



Review Article

Blend and Bond: Multiculturalism under the Radar

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Abstract

The “common name” initiative—assigning the word *Fijian* to Fiji nationals, irrespective of ethnic background, may be a bridging tool to national identity. This practice contributes significantly to unity underpinned by nation-building efforts. Practices as such, are flagbearers of inclusivity which simultaneously, create pathways to dilute ethnic tensions and divisions. By accentuating a collective Fijian identity, prospects of social interconnection and collaboration among the Fijian population, may heighten. Inclusive methodologies like these, align multicultural societies while strengthening the fabric of solidarity and statecraft. In the long run, such initiatives are a robust means to a harmonious end. Most essentially, for sustained prosperity for multicultural economies like Fiji.

Keywords : multi-culturalism, nation-building, government initiative, inclusive societies, social harmony

Common Citizenry in Multicultural Fiji: A Reflection

Multiculturalism and nation building go hand-in hand. The latter as some authors argue, is a reference to policies and endeavours by which, regulatory agencies effect transition (Foster, 1995). Such massive undertakings, encompass herculean efforts of “social engineering” in the bid to create modern economies— a level playing modern economy for all

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in ways people get collectively involved and addressed. As Talentino (2008) notes, the process of upscaling any economy, is commonly a political undertaking. Aristotle's theory of the good human life and ethics of virtue, can be closely associated with common citizenry (Miller, 2019). For Aristotle, virtues of living a good human life are not different from being ruled and to rule. Meaning, the art of ruling (say political hovering) requires the virtue of good leadership, as with ethnic and cultural diversities that exist within nations. For Aristotle, citizenship is not limited to place of birth or status, it rather expands to the notion of recognizing political-will and decisiveness in offering citizens the option to become inclusive.

It is said that citizenry has been central to western political thinking, at least since the emergence of the classical Greek political cultures (Turner, 1993). Shafir & Brysk (2006) say that common citizenry dates back to Grecian origin, depicting statuses held by male aristocrats notably those with political affluence, and its only much later that it came to be associated with nation building frameworks. The revival of the citizenship premise in modern times was effected on the need to harmonize multi-cultural societies that sought peaceful co-existence as a common good, as with the motive of classical republican and liberal notions of the early period (Dagger, 1997). While Dagger (1997) mentions traditional models of citizenry and democracy, such models have not been much successful in some nations, e.g. Iraq owing to conflict, civil tensions and other causes. The last mentioned can be classed as a post-colonial developmental approach of nation building, even if they did work in certain scenarios or economies. The focus importantly, should be on seeing functionalities of these in places it has worked (e.g. the common name Britishers for citizens of Britain).

When we talk about social enhancement of a multicultural landscape, there will always be a need to see social transformation through the lens of social welfare benefits (Dobbins et.al, 2007), that citizens have access to as opposed to limiting national growth to conceptions of profit and loss, and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of economies. Because growth

can also mean how people are treated, acknowledge and respected in policies and papers. In other words, what benefits do people pride with, enjoy or “exhibit”, having had the privilege of a “common name” especially in multicultural landscapes. Let us discourse on this, as follows:

Common citizenry in multicultural societies diminish racial divide, perhaps more appropriate would be to suggest that it helps shrink racial barriers. Integrating “common citizenry” propels positive outcomes for social cohesion. As can be identified in Shin’s (2009) deliberation, Korea followed the Japanese model of national identity in early stages of modern nation building i.e. as a form of categorical identity that competed against non-national and transnational forms like race and class. For starters, transforming national identity founded on blood and ancestry to making it into civic and democratic identities has not been easy feats (*ibid.*), but they have transpired.

Let us rope-in pointers of the African Union, particularly denoting that it has been decades since its establishment. Its formation has brought about mutual appreciation, ideals, tenacity, policy and approach within a de-colonized environment like theirs, in which distinctiveness yet assimilation is crucial to generate a non-humiliating African future (Muchie et al, 2012). Common citizenry is a pivotal step in nations to bring together diverse cultures, and to honour and encourage distinct ways of being. Although it needs revelation that as elsewhere, a large population base e.g. on the African continent, has its own dynamics and diversity of cultures, making it challenging for a united stand on aspects of common citizenry (*ibid.*).

As an added case, the Ghanaian nationalist front-runners faced huge challenges addressing aspects of national inclusivity in regards to social wellbeing of their people, but they managed to get people on board (Beland et al, 2018). This is confirmation to the view that nations and citizens can assimilate in climbing the multiculturalism and togetherness ladder. In China’s context, Fitzgerald (1996:86) suggests, ‘we must talk nationalism first if we want to talk cosmopolitanism’. Notably for traces of entwined relationship between the government and people, and con-

certed initiatives and efforts for a common front. The quest for citizenship are well situated, particularly in matters of state-centric projects which nonetheless, has mottled with variations in political administrations in nations like China (Law, 2018). Consequently, the goal of harnessing diversity and the torch bearing togetherness through social reforms, are ongoing in many economies around the globe (Fiji included).

Furthermore, in economies like Taiwan, citizenship is more than assigning a tag, it is a way to create individual personality and life by honouring citizens (Lee, 2004). The author outlays the archetype by saying that just pretending to have equal footing or a “common name” for the sake of it, is injustice. It is never enough if we just organize a tag (“common name”) and forget about it, while real life day to day problems such as ethnic tensions persist. Any effort to bridge multicultural societies warrants awareness, discipline, flexibility, initiative and ownership by people in larger frame of things. Only then citizens get the core benefit of ingenuities like a “common name”.

Now let us situate global conversations in Pacific and Fijian contexts. The decision of nationalism for Papua New Guineans lie in hands of the powerful few, while consequences of what is labelled as provincialism or tribalism is fierce given the dissimilarities between individuals who often struggle to find a common ground (Kavanamur et al, 2003: *xiii*). Thaman (2004) says that the conception of nation state is not separated from citizenship. She opines, when one is questioned- “citizenship of what nation”, such questions are not easily understood by communities that have been under foreign leadership. So it may mean different things to different people. Although the Pacific including Fiji, has come a long way with rapid globalization and urbanization, the outset of “common name” in multicultural societies, is not a foreign element anymore. In other words, if we contest with what Thaman (2004) said about colonialism and its grip on Pacific societies, I will have to bring to fore that post-colonialism and neo-liberalism (with the rise of privatization and multinational companies) and overall socio-cultural transformations, Fiji is not devoid of change, nor is the idea of diversity, assimilation

or related cohorts unfamiliar to Fiji. Like many nations before us, Fiji embarked on the “common name” train as a token to acknowledge its multicultural population base.

Given that Fiji is a multiracial, multilingual and multicultural nation, “common citizenry” was envisioned as one of the pathways to integrate Fiji’s diverse society. Fiji is known for its distinct cultural events, shared Pacifica myths and legends, customary art and music, and traditional connections. The *i-Taukei* and *Girmitya* descendants make up the main ethnic profile, whereas Rotumans, Chinese, Europeans, Part-Europeans and others (SCC, 2012), add-up to its multicultural existence. Fiji’s total population in 2017 Census amounted to 884,887 (FBoS, 2018), which is testimony to how multicultural groups have come together to form this significant populace, and why “common name” may be vital more than ever before.

Accentuating this premise in relation to usage of “Fijian” for all citizens, signals a contemporary and diverse Fiji. Koya (2010) claims that one’s consciousness of racial and ethnic differences divided Fijians for long, as if stopping an episode of national pride. When terminological reference of “Fijian” (during colonization) as national identity in constitutional texts of 1970, 1990 and 1997 (Mudaliar, 2018) emerged, it is around these times when indigenous ethno-nationalist ideals erupted, privileging the indigenous Fijian identity and separating them exclusively, compared to other ethnicities. But with modernization and fast-paced changes in Fiji, and the influx of diverse groups and cultures ballooning urban zones, the position of social cohesiveness and citizenry has become all the more significant.

In a consultation report of Fiji’s constitutional review, Ghai (USP, 1994:17) contends, ‘previous constitutions of Fiji have not promoted that sense of national identity because they have emphasized community and race at the expense of the nation. There must really be a deep crisis of identity in Fiji, and one important task of the constitution must be: to promote a sense of national identity. The terms of reference that parliament agreed upon for the review of the Constitution clearly mentions

national unity and identity as the purpose of the new’ (ibid.). Only when there is a genuine wish to stop serving one section of the society, or in overcoming communal politics serving only some, then will there be a sense of national identity for Fijians (NCBBF, 2008). As it is, people in Fiji seem to have greater awareness of their ethnic identity, than national identity (ibid.). And this narrative needs to change. Although popular consensus (especially from indigenous populations of a country) on sensitive matters as these, should not be overlooked. This is because “common citizenry” in Fiji, may perhaps be a matter of heritage and legacy, as much as it is for social harmony and potential assimilation. Popular consensus can aid nation states in knowing minds of its people before putting efforts in changing the status quo (e.g. embarking on citizenry reforms), but it must be mindful of not overriding sentiments of groups and communities.

This is because culturally and traditionally sensitive matters (even if the intention is perceived harmony) may provoke lesser acceptance from certain factions. For instance, inadequate support may prevail from descendants of indigenous settlers . Just to put things in perspective, some members of the *i-Taukei* community may not approve of “Fijian” as citizenry, should they (arguably) perceive that this reference overrides some element of their heritage or sentiments. The point that needs to be reiterated here is that while citizenry is a way to connect multicultural societies, it may (even if unintentionally) disrupt social or traditional integrity of some communities. In this regard, it is as much the role of regulatory bodies to spin the inclusivity wheel in least “disruptive” ways—that is adequate dialogue with *Turanga ni koros* (village heads), the *Mataqali* (clan), indigenous women leaders and others in respective villages and districts of Fiji, as is and had been the traditional law of this land. It calls for pushing citizenry reforms without bypassing what is equally instrumental—sheer respect for our first-settler ancestors, and their descendants .

On the contrary, traditional reference of the term *Fijian* and sentiments aside, pro-arguments on common citizenry underpinned by multi-

culturalism, have much emerged. NCBBF (2008) outlines, lack of community cohesion is noticeable looking at different races and cultures in Fiji, and the commotion surrounding *Fijian* citizenry. It is not being suggested that primary identities (say of the indigenous) will be scraped-out altogether. For that matter, *Fijian* could remain as an identity for indigenous populations, while *Fijian Girmitya* (Fijians of Indian descent) or *Fijian Chinese*, may (debatably) be references for other communities. This way, all cultures and groups in Fiji get recognition, receiving some portion from the larger piece of the “*Fijian*” pie. NCBBF (2008) also suggest an Anti-Discrimination Act and formation of National Identification System, as a means to record-keeping of Fiji nationals.

The Government of Fiji in 2013, spearheaded by the then leader of the government— Frank Bainimarama, announced a new constitution—deviating from ethno-nationalist reinforcements noting Fiji’s multicultural setup. The idea was to present and action an inclusive identity in elevating a comprehensive nationalist program (Mudaliar, 2018). The intention was to deviate from segregation on racial and ethnic lines. This was undertaken through statutory re-imagining of the *Fijian* identity via the equal citizenry clause within the *Fijian* Constitution (ibid.). Precisely, the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji—Chapter 1 (The State) Section 5, Sun-section 1 mentions:

‘all citizens of Fiji shall be known as Fijians and Sub-section 2 outlines, subject to provision of this Constitution, all Fijians have equal status and identity, which means that they are equally entitled to all rights, privileges, and benefits of citizenship and subject to duties and responsibilities of citizenship’ (Government of Fiji, 2013).

It is another debate that the said Constitution (2013) faced some skepticism and backlash when first made public, apart from some political opposition. But all that has been said and done, the question at the heart of things being: is common citizenry one of the probable answers to

the multiculturalism equation in Fiji?

Conclusion

In principle, common citizenry may have the potential to bridge ethnic segregation while cultivating social harmony and inclusivity. This tactic may minimize ethnic divisions, nurturing societal cohesion and collaboration. By underlining and using shared identities, it fortifies the social fabric much needed for persistent developmental endeavours, notably in a multicultural context like Fiji. Although it must be done cautiously so as to not override factions of societies whose sentiments may be disrupted. In embracing the rich tapestry of multiculturalism, citizenry reforms may perhaps spin the wheel of, amidst the clamor of opposition, unity in diversity.

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