

America between Utopia and Dystopia: Mona Mahmoud Mohammad El- Ghobary

المستخلص:

نتيجة للحياة البائسة التي يقع فيها بعض الناس في جميع أنحاء العالم ، قرروا الهجرة إلى أمريكا التي تمثل المدينة الفاضلة الحديثة. تعرف الولايات المتحدة بأنها أمة مهاجرة تروج للحلم الأمريكي وتحتفل بتعدد ثقافته. الحلم الأمريكي هو محاولة أو طريقة لتغيير نوعية الحياة ولا يتميز دائما بالحصول على الرخاء الاقتصادي. . التعددية الثقافية هي مصطلح يشير إلى التعايش بين المجموعات الثقافية المختلفة داخل المجتمع. تطرح التعددية الثقافية بعض التحديات مثل احتمال الصراع الثقافي وإمكانية الاستيعاب الثقافي..

اللغة والثقافة هي أصعب الحواجز التي يواجهها المهاجرون. يمكن تفسير الهجرة على أنها عملية التخلي عن العائلة والأصدقاء والممتلكات والثقافة. المهاجرون عالقون بين السعي المثالي للسعادة والاستقرار في جميع مراحل وجوانب الحياة والفهم الواقعي لوجودهم في مجتمع متناقض. على الرغم من أنه قيل إن الهجرة تغذي الاقتصاد ، إلا أن البعض يرى أن المهاجرين يعتبرون عبئا يضعف المجتمع الأمريكي ولا يمكن احتضانهم في الهوية الأمريكية.

As a result of the dystopian life some people around the world are caught in, they decide to immigrate to America which stands for the modern Utopia. The United States is known as an immigrant nation that propagandizes the American Dream and celebrates its multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is a term that refers to the coexistence of different cultural groups within a society. Multiculturalism presents some challenges as the potential for cultural conflict and the potential for cultural assimilation.

The American Dream is an attempt or a way of changing ones quality of life and it is not always characterized by obtaining economic prosperity. Language and culture are the most difficult barriers encountered by immigrants. Immigration can be interpreted as a process of letting go of family, friends, properties,

and culture. Immigrants are caught between an idealistic quest for happiness and stability in all phases and aspects of life and a realistic understanding of the impossibility of their statuesque. Although it has been said that immigration fuels the economy, immigrants are considered a burden that debilitate American society and could never be embraced in the American identity.

Key words:

[Utopia, Dystopia, Multiculturalism, American Dream, Immigration]

America between Utopia and Dystopia

Just as Sir Thomas More comes up with the term Utopia to describe a society where everything is perfect, ideal and up to the standards, nearly heavenly, postmodern theories deal with Dystopia which stands on the other shore of Utopia. Dystopia describes a society where everything is deformed, chaotic, violent, unpleasant and unsatisfactorily related to hell on earth. Dystopia features a capitalist society that is controlled by laws of propaganda, media, deception, and false representation of things and incidents. People living in Dystopia are always planning to escape. This study takes one of its prime concerns to show how some people are living in dystopian societies, struggling and trying to achieve a better future but they are doomed in the very meaning of dystopia. They do not reach a happy ending; on the contrary, they are caught up in a living nightmare.

As a result of the dystopian life some people around the world are caught in, they decide to migrate to America which

stands for the modern Utopia. The United States is known as an immigrant nation. With the exception of Native Americans, the majority of Americans are immigrants themselves, their ancestors, or former slaves. Ban Ki-Moon, the former Secretary- General of the United Nations points out that “[i]mmigration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety and a better future” (Ban Ki-Moon n.p.). It is an attempt or a way of changing one’s quality of life and it is not always characterized by obtaining economic prosperity. Inoh tries to investigate immigration to America throughout history;

The central question of immigration history over the past three decades has been diverse, centering on the experience of immigrants. Historians, influenced by social history, explored questions of who came to America, what factors influenced their decision to migrate, how their life and culture changed as a result of living in America, and how native-born Americans reacted to the presence of different immigrant groups.” (Inoh 149)

In an attempt to answer the questions listed above, we must first try to understand what immigration is. The term immigration is coined in the 17th century referring to the moving of people from their native countries to live permanently in a foreign country. This process can be devastating and has an impact on the immigrants who have to leave everything familiar behind and launch a new life

in their country of destination. They are also faced with obstacles that can threaten their transition and assimilation into the new society they migrated to. Wayne Shirey explains that,

During the seventeenth century, the first wave of European colonists began arriving. Most of them came from England and northern Europe... The second wave lasted about fifty years, through the mid-nineteenth century, and brought mostly Irish and Germans to the United States. That period was followed by a third wave, which lasted about forty years and brought in millions of Asians and southern and eastern Europe. Finally, after U.S. immigration law abolished quotas based on nationalities in 1965, the fourth major wave began. It has continued into the first decade of the twenty-first century and has been the largest immigration wave in U.S. history. The majority of it has brought into the United States have come from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean islands of the West Indies. (Shirey n.p.)

The second question to be discussed concerns the factors that induced people to migrate and why they venture to leave their habitual accustomed life behind. To answer this question, researchers find that people migrate for a variety of reasons. Sometimes immigration is compulsory and unavoidable because of oppression, ethnic cleansing, wars or natural disasters. It may

revolve around a quest to flee religious or political persecution. On the other hand, it can also be optional for economic reasons, when people want to change the quality of their lives to maintain economic stability, higher income and above all to escape poverty. Their greatest pursuits are for the American Dream that I am going to explain later, and a brighter future. Sometimes it is because of political reasons to flee from dictatorship. Angilini believes that

[w]hen people migrate to a new country, they bring with them resources, habits and experience from their home country, including valuable productive inputs (e.g., labor, skills, other sources of human capital) that can generate substantial economic returns for the host country. Yet, they also enter this new society with (potentially) different cultural backgrounds, marked by distinct languages, religions and (economic and social) values.

(Angilini – Casi and Corazzini n.p.)

Each culture comes with its own language. This language is the first obstacle that faces immigrants and the thing that makes it hard for them to assimilate or dissolve in the new destination that they chose for themselves. “Throughout much of America’s immigration history, language has often played an indirect yet, controversial role in the debate over immigration, naturalization, Americanization, assimilation and national identity.” (Inoh – 3). Immigrants cannot denounce their native languages but at the same

time, they cannot use it freely as the sole mean of communication with others except their own race or culture.

Language and culture are the most difficult barriers encountered by immigrants. Some critics defined the immigrant in America as “an American, who leaving behind him all his old prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds.” (Fleegler 3). In this sense, immigration can be interpreted as a process of letting go of family, friends, properties, and culture.

Immigration is a controversial issue. Immigrants are caught between an idealistic quest for happiness and stability in all phases and aspects of life and a realistic understanding of the impossibility of their statuesque. Although they are relocated both physically and emotionally, their ties to their home countries are more intricate than mere sentimentality and nostalgia. Some debate that immigrants as minorities will always be outsiders, and based on this point of view they face racism. “...eastern and southern Europeans, Asians and Latinos, though, remained firmly outside the broader definition of American identity” (Fleegler 191). According to this point of view, immigrants are considered a burden that debilitate American society and could never be embraced in the American identity. For them, “migrants are “illegal aliens” rather than authorized workers. Since the migrants are ‘illegal’ they are by definition ‘criminals’ and ‘law breakers’ and, thus, could be readily portrayed as a grave threat to the nation.” (Durand n.p.)

On the other hand, Bill Clinton justifies the presence of immigrants and how they contribute to the US economy in many ways:

More than any other nation on earth, America has constantly drawn strength and spirit from wave after wave of immigrants. In each generation, they have proved to be the most innovative, the most industrious of people. Bearing different memories, and honoring different heritages, they have strengthened our economy, enriched our culture, and renewed our promise of freedom and opportunity for all. (Fleegler 1)

It has been said that immigration fuels the economy. According to Clinton, immigrants contribute to the cultural and economic welfare of the country. Hence, they strengthen the nation. That is to say “[i]f immigrants contribute to the host society through the labor force, society should be more open to them, such that non-natives should feel more accepted overall.” (Angelini- Casi and Corazizin n.p.). This idea of contributionism takes us to the next focal term in this research which is Multiculturalism. In his book, *Red, Whites and Blues: Social movements, Folk Music and Race in the United States*, William G. Roy says:

Social movements do culture. Not just in the sense of culture as a shared orientation toward the world but in the more vernacular sense of art, music, drama, literature and dance. People

joining together to right social wrongs and
weaken abusive power. (Roy 234)

The act of migration itself or moving from one place to another encompasses multiculturalism. It is a concept that has become increasingly relevant in today's world. As the world becomes more interconnected and people from different backgrounds come into contact with one another, the idea of multiculturalism has emerged as a way to promote diversity and understanding among different groups. The universe is based on reciprocal relations. No one can live alone or separate himself from dealing with others with different backgrounds, morals and cultures. Hence, he tries to get the best from others without renouncing his own identity or dissolving in theirs. The postmodern critic Lyotard remarks that "[a] self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before" (Lyotard n.p.). Hence, multiculturalism encompasses humanity.

Multiculturalism emphasize that acknowledging the existence of ethnic diversity and ensuring the rights of individuals to retain their culture should go hand in hand with enjoying full access to, participation in, and adhesion to constitutional principles and commonly shared values prevailing in the society (UNESCO n.p.)

Multiculturalism is about diversity and appreciating cultural differences. Embracing cultural diversity enables societies and individuals to unite. In the words of Heckmann ,

There are no “pure”, original cultures. Each culture has incorporated elements of other cultures; cultures are the result of interaction with one another; culture is the continuous process and change. In this sense, the cultures of immigrants are seen as opportunities for the enrichment of one's own culture (Heckmann 245).

Multiculturalism is a term that refers to the coexistence of different cultural groups within a society. It is a recognition and a celebration of the diversity that exists within a community, and it promotes the idea that all cultures are equally valid and valuable. Multiculturalism encompasses a range of experiences, including races, ethnicity, religion, language, and nationality. It acknowledges that different backgrounds have unique perspectives, experiences, and ways of life, and that these differences should be respected and celebrated.

Immigrants from different parts of the world try to preserve their culture and cling to it. The other alternative for them is to abandon their own heritage and culture to be socially accepted in the new state; a totally dehumanizing thing. There for “[c]ultural differences make a large contribution to unity and multiculturalism celebrates that contribution. Multiculturalism also ensures that all

citizens can maintain their identities, take pride in their ancestry, and have a sense of belonging.” (Canadian Heritage Leaflet n.p.). It is a human notion that everyone tries to get the best of everything, to learn, improve, enrich his own Culture and accept new situations. Multiculturalism allows people from different backgrounds to learn from one another and to appreciate the richness of other cultures. This can lead to a greater tolerance and acceptance of diversity, as people learn to value and respect each other’s differences. Also multiculturalism can lead to greater innovation and creativity. When people learn about other cultures, they should be less likely to hold negative stereotypes or prejudices about other groups.

However, multiculturalism also presents some challenges. One of the main challenges is the potential for cultural conflict. When different cultural groups coexist together, there is the potential for misunderstandings, disagreements, and conflicts to arise. These conflicts can be based on differences in values, beliefs, and practices. Although a place like America encompasses different nationalities and ethnicities, immigrants living there generation after generation are considered labelled Americans: African Americans, Mexico or Latino Americans, Indian and Arab Americans. They are not fully equal citizens; on the contrary, they are treated with reservation. This very act of labelling reflects discrimination. Labelling people create disunity, and a sense of exclusion, shutting lives out of the broader sense of citizenship. That’s why Levy thinks that

[t]eaching people and convincing them not to feel more comfortable around those they perceive as their own kind, inducing them to abandon the moral and social ties they feel to their ethnically cultural communities– this is utopian at best. At worst, it is deceptive rhetoric of civic nationalism, trying to persuade people to abandon their particularities identities and identify solely with the state. (Levy 10)

Another challenge for multiculturalism is the potential for cultural assimilation. When different cultures coexist within a society, there is the potential for one dominant culture to impose its values and practices on other groups. This can lead to the loss of cultural identity and the suppression of minority cultures.

Every culture is unique. It is only about flexibility and the ability to accept the other as equal. Renshon points out that “[c]ultural conflict is about domination, ‘the word domination implies subjugation... The United States has a mixed, in some cases bad, historical record in its treatment of Indians, Americans of African and Asian descent, women and others.’” (Renshon 5). Despite what Renshon says about the United States of America, it is still an attraction force to all the people who live in dystopia all over the world. The only explanation for this might be because America is able to sell its American Dream.

The American Dream is a concept that has been woven into the fabric of American society for generations. It continues to inspire people to work hard and pursue their goals, and strive for a better future. It is the belief that anyone regardless of their background or circumstances can achieve success through hard work, determination and perseverance. One of the most important definitions of the American Dream is written by James Truslow Adams. He defines the American Dream by saying,

That dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his (or her) ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (Adams 415)

Adams clarifies that people pursue the American dream which is a dream of a land in which life would be better and easier for everyone according to their abilities with no other privileges. It is the pursuit of happiness, security and financial stability.

Over the years the American Dream has taken on different meanings for different people. For some, it represents the opportunity to achieve financial success and material wealth. For others, it represents the chance to pursue their passions and achieve personal fulfillment. Still others see it as a way to escape poverty, discrimination, or other forms of hardship.

After being confronted with the dark reality people realized that America “the country did not prove equally hospitable to everyone, and some groups endured enormous hardships on their way to a fuller realization of America's version of opportunity and freedom.” (Renshon 3). America indeed embraces many nationalities, races and cultures but it is not a colour-blind society. If you probe deeply away from the facade you will find the ugly face of racism. As Renshon explains, “America has become the land of paradox as well as opportunity. “ (Renshon 4). There is always a reason for classification and discrimination in America. It’s a matter of supremacy; men over women, white over black, educated over uneducated, high standard over low standard and also citizens over immigrants. The problem is that we cannot get past the stereotypes we have of others. Ghosh demonstrates that :

Three constitutive elements of the American Dream....: individualism, equal opportunity and success. These ideas circumscribe what is perceived as any realization of the American Dream. In the absence of any one of these three elements, we cannot have a successful instantiation of the term. First, the dream is always

about individuals. We cannot have an instantiation of the Dream if we are talking about a social class or other such aggregates. Second, if the background condition of equal opportunity, what is popularly called a “level playing field,” does not exist, we cannot say the American Dream has been achieved. Finally, there has to be some kind of success, which is always already tied up with virtue and the quintessential American injunction to “pursue happiness. (Ghosh 33)

The American Dream has faced its share of challenges and criticism over the years. Some have argued that it is a myth, a false promise that only serves to perpetuate inequality and social injustice. Others have pointed to the growing income inequality and lack of opportunities for many Americans as evidence that the dream is no longer achievable for all. Some have argued that the American Dream is no longer relevant or achievable, and that we need to find new ways of defining success and happiness in the modern world. This may involve a shift away from materialism and consumerism and towards a greater focus on personal fulfillment and social connection.

Immigrants there are even denied the simplest right to get health care when needed. “Families are fearful and resistant of seeking medical help for fear of giving identifying information and it being placed in the wrong hands.” (Boyed – Barrett n.p.). They are not paid fairly or even live like equal, respected human beings. They are always treated as mere servants haunted by law. “Despite

the significant contribution of the Mexican immigrants to the U.S economy, The U.S laws criminalize their labor.” (Tunali 16).

To sum up, the immigration experience varies depending on various elements and circumstances, but despite how different the reasons might be, the decision to leave their countries unifies the immigrants. They fight too hard to face the consequences of their decision, but unfortunately their efforts do not work. They feel detached, alienated and unwelcomed. They recognize the illusion of the American Dream, and their inability to fit in the American society.

It is clear that culture in America praises the superiority of white Native Americans over all other races and nationalities. This recurrent theme evokes a struggle from all other ‘ outsiders' –from the perspective of white supremacy – against all forms of oppression: subjugation, marginality, otherness and inferiority. It also evokes a need to counterbalance this white-made culture with a culture written by or about ‘outsiders' or ‘ others' representing them as true human beings with their flaws and good deeds without idealizing or dehumanizing them. The ‘outsiders’ are always subjects for marginalization. No one cares for them or for their dilemma for so many years. In the so called ‘ multicultural’ and mighty America, they lack the simplest rights in life. “Not since the days of slavery have so many residents of the United States lacked any social, economic, or political rights and enjoyed so few legal

protections.” (Massey n.p.). They are deceived by a dream that is never going to come true.

Despite that nightmare and the countless experiences of failing immigrants, so many people are still aspiring to become Americans. They want to secure a better future for their offspring. They want them to be elevated mentally and acquire the finest kind of education from their perspective.

Believing in the American dream promotes the idea that a person should be judged only according to his capacities and not by any other criteria like a birthright, gives hope to immigrant students that through hard work, education and perseverance, they can reach their dreams and goals. They do everything possible to benefit from the opportunity that has been given to them. They crave knowledge and education and show positive attitudes toward teachers more than native students.

The politics of the dream is what keeps people going. A dream of a better life, a better future and better circumstances, a dream that there is light at the end of the tunnel, is what triggers people to fall for the American Dream. For such people, this is the kind of dream that is too big and promising to be merely a mirage. It is the dream that unifies all people, rich or poor, suffering or not. Confronting the American reality makes people skeptical of the fruitfulness of their dream, the dream that is crushed on the shores of American immigration policies, a dream that is shattered by some presidents' spiel and other presidents' clear condemnation of the immigration system and immigrants.