Perspectives on Identity and Acculturation of Immigrants in Europe

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Abstract. *Migration has always played a requisite role in the history of mankind. At present the intensity and frequency of cross-border mobility are much higher than in previous decades. In addition, many citizens are children of foreigners and belong to the so called second generation of immigrants, these people belonging to two different cultures. The second generation of immigrants is raised and educated in accordance with the value system of their parents' country of origin. Outside the home, they familiarize themselves with the national society's value system, while the kind of neighbourhood in which they live may be more or less encouraging. Cultural assimilation occurs when immigrants voluntarily adopt their new country's language and cultural practices to integrate into society and improve their chances of economic and social gain.*

Sociologists suggest that differences in cultural integration efforts matter less to the formation of acculturation preferences of the second generation. Somewhat surprisingly, the position of this growing segment of European societies is still underexplored, reasons for policy-makers concern. In this paper we are trying to reflect both the attitude of immigrants and that of European host countries towards integration and assimilation of new habits and cultures.

Keywords: *acculturation, cultural appropriation, intercultural communication, language assimilation*

The concepts of cultural diversity and cultural identity are at the forefront of political debate in many western societies. In Europe, the discussion is stimulated by the political pressures associated with immigration flows which are increasing in many European countries. Ethnic and cultural heterogeneity associated to such trends is one of the most important challenges that European societies will face. Sociologists have been studying the cultural integration patterns of immigrants at least since the late nineteenth century. Economists, have instead been traditionally interested in assessing the direct impact of immigration flows on market outcomes, mainly on the labour market, or on fiscal transfers and public goods provision.

Immigrants are motivated to leave their countries for a variety of reasons, including a desire for economic prosperity, political issues, family re-unification,

escaping conflict or natural disaster, or simply the wish to change one's surroundings. More generally, social scientists have dedicated a lot of attention to the fact that immigrants' integration can significantly alter the design and the political economy of public policies in the host society. Cultural diversity may indeed affect the sense of community and social solidarity which constitute founding pillars of democratic welfare state systems.

For these reasons several observers favour explicit public policies promoting or even requesting the cultural assimilation of immigrants to the cultural attitudes of natives. Other observers argue that welfare state institutions should be designed to accommodate cultural diversity. These policies would facilitate contacts across communities, promote tolerance, trust and respect towards other groups and, in the end would help develop new national identities[1].

Many European countries are characterized by aging and shrinking populations. In order to ensure their economic growths and maintain their welfare systems, they have implemented a series of measures to reduce the demographic effects, among which opening channels to legal migration, playing a key role. As these countries try to attract the same group of people, mainly highly skilled professionals and low-skilled workers, increasing competition between the two regions might be observed in the upcoming years. In particular, high-skilled professionals are targeted by receiving societies. They are encouraged to stay for longer periods or even enticed to settle down permanently.

This is achieved by providing them with rights and benefits, facilitating their stay, and making them the target of integration policies[2]. This is a consequence of diverse pull and push factors, combined with technological advancement, and is true for Europe. his large-scale movement, however, changes the composition of the societies in the sending and receiving countries and results in some of today's key challenges.

Identity is defined as a person's self image based on social categories and on prescriptions associated with these categories. Scholars from many different academic disciplines have generally categorized ethnic identity formation along two main theoretical frameworks: *primordial* versus *situational.* The primordial**,** also known as "essentialist" perspective argues that people have an innate sense of ethnic identity. It is something that people are born with, is instinctive and natural,

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[1] Yann Algan, Alberto Bisin, Allan Manning, Thierry Verdier, (2012) *Cultural Integration of Immigrants in Europe,* Studies of political reform, Oxford University Press, Oxford: 5-6

[2] Dr. Wilhelm Hofmeister et.al*., (2014) *Migration and Integration. Common Challenges and Responses from Europe and Asia,*National Library Board, Singapore: 7

and is difficult if not impossible to change. On the other hand, the situational perspective, also known as the "constructionist" or "instrumentalist" states that ethnic identities are socially defined phenomena. That is, the meaning and boundaries of ethnic identity are constantly being renegotiated, revised, and redefined, depending on specific situations and set of circumstances that each individual or ethnic group encounters[3].

Each person has a perception of his own categories and that of all other people. In this context there occur differences between individuals characterized by oppositional cultures when minorities adopt cultural categorizations and prescriptions defined in opposition to the categorizations and prescriptions of the dominant majority. Thus at the heart of oppositional cultures lie two crucial factors: social exclusion and lack of economic opportunities. Social exclusion derives from the well established sociological fact that dominant groups define themselves by differentiation and exclusion of others. These, in turn, create a conflict for minority members: how to work within the dominant culture without betraying his own.

From the perspective of the dominant identity, the oppositional identity is perceived as inducting bad economic decisions, self-destructive behaviour, such as taking drugs, joining a gang or becoming pregnant at a young age, which in turn can generate negative pecuniary externalities on the rest of the community. Finally, social exclusion by the majority is modeled as a loss in identity that individuals from the minority will suffer if they choose to adopt the dominant culture[4].

Cultural integration has an essential dynamic character across time and generations. Individual members of a small minority group may decide assimilate with the dominant majority culture or not, remaining as members of the minority group.

Acculturation explains the process of <u>cultural change</u> and psychological change that results following meeting between cultures[5]. The effects of acculturation can be seen at multiple levels in both interacting cultures. At the group level, acculturation often results in changes to culture, customs, and social institutions. Noticeable group level effects of acculturation often include changes in food, clothing, and language. At the individual level, differences in the way individuals acculturate have been shown to be associated not just with changes in daily behavior, but with numerous measures of psychological and physical well-

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[3] C.N. Le, (2014) *Assimilation & Ethnic Identity - Asian-Nation: The Landscape of Asian America*., http://www.asian-nation.org/assimilation.shtml, october 24: 2014

[4] *Ibidem*:10-11

[5] Sam, David L., Berry, John W., (2010) *Acculturation When Individuals and Groups of Different Cultural Backgrounds Meet. Perspectives on Psychological Science,* 5: 472.

being. As <u>enculturation</u> is used to describe the process of first-culture learning, acculturation can be thought of as second-culture learning.

The concept of acculturation has been studied scientifically since 1918. As it has been approached at different times from the fields of <u>psychology</u>, <u>anthropology</u>, and <u>sociology</u>, numerous theories and definitions have emerged to describe elements of the acculturative process[6].

Although numerous models of acculturation exist, the most complete models take into consideration the changes occurring at the group and individual levels of both interacting groups[7]. To understand acculturation at the group level, one must first look at the nature of both cultures before coming into contact with one another.

Gudykunst, in his work *Communicating with Strangers: An Approach to Intercultural Communication* defined intercultural adaptation as an "upward-forward" progress of acculturation that brings about change in strangers in the direction of assimilation, the highest degree of adaptation theoretically conceivable. It is the process by which strangers are socialized into a new culture so as to attain an increasing functional and complete adaptation as a lifetime goal[8].

This intercultural communication text provides a comprehensive overview of important theory and research in intercultural communication. *Communicating with Strangers* looks at the basic processes of intercultural communication and ties those processes to the practical task of creating understanding between people of different cultures, backgrounds and communication patterns.

Cultural appropriation is the adoption of some specific elements of one culture by a different cultural group. It can include the introduction of forms of dress or personal adornment, music and art, religion, language, or behavior[9]. These elements are typically imported into the existing culture, and may have wildly different meanings or lack the subtleties of their original cultural context. Because of this, cultural appropriation is sometimes viewed negatively, and has been called "cultural theft".

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[6] Rudmin, Floyd W., (2003) <u>*Critical history of the acculturation psychology of assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization.*</u> "Review of General Psychology 7: 3.

[7] Berry, J.W., (2003) *Conceptual approaches to acculturation*. AmericanPsychological Association, 17–37

[8] Gudykunst, William B., Kim, Young Yun, (2003) *Communicating with Strangers: An Approach to Intercultural Communication* (4th ed.), New York: McGraw-Hill Education: 360

[9] Schneider, Arnd, (2003) *On 'appropriation': A critical reappraisal of the concept and its application in global art practices,* Social Anthropology 11:215–216

In some instances, acculturation results in the adoption of another country's language, which is then modified over time to become a new, distinct, language. Language shift, sometimes referred to as language transfer or language replacement or assimilation, is the process whereby a speech community of a language shifts to speaking another language. Often, languages perceived to be "higher status" stabilize or spread at the expense of other languages perceived by their own speakers to be "lower-status". Many interesting analyses of cultural transmission require this assumption to be relaxed.

Indeed, in many situations the adoption of a dominant cultural trait might provide a beneficial effect per se. Adoption of the dominant language has benefical effects on the labour market. In this case, altruistic parents may favour the cultural assimilation of their children. This trade-off between cultural preferences and the disadvantage of minority traits in terms of labour market integration may be central to the integration pattern of immigrants in the host country.

Some changes are forced by new lifestyle demands, others are a result of attraction to alternative options in the immigrants' new home and, therefore, are more voluntary. Acculturation drives changes in many aspects of immigrants' consumer behavior. It influences adaptation in diet and food consumption customs.

Food habits and food consumption are affected by acculturation on different levels. Research indicate that food habits are discrete and practiced privately and change occurs slowly. Consumption of new food items is affected by the availability of native ingredients, convenience and cost, therefore an immediate change is likely to occur.

Acculturation is a two-way street, however, as immigrants share their own foods and customs with the larger society. Marketers may also cultivate opportunities in adding flavors brought by immigrants, to their products.

There are also ethnic and racial group variations in sexual behavior, marriage issues, differences in environment, associated norms, cultural norms, cultural values and opportunity structures. Many commentators have raised the issue that immigrants from certain cultures who move into Western countries may not be able to understand and assimilate certain Western concepts, that are relatively alien in some parts of the world, especially related to women's rights, domestic violence, LGBT rights (lesbian, *gay*, bisexual, and transgender rights) and the supremacy of secular laws in front of religious practices. For instance, in some parts of the world it is legal and socially accepted for men to use physical violence

against their wives if they "misbehave", and wives are expected, both legally and socially, to "obey" their husbands[10].

Various behaviors of women, such as refusing arranged marriages or having premarital sex, are seen in many parts of the world as justifying violence from family members (parents). A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (an American research institute that provides information on social issues, public opinion and demographic trends) found that stoning as a punishment for adultery was supported by 82% of respondents in Egypt and Pakistan, 70% in Jordan, 56% Nigeria, 42% in Indonesia; the death penalty for people who leave the Muslim religion was supported by 86% of respondents in Jordan, 84% in Egypt and 76% in Pakistan; gender segregation in the workplace was supported by 85% of respondents in Pakistan, 54% in Egypt, 50% in Jordan.

Cultural assimilation occurs when immigrants voluntarily adopt their new country's language and cultural practices to integrate into society and improve their chances of economic and social gain. Social acceptance is often easier for groups whose culture and appearance more closely resemble those of the majority group. The term is used to refer to both individuals and groups and in the latter case it can refer to either immigrant diasporas or native residents that come to be culturally dominated by another society.

In the 1920s, sociologist Robert Park was the first to describe cultural assimilation as a unidirectional process of adaptation whereby immigrants endorsed the values, behaviors and ideals of the host culture, and simultaneously lost the values, behaviors and ideals characterized by the immigrant's culture of origin. At that time, cultural assimilation and notions of "one people, one culture…one nation" were the prevailing view in society, when immigrants were expected to adapt, assimilate and eventually resemble members of the host culture.

Assimilation may involve either a quick or gradual change depending on circumstances of the group. Full assimilation occurs when new members of a society become indistinguishable from members of the other group. Whether or not it is desirable for an immigrant group to assimilate is often disputed by both members of the group and those of the dominant society.

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[10] In 2010, the United Arab Emirates's Supreme Court ruled that a man has the right to physically discipline his wife and children as long as he does not leave physical marks. In Iraq husbands have a legal right to "punish" their wives. The criminal code states at Paragraph 41 that there is no crime if an act is committed while exercising a legal right. Examples of legal rights include: "The punishment of a wife by her husband, the disciplining by parents and teachers of children under their authority within certain limits prescribed by law or by custom".

Cultural assimilation can happen either spontaneously or forcibly. A culture can spontaneously adopt a different culture or older and richer cultures forcibly integrate other weak cultures. The term assimilation is often used with regard to immigrants and various ethnic groups who have settled in a new land. A new culture and new attitudes toward the origin culture are obtained through contact and communication. Cultural changing is not simply a one-way process. Assimilation assumes that relatively tenuous culture gets to be united to one unified culture. This process happens through contact and accommodation between each culture. The current definition of assimilation is usually used to refer to immigrants, but in multiculturalism, cultural assimilation can happen all over the world, not just be limited to specific areas. For example, a shared language gives people the chance to study and work internationally, not just being limited to the same cultural group. People from different countries contribute to diversity and form the "global culture" which means the culture combined by the elements from different countries. This "global culture" can be seen as a part of assimilation that causes cultures from different areas to affect each other.

A state or an ethnicity can spontaneously adopt a different culture due to its political relevance, or to its perceived superiority. The first is the case of the Latin language and culture, that were gradually adopted by most of the subjugated people.

The second is not the case of subjugated, but of the older and richer culture, which see itself imitated by the new masters, e.g. the victorious Roman Republic adopted more from the Hellenistic cultures than it imposed in most domains, except such Roman specialties as law and the military.

While European countries are witnessing an especially vivid debate about immigrants' assimilation and integration into receiving societies, authors publishing papers at IZA, an Institute for Study and Labour, offer a systematic analysis of whether such assimilation is indeed taking place. They suggest that, being a complex phenomenon, assimilation may be taking place along different dimensions and with different speed, and also differ across immigrants of various origins going to various destination countries.

They find that *first-generation immigrants* differ in a most important way from native-born along such dimensions as language, citizenship, civic involvement, religiosity, trust, perceived discrimination, occupations, and income. However, these differences are no longer the same for *second-generation immigrants*. In fact, a spectacular progress is observed between generations with respect to language and citizenship, occupations and income, while features such as religiosity are relatively persistent. In contrast, perceived discrimination and

unemployment may actually aggravate for second-generation immigrants, while trust may also diminish, as compared to native-born and to first-generation immigrants.

At the same time, the researchers providing studies for the German center for migration also find that there is an important heterogeneity in these outcomes not only across immigrant generations, but also across destination countries and migrant origins[11].

Assimilation along cultural and economic outcomes may be related one to another. For example, one would expect that learning a language of the receiving country may help immigrants to find a better job. They explore the relationship between assimilation along different behaviors, but do not find very strong or consistent patterns between them. In fact, for first-generation immigrants, they rather observe that progress on some dimensions may compensate the lack of progress on other dimensions; and also that a big discrepancy in one dimension is not necessarily a handicap, or an impediment, for assimilation on other grounds.

Preserving some of the behaviors may actually be of help to immigrants to progress on others. For second-generation immigrants, they find a particularly strong relationship between possessing citizenship and economic outcomes, language and citizenship, language and perceived discrimination, as well as between perceived discrimination and trust.

Since the perceived discrimination reflects immigrants' experiences with the attitudes and behaviors of native-born in the receiving societies, the latter finding suggests that immigrant assimilation is interdependent with the attitudes and acceptance of immigrants on the part of the native-born.

The gaps in language spoken at home are significant and initially large for all types of non-native-born individuals regardless of their origin. In a notable way, for this outcome, the gaps between any immigrant group and native-born never vanish, but at the same time, there is noticed impressive closing of these gaps, the nearer we get to the "native-born with both native-born parents" status. First generation immigrants with less than 20 years of residence have a 53.5 percentage points higher probability of speaking a different language at home. This gap is still statistically significant for second-generation, but the magnitude drops dramatically to 12 percentage points.

In all destination countries, second-generation immigrants have lower gaps in speaking the language of the country then the first-generation immigrants. The

[11]Mariya Aleksynska, Yann Algan, (2010) *Assimilation and Integration of Immigrants in Europe,* IZA Discussion Paper No. 5185, Bonn, September: 4

gap in the probability of speaking a different language at home ranges from 22 percentage points in France, 42 percentage points in Germany, to 80 percentage points in Austria. They thus seem to capture genuine specificities in the integration process of each destination country.

Turning to religiosity, considered to be perhaps the most persisting cultural trait, we find out that researchers measured religiosity as the frequency of praying, relating it to answers to the question: "Apart when you are at religious services, how often if at all do you pray". The answer takes on values 1 for every day, 2 for more than once a week, 3 for once a week, 4 for at least once a month, 5 for only on special holidays, 6 for less often, and 7 for never; and they converted them into days per year. The outcomes show a much higher frequency of praying among first generation immigrants relative to natives.

The religiosity of the new country does not influence immigrants' religion ethnic patterns or homeland attachment. Insofar as group size is a significant determinant of particularistic behaviors, it weakens them. The more policy-based opportunities newcomers receive, the more they dissociate from group behaviors and homeland ties[12].

Other surveys show that the frequency of praying is significantly higher among immigrants from MENA *(*Middle East and North Africa*)* and Africa, and to a lesser extent from Asia and South America, relative to native-born. Besides, the gap persists and remains as high among second generation immigrants as among first-generation immigrants, although heterogeneity of changes along this dimension is observed across destinations[13].

Integrating immigrants, allowing them to participate in the host society at the same level as natives, is an active, not a passive, process that involves two parties, the host society and the immigrants, working together to build a cohesive society.

Most studies of the relation between naturalization and integration, have focused on policies and structural context of destination countries, particularly in Europe, but there is relatively little attention for the role of origin countries in the process of naturalization and integration of immigrants. Yet it is evident that the 'origin factor' matters significantly when assessing the question of immigrant integration. Especially, dual citizenship policies in origin countries should be taken into account as a potential facilitating or restraining factor for the process of integration of immigrants.

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[12] *Uzi Rebhun*, *(2014)* Immigrant Acculturation and Transnationalism: Israelis in the United States and Europe Compared*, in Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *vol. 53, issue 3: 314*
[13] *Ibidem:* 13

These dual citizenship policies may be reflected in general rules in constitutions or citizenship laws on the loss of citizenship upon voluntary acquisition of another citizenship, but also in more specific bilateral agreements between countries or rules that only apply to citizens from certain countries[14].

Immigrants belong to two places: first, where they come and second, where they now live. While integration takes place in the latter, immigrants maintain a variety of links with the former. New means of communication facilitating contact between immigrants and their homes, globalization bringing greater cultural diversity to host countries, and nation-building in source countries seeing expatriate nationals as a strategic resource have all transformed the way immigrants interact with their home country. A considerable amount of high-quality research on the integration of immigrants has been produced in the EU. Building on existing research to investigate the impact of origin countries on the integration of immigrants in the host country remains to be done[15].

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