

Changing Identity Dimensions as a Result of International Migration

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Abstract

Migration experience can have an important influence on all dimensions of a migrant's identity. On one hand, the personal dimension is itself the result of multiple influences of distinct social space and time, synthesized both in multiple personal and collective identities. On the other hand, the social dimension of identity is provided by the feeling of belonging to different social groups. In any identity building collective identity logic overlaps the individual trajectory logic. Viewed in this way, the construction of identity is dynamic, allowing the change, mobility and avoiding the dissolution of identity.

Speaking of changing identity dynamics due to international migration, this article analyzed the changes in the levels of communication and language primarily due to integration in the destination country, changes in behavior and attitude of migrants, changes in mentality, lifestyle and self-esteem.

Keywords: *identity, change, immigrant, language, behavior, mentality, lifestyle, self-esteem.*

Any individual who has experienced the migration can be a subject to identity changes. These changes are noted along with the integration in the country migration country, by adapting to new social environment, acceptance of some reference models from other social environments/groups, integration and assimilation of another professional group or in another work collective, learning another language, new social relationships, acceptance and assimilation of other norms, rules and principles of life.

Personal identity of an immigrant occurs in relation to other individuals, which is its own universe: *nothing is more collective than personal identity*. This identity type is strongly influenced by the interaction process. As a result of this

interaction is carried out an exchange of information, views, opinions, beliefs between individuals, all of which influence the identity of migrants. Identity change appears from the time when the decision to leave abroad is made and it is remarked throughout the whole migration flow process. These changes are noted in particular at the levels of communication, behavior and attitude, mentality, lifestyle and self-esteem.

Identity and language

A fundamental element of national and cultural identity is the language that is considered a “natural meta-system, dynamic, unbalanced, open that, like any open system, may maintain its internal coherence, only if the process is not violent and constantly disrupted by direct interaction and mutual influence”.¹

The language allows people to express themselves, interact in society, to anticipate future actions and to organize it. It conditions the way in that we conceive or interpret the outside world and it is considered the most complex mechanism of communication and social integration.

Language is “a symbolic means of exchange between different social groups and individuals, as well as the consequences of value messages sent from one unit to another social system. As a system of significant symbols in relation to a code, the language has a structure parallel to the normative values and social norms constituents”.²

Language is closely linked to intergroup relations, but also because “through it there are expressed stereotypes, with all their retinue discriminatory consequences. In this respect we can speak of an ethno-linguistic identity and even an ethno-linguistic identity theory to explain the best strategies used to achieve a positive and distinct identity, especially their social consequences of the use made.”³ Some studies have shown that the way an individual speaks can affect the assessment made by others about him. This does not happen because some styles of speaking are more agreeable than others, but because different styles of speech are associated with social groups that are positively or negatively valued in society. If someone uses a style of speech belonging to a social group with lower status, he will be seen by others through the assessments that they have upon the group concerned. Thus, one can speak of a linguistic behavior that it is influenced

¹ Bogdan Popoveniuc, *Ecce homo!? Studii și eseuri de antropologie filosofică*, University “Stefan cel Mare” Publisher of Suceava, 2008, p. 270.

² Jeffrey Alexander and Steven Seidman (coord.), *Cultură și societate. Dezbateri contemporane*, Institutul European, Iași, 2001, p. 44.

³ Zoltan Schapira, *Teatrul și identitatea*, Clusium, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 43.

by processes associated with inter-group relations and membership of a particular group.

Language or speech style indicates ethnic identity. Immigrants speak their native language or in institutions that represent them (churches, associations, school) or community groups, friends of that nationality or family members (for those who emigrated with their families). But for the most part, migrants learn and communicate in the language of the host country (in the receiving community, workplace, public institutions, public places etc.). At the integration in the host country of migration most immigrants face difficulties in the understanding and language acquisition. "Understanding a language is one of the mental factors that enable creativity and self-consciousness. Without language we would not be self-conscious beings, and we live more or less in the "here and now". Mastering the language is necessary for our individual awareness of distinctive characteristics and to master the environment virtually."⁴

There are immigrants that, once with the integration into the host society and with the assimilation of the language, communicate mostly in the host country language, and in some situations they hide their ethnic origin. Therefore, the way that an individual accentuates or hides their ethnic language, show how he sees his ethnic identity as a source of pride or respect.

The behavior and attitudes of migrants

Migration abroad has a significant and sustained influence on the migrant's behavior and attitudes. Although human behavior is mostly rational and deliberate, there are situations in which individuals form groups to achieve various objectives, but within these groups sometimes manifest strong conflicts, diverse trends, and fierce battles for power or comfort, indifference and lack of interest and initiative is installed.

The motivation is the base of the migrant's behavior. According to Maslow's pyramid, motivation involves matching the needs and interests of individuals with the process of meeting the objectives and tasks arising from the duties they have. These types of necessities are: self-realization, self-esteem, membership/affiliation, safety, physiological needs. Thus, migrants make up their acts and conducts according to their needs. The first migrants' impulse is looking for a source of life and his one environment (housing, food, employment, income). After the fulfillment of physiological and security needs, follow the needs of affiliation and belonging to a social group, increased self-esteem, and finally,

⁴ Antony Giddens, *Sociologie*, Bic All, Bucharest, 2000, p. 52.

depending on the status and capabilities of each, self-realization. In a more detailed way one can say that individuals (migrants) have physiological needs, safety needs, of an ambient environment and of a social group, knowledge, self-esteem, formation/reformation of identity and a creative environment and spiritual.

Affiliation to a social group can affect the way individuals behave, because the need to belong to a group attracts a uniform behavior in accordance with the goals and values of that group.

Regarding the attitude, by this we can understand “an internal provision of the individual that embrace his perception and his reactions to an object or a stimulus.”⁵ This has several elements:⁶ (a) is a personal experience with a neurobiological sub-layer and it cannot be measured by behavioral manifestations only in an indirect manner, (b) the attitude constitutes a set of cognitive elements relative to an object to which there are associated positive or negative assessments (affects), (c) the core is that attitudes are precursors to behavior, (d) the individual produces tailored and consistent responses to the items associated with attitudes (in general it is considered that the attitude completes the behavior).

Once passed the period of adaptation in the host country, the migrants manifestations tend to approach those of the natives. The following features are in particular characteristic:⁷

- native language is gradually replaced with the language of the migration country, including in the family communities. Also, most immigrants chose to educate their children in the language of the host country, even if they have an alternative to the language of origin;

- it increases the number of mixed marriages, a phenomenon that accelerates the process of integration;

- the ethnic foreign birth who remain permanently in their adopted country, in the long run, tend to approach the natives;

- the cultural practices of the country of migration (including gourmet, consuming patterns, culinary tastes, even social practices and protocol) are acquired by immigrants. However, a phenomenon occurs, called acculturation. This is the result of direct and continuous contact between individuals and groups from different cultures.

Immigrants with higher education are integrated more easily than those with secondary education or no education. The first categories of immigrants have an

⁵ Adrian Neculau (coord.), *Manual de psihologie socială*, Polirom, Iași, 2004, p. 128.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Rusu Valeriu, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

appropriate attitude and behavior in the receiving society. The second category of immigrants, face many more difficulties in adapting and integrating, some of them with behavioral misconduct and impropriety against the native population. These behaviors are reflected in many cases with the reactions of exclusion, marginalization and discrimination.

Changing lifestyles

Once the immigrants arrive in the country of migration, they aim to reach their goal, that is most often linked to the economic situation. The contact with another social environment for a certain period of time can cause a change in the lifestyle.

The lifestyle of individuals show how they live their daily lives in a society, show differences and similarities between the ways in which individuals relate to reality and relate to others and how they express their personality and identity. "Lifestyles are expressions of the ambitions of individuals to create their own specific personal, cultural and social identity in the social context determined by their societies, therefore, lifestyle is defined as a structural, positional and individual caused phenomenon."⁸

It also talks about the lifestyle of an individual when he has alternatives from which to choose, but and the possibility to make it. Thus, the choice of the migrant's lifestyle is determined by the society in which he is, by the position that they occupy in society, by the possibilities and opportunities but and by the choices and personal expressions. "Lifestyles develop and maintain at the intersection of social and cultural structures, respectively, the individuals actions and initiatives."⁹

Lifestyle is linked to the individual culture. Two cultural features are universality and particularity. "Culture is individual/community own, essentially defining in a certain way of life."¹⁰ Once the phenomenon of acculturation is produced, immigrants take cultural elements of the host country and translate these to some extent in their being. All these acquired cultural elements, along with those stored from the origin country, stay at the base of the adopted lifestyle.

Migration in Western societies is characterized by greater freedom of individuals to express preferences, to express themselves compared to other societies. Immigrants have a higher possibility of expression, and societal

⁸ Mircea Comșa, *Stiluri de viață în România*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 125.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Nicu Gavriluță, *Antropologie socială și culturală*, Polirom, Iași, 2009, p. 177.

structures also support and offer such opportunities, which are included in their operating system.

In the country of origin, immigrants had fewer opportunities and possibilities, which is the motive why they accepted a lifestyle marked by limits and constraints. Once arrived in developed countries there are other possibilities and opportunities and as a result immigrants have adapted to a different lifestyle. In many cases, the lifestyle learned in the host country is sent to the families and to the origin countries, making it noted some positive and negative effects.

Mentality and change

In the new social environment, immigrants find different aspects of the country of origin, they relate to people with other perspectives and a different way of thinking, they know new places and adopt a different lifestyle, they have other possibilities and opportunities. All this has a great influence on the immigrant's mentality. "The mentality is a set of beliefs and representations that determine behavior and attitudes of individuals in a given situation, a system of reactions and responses solidified to experience."¹¹

Mentalities have a very complex structure with numerous and heterogeneous elements that comprise a system of accepted ideas about social reality, an ethical system of relationships between people, a set of habits, conventions and rules that are spontaneously respected and an operational system criteria that guides the judgments in relation to events and conjunctures of social existence. Social environment changes, new social relations, culture and civilization affect migrant's mentality. Also, a great influence is made by education, age and social status. It's sad that in many situations "a mentality change is given not by his own experience of migration, but by education, age or economic status of those who worked or traveled abroad".¹²

Regardless of financial situation, gender, age or education they have, people who have worked abroad claim that migration is changing people. Although mentality is defined as the most profound cultural structure of a community, the most durable and most resistant to change, migration is marked by a change of attitude as a result of social influences and cultural environment pressure. "Social influences and pressure is internalized on the cultural environment in mentality, as a deep structure of social consciousness, from which it acts as orientation factor, it

¹¹ Gheorghe Fulga, *Schimbare socială și cultură politică*, Economical Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p. 201.

¹² Dumitru Sandu (coord.), *Locuirea temporară în străinătate. Migrația economică a românilor: 1990-2006*, Fundația Pentru o Societate Deschisă, Bucharest, 2006, p. 57.

requires trial and a evaluation criteria, patterns of social action”.¹³

Mentality conditions the social group's choices and evaluations on long periods of time. Thus, the migrant's changed mentality conditions the actions and relations with the family, the community of origin and respectively the destination. Through the newly formed mentality, migrants work to improve some special circumstances. “Mentalities are diffused social models of solving family problems or reporting certain types of situations. Their durability is determined by the socialization processes and social communication as a response to recurring social requirements. As generative or structural structures, mentalities are diffuse cultural provisions, supported by socialization and institutionalization.”¹⁴

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is one of human needs arising from an “exigent self-evaluation of the individual who wishes to have his status recognized or the status at which he is aspiring, to have his skills valued, his knowledge, performance, moral qualities, etc. Meeting the needs of esteem allows the person to acquire self-confidence and feelings of value of attorney, the power, utility, etc.. Otherwise, the unmet of this necessity may lead to feelings of powerlessness, inferiority and weakness.”¹⁵

“Self-esteem is deeply related to the relationship between self-concept, self-perceived, - and ideal self (or desired), that is how they want to show in many ways, our person.”¹⁶ Thus, self-esteem is closely linked with self-image. In principle, the individual knows himself through the trials of life, through its actions, its relations with others, both in normal circumstances and in critical situations. In personal actions are observed successes and failures which, by their dynamics, are the primary source of self-knowledge. Successes and achievements raise self-esteem, and failure descends them. In the long run, these trends will lead to a stabilization of self-image. To these are added the group's view, the social self-image.

Immigrants may have a high self-esteem or low self-esteem. The self-esteem level strongly affects performance in all the activities they carry: a low self-esteem increases the risk of failures, giving a bleak vision about him-self. Migrants self-esteem is a subject to change depending on the person's ability to automotive and

¹³ Gheorghe Fulga, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

¹⁴ Dumitru Sandu (*coord.*), *Viața socială în România urbană*, Polirom, Iași, 2006, p. 21.

¹⁵ Fayard, *Vers une psychologie de l'être*, Paris, 1979, *apud* Cristian Bocancea and George Neamțu, *Asistența socială. Elemente de teorie și strategii de mediere*, A92 Publishing House, Iași, 1996, p. 36-37.

¹⁶ Petru Ilut, *Sinele și cunoașterea lui*, Polirom, Iași, 2000, p. 23.

stimulate the social and environmental conditions in the country of migration: according to their work and its conditions (work-provided education and training in relation to professional), the employer's assessment and evaluation, the assessing of the social group they belong to, the native perceptions and reactions etc.

Self-esteem is based on three components: self-confidence, self concept and self-love. Given that an immigrant trusts themselves, their abilities and qualities, has a positive outlook about themselves and self appreciate and values them (self-esteem), it can have both success and achievements in the country of migration and at home when they return. Otherwise, failures and disappointments may occur frequently (low self-esteem), attracting other failures.

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