

Discursive Identity of Immigrants: A Review

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Migration and immigrants' identity is a worldwide phenomenon in present times and the main issue in migration studies. The paper presents a review of formation of identities of immigrants through discourses and discursive practices. Language and discourses are significant in constructing and defining immigrant identity. Discourses on immigration are a topic of controversy therefore it has been studied differently by different scholars. The review of contemporary literature on the subject reveals that immigrant identities are affected by the policies, practices and discourses in the country of migration. A positive immigrant identity is fostered by transnational practices when immigrants think themselves as members of multiple communities. This fostering of identity is only possible if positive and encouraging kind of supportive discourses are produced in the host society.

Key words: *Immigration, Discourses, Identity, Discursive, Review.*

Introduction

Immigration is a complex process for the reason that it lies within many other disciplines like history, sociology, geography, politics, economics, linguistics, cultural studies, psychology, and gender studies. Also, it deals with the binary pairs of: past and present, country of migration and the host country, self and others, and old and the new environment. There hasn't been much work in the field of immigrant discourses. Those, which are available, deal only with the immigrant stories, such as their lives in the home country, their reasons for moving to the host country, the new country, and their hardships. There is a clear difference between travel literature and immigrant literature. Immigrant literature has less to do with just the personal account or travel for pleasure. It particularly talks about oppression, hardship, and the circumstances of migration. At the same time, they are dependent on the

history and economic cycles. The immigrant discourses deal with power relationships and construction of immigrant identity and should not be taken as narrations of regret, laments, and victims at the hands of the native population. The immigrant literature can be said to constitute the subcategory of exile literature and literature of diaspora. The task of locating immigrant literature is complex as not much work is done that can distinguish different forms of related literature such as 'exile immigration, dissident life, immigration, post-colonial relocation and different ways of travel, migrancy, resettlement, nomadic journey' (Coklin, 1999 p. 6).

Migration is often socially and psychologically distracting even in the most receptive of the circumstances (Furham & Bocher, 1986). The immigrants look for a meaningful existence when they suddenly encounter a new social environment. They are in need of a 'valued identity' in the new circumstances. The task of this new identity construction is huge and difficult when they encounter a disvalued status based on their immigrant status. If the individual perceives that the host environment is rejecting and not accepting them, the surroundings become inappropriate for identity formation in a positive way.

Immigrant Identity

Migration and immigrant identity are a worldwide phenomenon. The issues related to the interrelation between migration and identity has been explored through transnationalism, diaspora and biculturalism (Ballard, 1994; Vertovec, 2009). The subject has remained the focus of academic exploration highlighting issues and answering questions qualitatively of migrant identity with the host country and the home country and the formation of communities of the new country. Recently those social psychologists have tried to develop theories of immigrant identities and acculturation strategies (cited in Jaspal, 2015).

The contemporary literature on immigrants is suggestive of the fact that immigrant identity is fostered by transnational practices when immigrants think of themselves as the members of multiple communities across borders. Park (2007) believes that migration is not an event but a process in which life patterns are adopted such that these can link the home and the host country through social, cultural and economic connections. Park (2007) based his study on the post-immigrant identity of Korean Women living in New York. The researcher used the snowball-sampling technique for collection of data so that he may have access to the social network of Korean Community. His focus was on the strategic use of identity markers by these women. Identity markers that were found in the study were education, social class, job etc. Multilayered post migration identities were found among the respondents. They would call Korea 'my own country', while US was typically referred to as 'where I will live my life', or as 'the scene/site of my life'.



The immigrant identities are formed transnationally i.e. between two nation states and a little easily if there are commonalities or familiarity in social, economic and political networks. But at the same time, such identities are affected by the policies, discourses and practices of the host nation. Identities are also formed through lived experiences. DeJaeghere & McCleary (2010) have shown how civic identities among Mexican youth are formed and affected by the ongoing immigration discourses and practices. They took a transnational approach to study the civic identities of young Mexicans immigrants and argued that their identity of being immigrants is essentialised and made exclusionary in racial terms whereas the Mexican youth try to negotiate their identity to look for and create other identities (alternative identities).

According to Killian & Johnson (2006) the immigrants are in a complicated identity situation. They have three identities, which are all distinct. These three identities are the immigrant, ethnic and national identity of the host country. The expression of these identities is context dependent and may include the cultural background of the immigrants still working in matters of identity. Social theorists Hogg, Tajfel and Turner posit that as there is an individual need to feel positive about one's self there is also a need to have positive feelings about one's group and one's membership in that group. It therefore becomes problematic if a group has a low status in the society, at that time the immigrants get engaged in identity work where identity work is defined as 'the range of activities individual engage in to create, present and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept' (Snow & Anderson, 1997 p. 1348) (cited in Killian & Johnson, 2006, p. 64). Similarly, identity talk is one of the strategies of identity work in which the person verbally asserts his personal identity. Managing one's personal appearance to fit others' expectations is another form of identity work.

Waters (1994) explored the immigrant identity among the second generation of West Indians and Haitians in the United States. He found three identities within this group, a Black American identity, an ethnic identity of origin and an immigrant identity. These three identities have different implications for the perception about the host society and the opportunities it holds for the members of this group of second-generation immigrants. For instance, youngsters who emphasised their identity as Black Americans perceived more racial discrimination and restriction in opportunities. Those who identify themselves as West Indians or Haitians see more opportunities and belief in individual efforts.

According to Social Identity Theory, when the group boundaries are permeable, the immigrants do not like to consider themselves as immigrants. But the fact remains that usually, the natives of the host country do not see the boundaries as permeable as they identify immigrants from their birthplace and many a time through genetic makeup.



Studies on immigrant identity have been done variedly. Some of the researchers have worked on the labels that are used for and by immigrants. For instance immigrants in America have moved from using their home identity such as Chinese and Mexican to compound label like Chinese Americans or Mexican Americans, with the passage of time, and then sometimes to the single national label of 'American', which shows feelings of belongingness to the new society and the positive attitude of the people towards the larger society. Choosing identity and labels very much depend on the context, which basically includes the immigrant population, home and host countries and also the attitudes of the immigrants and the members of the new society. For example Antilleans in Netherland are treated as non-Dutch by the government so for this reason they kept a separated identity; similar is the case of Russians in Israel. Every context comes with a different implication.

The immigrant identity continues with the children and the grandchildren of the immigrants despite the fact that they are born there and speak the language of the new land and perhaps do not know any other tongue but ironically are not considered as a part of the mainstream identity. Such an experience may become the basis of some other identity such as ethnic, national, religious or even a distinct immigrant identity. 'Besides actual political mobilization, immigrants modify everyday life and practices in the societies where they live through just being there. In some cases, their presence influences the very way the citizenship is understood on an interpersonal level' (Hellgran, 2007 p. 4). Different generations of immigrants face different identity issues, the age of the immigrant and the time of migration is also a factor. The new immigrants usually have more identity affiliation to the place of their origin than the subsequent generation. The willingness to adapt to the new society also varies between generations. But not much research is done on such factors effecting immigrant identity.

The minorities and sub-communities of immigrants are seen as such for a number of generations despite their developing historic roots in the country of migration because of maintaining cultural differences with the local population. Migration can become a reason of change of identity due to the process of assimilation, but at the same time people may carry on with their pre-migration identities extending the cultural boundaries of the country they have moved to. There are motivational reasons behind migration and migrants carry certain imaginaries of the country of migration. Thomson (1999) gives the example of Ethiopian Jews who had a struggling experience when they migrated to Israel but their motivation was their religion and the faith that the holy land is for the Jews to return to, be it a myth but a strong one for which they accepted all kinds of sacrifices for the sake of their faith and religion and moved to Israel. Another example is of the Barbadian people migrating to Britain which they considered their motherland, such an image had been a part of their upbringing, but then they had to face the realities of being an immigrant and doing low paid jobs, still in their letters to families they tried to maintain the same image of mother country about Britain. Li, Jowett, Findlay & Skeldon (1994) deciphered migration decision and

construction of ethnic identities among professionals in Hong Kong, in the context of newly gained sovereignty by Hong Kong in 1997. For this study the technique of in-depth interviews was used. The study found that besides official immigration policies, migration is a self-regulatory phenomenon, regulated by the potential migrants who consider the decision in relation to their ethnic identity and place of migration. The study was based on people's discourses of migration decision and ethnic identity. Ethnic identity gives a wider context to human lives. One of the views that they have used in this study was to see migration decision as a reflection of one's behaviour and personality of which identity is an integral part. Humans are carriers of multiple identities and switching between identities depends on the place and the people they are with.

The larger society usually views immigrants in negative terms and derogatory ways and the immigrant group may take a varied position in this devaluation. Such devaluation will not threaten self-esteem if it is not internalised. Young children develop conflicting negative feelings about their own group if they are exposed to stereotypes about their group as they easily get influenced by the messages that they receive. Children attach meaning to their ethnicity according to parental socialisation. The provision of positive context by the group results in the development of positive sense about their own group among children. When children have a secure sense of their ethnic identity, it can be assumed that such a sense is achieved through positive feelings about their own group, which gives them strength for resolution of identity conflicts and a positive self-evaluation.

Psychological Outcomes of Migration: The different identities have a role to play in the psychological well-being of the immigrants. Phinney et al., (2001) tried to understand the psychological outcomes of migration by using the interactional model with special reference to the relationship between ethnic and national identity and the attitude of immigrants and the receiving host society. In societies where pluralism is accepted and encouraged, the immigrants maintain their ethnic identity but if there are pressures for assimilation in the host society then the bent of immigrants is towards the national identity, many try to downplay their ethnic identity but some also take pride and emphasise more on their cultural group to deal with the surrounding negative environment. Phinney et al., (2001) give four strategies for acculturation in their study, which are often found among the immigrant population. These are integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. Immigrants may have bicultural identities i.e. a strong ethnic identity but also strongly identify with the new society. One with strong ethnic identity and a weak new identity, carry a separated identity, whereas identifying only with a new culture refers to assimilation, and people who do not identify with either can be identified as marginalised.

The exclusion and discrimination take place through subtle mechanisms of reproduction of ethnic boundary in everyday life. 'Being an immigrant is not an established identity. It is a legal status and a life history that very well might be transformed into an identity, alongside

other collectives, ethnocultural and individual dimensions of person's identity' (Hellgran, 2007, para 15). The exclusion and discrimination that immigrants face is universally common and not linked to particular society or culture.

Ayometzi (2007) discovered during her fieldwork for her dissertation that the undocumented Mexicans in the US are the migrant communities who initially do not find themselves to have a membership of a particular group. They sustain an identity other than ethnic or linguistic. In this particular group, it was the religious identity as 'Christian identity'. This new set identity at least afforded them a space for interactive engagement, for that they were found to be actively participating in some Baptist mission. They selected an identity that matched with the people of the host country. They searched some common ground that they found in religion. The immigrant group in Pakistan known as Urdu Speaking also emphasised religion when they migrated from India to the newly formed Pakistan. In fact, the whole movement and struggle for a separate homeland were built around religion, Islam. This differentiated them from the majority residents of India who were Hindus by belief. They were made to feel similar to the local population of Pakistan by religion alone. Though later they found huge differences in language and culture. Very soon linguistic issues raised their ugly heads. The basis of common religion did not prove to be a strong binding force so the people who poured into the new country ended up with a vague immigrant identity.

Migration with the new cultural negotiation transforms the self-definition of a society and its members, this is called as the 'cultural-symbolic construction' by Breton (1992, pp 11-12) (cited in Lemon, 2010, p. 10). Original collectivity is redefined, collective representation is reassessed and social differentiation becomes significant by immigration.

Approaches of Immigrant Identity: The presence of them and us is usual in the discourses constructing identity because identities are studied in relation to others. In studying immigrant identity, the definition is maintained through the constructs of insiders and outsiders. The strategies that are used in such construction are those of assimilation and inclusion for us and dissimilation and exclusion for them and also of singularisation to highlight the difference between us and them (Wodak et al., 1999).

The migrant identity in cultural approaches has been explored through biographies, life histories and testimonies. Mobility and identity according to Chapman (1985) are not natural but human construction. The ongoing research in migrant identity has explored how the migrants negotiate their subject position, which is multiple and influences their migration decisions. Any theory related to migrants needs a different set of research questions and strategies for interpretation. More specific works have focused on: power relations surrounding migrant identities; mobility and their subjectivities in relation to race, gender, ethnicity and nationality; and basically how identity shapes mobility (cited in Silvey & Lawson, 1999).

Immigrant Policies and Immigrant Identities: Beswick & Gutierrez (2010) studied the strategies of identification expended by Portuguese and Spanish migrants in the UK. They used the interdisciplinary perspective and marked the context of their arrival in the UK. They observed their identification patterns such as linguistics, social and cultural that helped them in finding out the relationship between language use, identification attitudes, and strategies used by the migrants at different stages in the new country. Analysis of identity negotiations among different groups has been conducted by employing the concept of symbolic ethnicity given by Gans (1979). Symbolic ethnicity refers to the range of social, cultural and linguistic strategies used in identity negotiations by the different ethnic group in a society. Gans is of the view that cultural assimilation is not an easy and a straight phenomenon but the migrants try to maintain their identity in some way that also mitigates the uprootedness and social and psychological upheaval in the new place. The framework also considers nostalgia and sentiments for identity negotiations.

The working of multiple forces and processes in the making of identity make it multifaceted. Immigrant identity is a strategic form of it with external and internal factors and changes intersect to give identity a new definition, which also influences the society containing immigrants for instance Ku (2004), analyses the effects of immigration policy on immigrant identity, where identity is taken not only as forming a community but also drawing boundaries, differentiation, and distinction among people at many levels of society through discursive and institutional practices. The author believes that immigration influences the internal policy at societal, institutional and discursive levels. The category and categorisation that are made officially do not directly and exactly form identity but they do 'evoke consent, trigger contestation, conceal conflict, produce a line of distinction that otherwise might not exist, and be transmuted into everyday usage impinging on identity formation in the process' (Ku, 2004, p. 353). Identity formation is the result of the interplay among the already existing discursive practices of inclusion, exclusion and distinction. These identity formation discourses also include hegemonic narratives and discourses with changing social context.

Perspectives on Immigrant Identity: The identity processes related to post migration of immigrants were usually studied through the assimilationist perspective till the twentieth century but later other frameworks were taken up and transnationalism is one of them that informs that migration is not a one-time event that ends with reaching the country of migration but it is an ongoing process of identity negotiation by the immigrants in which they engage in social relationship and life pattern trying to link the two cultures. Park (2007) explains the identity dynamics by the lesser mobile immigrants who are the first generation Korean women in the US. Despite their immobility, they are seen as negotiating and engaging in identity practices which let them imagine themselves as members of the transnational community which implies resistance to assimilation in the US society and preserving their culture on the one hand while showing a gradual adaptation of the US society on the other.

Another approach to studying migration is through biographies. This approach takes the perspective that the issue of migration can be dealt qualitatively because humans are 'proactive socially embedded, intentional agents' who are not only influenced by the social world around but also influences them (Findlay & Li, 1997). The author taking the Giddens' view deliberates that the social world is constructed in three levels of consciousness i.e. the unconscious, the discursive conscious and the practical conscious. Practical conscious is the awareness of actors about their actions in the social situation, which cannot be expressed discursively. On the other hand, the discursive consciousness of the immigrants that can be probed for research purposes reveals how people or the social actors position themselves in the social world. It is a rather challenging task to raise practical consciousness and make it appear in the discursive one. In the research by Findlay & Li (1997) this was achieved through engaging the actors in deliberate reflection and then fitting in their intention to the wider perspective of their social and cultural worlds.

Immigrants Discourses: According to Van Dijk (1997) there are two kinds of discourses that show immigrants as the threatening other. One is the racist discourse through the use of racist language, which excludes the immigrant communities. Such discourses are apparently considered bad by the social norms, especially in the western society. The other kind of exclusionary discourses are the discriminatory discourses based on differential practices, which magnify the differences between the host community and the immigrant community making them irreducible and integration impossible, therefore. Several kinds of research have shown that discourses of discrimination are directly linked to the power structures of that society where one is privileged and maintains its position through the perpetuation of these discourses (Triandafyllidou, 2001). Both the formal and the informal discourses taking place in the society about immigration, immigrants, asylum seekers etc. have an impact on the related policy decisions which construct a certain tone of the message to be communicated. In turn, these have consequences for the immigrants. The host nation decides for the 'common good' that are favourable to them from their perspective and experience with the aim of domination (Korkut, Knapp & McGarry, 2013).

In many studies on immigrants, the media discourse is analysed so as to explore their perception about themselves through such discourses. One such research was conducted in Sweden by Sjobery & Rydin (2008) making use of the media ethnographic discursive approach. The study found important interconnections between the ongoing popular media discourse and the immigrant perception of themselves, their culture and country and also how does the host country, in this case, Sweden look at them.

Another dimension of immigrant discourses was researched by Verkuyten (2005) in Netherlands where he evaluated immigrant discourses for their consequences on multiculturalism. This research was conducted in the form of two studies among Dutch people. Through interviews, the discursive construction of categories of immigrants and the

rhetorical consequences it had on the people's way of evaluating cultural diversity and assimilation were found. The rhetoric from the data was divided into having a personal choice and the lack of it. The former was indicative of a desire for assimilation while the latter was supportive of cultural diversity. The second study in this connection was experimental in which the endorsement for multiculturalism was found to be the consequence of notion of 'personal choice' or 'lack of it' where the endorsement was found to be greater for the latter case. The study was based on analysis of ideological discourses of immigration and their consequences on multiculturalism. The conducted interviews were a means of finding out the repertoire deployed while talking about multilingualism, specially its endorsement in immigrant discourses.

Migration discourses are often formed as political discourses. The dominant and hegemonic discourses influence the migration policies. 'Discourses on migration, multiculturalism and integration are related to national identities and self-definition as well as practical policy interests' (Androvicova, 2010, p. 10). Androvicova analysed migration discourses by collecting rich data gathered from multiple sources such as the parliamentary debates, political programs, and daily press and political documents related to migration in Slovakia. Being a new member of the European Union, Slovakia relied more on the vision already produced by the EU about the immigration, which was recontextualised in the national context of Slovakia. Buonfino (2004) remarks that:

'there are many existing discourses on immigration that draw different frontiers between friends and enemies and between 'us' and 'them', some of these discourses are ignored by policy makers while others enter into dynamic dialogues with one another and shape the way policies are structured and negotiated' (cited in Androvicova, 2010, p. 6).

The immigrant ethnic group become a topic of constant discussion in multi-ethnic societies where the autochthonous majority engages in discussion about conflict of socio-economic circumstances, if the migrating group attains salience 'such talk is crucial for the informal distribution of beliefs and for the expression and social sharing of attitudes about minority groups' (Van Dijk, 1984, p. 1). Such discussions result in diffusion of prejudice discourses in the society. Van Dijk (1984) studied the properties of prejudice talk among the members of the majority group in Netherlands, which has the immigrant population from Morocco, Turkey and Surinam. The prejudice discourse eventually revealed racist discourse. Such a study not only gave insight into the talk about the minority groups but also formed racial discrimination existing in many western countries. The study focused on the expression of ethnic attitudes and their spread in the community and used discourse both as 'object and a method of investigation' (Van Dijk, 1984, p. 1). The talk about minorities has a strategic nature of its own where people do not want to appear racist but do express their negative opinion and feelings about the minority migrant groups.

The anti-immigrant discourses are actually discourses of national belonging and of protecting of national space. Those discourses eventually become public opinions and generate anti-immigrant sentiments. These elite intellectual discourses set certain frames of references, which are taken for granted in everyday life. Garcia (2004) reports that immigration and crime news have often been framed together depicting immigrants as criminals and violators of law and order. Taking discussion on a wider scale, intellectuals of Costa Rica have worked with the opinion section of the newspaper and also other public arenas and have reached the conclusion that the society is interpreted only on the basis of nationhood, which has given rise to anti-immigrant discourses. The review on the topic shows that:

‘discourses on immigration are a topic of controversy, and society is divided regarding the best way to approach it. Despite their ability to interpellate broad audiences, hegemonic discourses on immigration face alternative voices that attempt to undermine depictions of immigrants as threatening others. Without understanding the power of xenophobic ideologies, it is important to recognize the efforts made by alternative voices’ (Garcia, 2004, p. 440).

In most of the cases, immigrants are considered as a threat to the homogenous culture and therefore as ‘other’ by identity. The discourses in the society trigger it by highlighting the differences between the natives and the immigrants. In Anderson's terminology, migrants are excluded from ‘the imagined community’ of the nation. The media discourses tend to produce a discourse that is representative of the ideology of the powerful and marginalising the ‘subaltern group’ like the immigrants. Media in any way is an important canvas to shape public opinion, which is also vice versa. Conway (2006) studied the discursive construction of Irish identity in the backdrop of demographic, social and economic change in Ireland due to immigration. The analysed data comprised of opinion and editorial section of ‘Irish Times’ from 1996-2004. They found the mobilisation of cultural resources by these discourses.

Conclusion

Identity is constructed through language both directly during interaction and indirectly through discursive practices. The immigrant identities are formed transnationally, between two nation-states according to the commonalities, familiarities or differences in social, economic and political networks. But at the same time, such identities are affected by the policies, discourses and practices of the host nation. The identity formation is a continuously unfolding process and therefore migrant identities might not be determined by their places. Researchers have used different methods to determine migrant identities such as analysing biographies, life histories and testimonies. Language and discourse are important in defining identity in terms of Post-Structuralism whereby language acts as a tool that form and reforms, shapes and reshapes, constructs and reconstructs identity.



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