

The concept of integration in migration research sociology essay



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There are a number of theoretical models of the settlement process of immigrants to a new host society. In this section, some of the various focal points regarding the process of integration of immigrants into their host country will be presented.

2. 2. 1. Meaning of Integration

The notion of integration is broadly employed by sociologists and social anthropologists to indicate the process of immigrant adjustment in their destination country and the experiences that could be acquired and shared between the new settlers and the host societies at the various levels of social organization (Mekuria, 1988: 85).

The term integration is considered as the longer-term process through which immigrants become full and equal participants in the various dimensions of society (Gray and Elliott 2001a: 20).

Immigrants supply to the dominant society's social and economic wellbeing while retaining their own cultural identity. It is a two-way process involving participation and co-operation of both immigrants and members of the dominant receiving culture (Ho-Bedford and Cooper 2002: vi).

Integration is used with other resettlement terms including settlement, acculturation and assimilation. Settlement generally refers to the initial adjustment and early stages of adaptation into the host country. Therefore, the process of migrant settlement refers to the individual, community and societal factors associated with the intent and decision to settle in the receiving country. Whereas, acculturation is the gradual modification and

compromise of values or practices without giving up ethnic and cultural identity (Berry, 1987: 97-110; Walker, 2001: 8).

Assimilation is more distinct from integration in that it is characterized by the immigrant group 'melting' into the dominant host society (Berry, 1980: 491-511; Valtonen, 1994: 63-78). The level of integration experienced by immigrants varies depending on the characteristics of the individual and their relationship with the host society. Largely immigrants must desire integration otherwise segregation and the traits of assimilation begin to occur (Berry 1997: 5-68; Gray and Elliott 2001a; Mestheneos and Ioannidi, 2002: 304).

2. 2. 2. Assimilation versus Integration

The conceptual dissection between assimilation and integration is controversial among sociologists in the analysis of immigrant practices and interactions with their new societal setting. Some of them prefer integration, while others assimilation and some use the terms interchangeably to express the different aspects of the process (Mekuria, 1988: 84).

In 1921, Park and E. W. Burgess (1969: 735) provided an early definition of assimilation, which showed assimilation as the one-way process:

a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life (Alba and Nee, 1997: 827-28).

The classical assimilation framework implies that the various dimensions of assimilation -socioeconomic, social, cultural, and spatial assimilation - are interconnected (South et al., 2005: 579-81). The Socioeconomic assimilation as showed by high levels of education, income, and wealth is hypothesized to enhance immigrants' mobility neighbourhoods. Social (or,

Gordon's terminology, structural) assimilation is also likely to increase immigrants' prospects for spatial assimilation with the majority. Cultural assimilation (or, acculturation) - indicates ethnic minorities' adoption of the cultural practices and norms of the majority and the degree to which minority group members identify with the host society. Spatial assimilation is expected to influence immigrants' geographic mobility into neighbourhood with the mainstream population(South et al., 2005: 579-81). Therefore, assimilation means replacing one's previous identity with that of the host society. Whereas integration refers to the capacity to access aspects of the dominant culture, while simultaneously retaining an ethnic identity.

Kritz and his colleagues have defined these concepts by corresponding to the two fundamental dimensions of societal systems: ' structural' and ' cultural'. Integration refers to " participation in the structure of a societal system and measured as the degree to which a system unit occupies positions on structurally relevant status lines". Whereas, assimilation is defined as " participation in the culture of a societal system and measured as a degree to which a system unit occupies positions on culturally relevant status lines" (Kritz et al., 1981: 80). Assimilation has also to be distinguished from acculturation, which is defined as cultural change resulting from direct contact between two cultural groups. It is unlikely to the accultured

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individual to completely ignore his/her ethnic identity, but adopts some elements of the immigration system (Ibid, 81).

In international migration, it is more likely for the immigrants eventually to come to terms with the question of whether or not they and their families maintain the language and culture of their home country or adjust to the culture and language of the host country. " With succeeding generations, assimilation to the new country becomes dominant, but the conflicts are most difficult for the first generation migrants" (Glazier and De Rosa, 1986: 314). The first generation immigrants usually compromise and hesitate, which makes it difficult to relate to the new environment. If immigrants have never expected of such prior to their migration, the outcomes to the crisis become rather strong, painful, and intense (Ibid, 305).

Immigrants develop about four strategies in terms of two major issues: cultural maintenance versus cultural contact. The question is whether to remain primarily among their original culture and community or to get involved in the host society, and several possible strategies exist (Kritz et al., 1981: xxvi; Mesch, 2002: 916).

Assimilation occurs when individual do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures. Separation persists when individuals place a value on retaining their original culture and, at the same time, wish to avoid interaction with other groups (Mesch, 2002: 916).

Assimilation refers to giving up of one's own ethnic identity and adopting that of the mainstream society. The American ' melting pot' concept is an example of assimilation (Al-Issa and Tousignant, 1997: 5).

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Integration is the incorporation of part of the other culture but maintaining one's own cultural identity. The end result is a multicultural society with a number of distinctive ethnic groups within a larger social system (Al-Issa and Tousignant, 1997: 5). Integration is a possible outcome when there is an interest in maintaining one's original culture in daily interactions in parallel to the attempt to play an integral part in the larger social network (Mesch, 2002: 916).

The third option is separation, when the ethnic group withdraws from the larger society. Separation may take the form of segregation when it is imposed by the dominant group (Al-Issa and Tousignant, 1997: 5). Finally, marginalization occurs when the group or individual loses contact with its own culture as well as with that of the culture of the majority and is usually characterized by alienation and loss of identity (Ibid, 5). Marginalization arises when there is little possibility of or interest in cultural maintenance because of forced cultural loss or minimal desire for relations with others because of exclusion (Mesch, 2002: 916).

The phenomena of integration and segregation are dependent on a number of factors. One factor is the society of origin. The emphasis here is on the extent to which the motivation for migration can be reactive or proactive. The former refers to factors present in the country of origin that are negative in nature and the latter refers to facilitating or enabling factors that are positive in nature. Immigrants whose motivation for migration was proactive are considered more likely to get involved with the general population and to avoid neighbourhoods with a high percentage of residents who are immigrants (Mesch, 2002: 916).

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Another factor is the general attitude of the society to immigration and to pluralism, as perceived by the immigrants themselves. The more the society is perceived as open and receiving, the less likely the immigrant is to live in a residentially segregated neighbourhood (Ibid, 917).

2. 2. 3. The Major Social Integration Patterns

Many research observations about the integration models of the immigrants have shown a notable confusion, especially with regard to their total incorporation in the wider society. Despite the diverse proposals about the integration patterns of new immigrants, there is a significant lack of systematic empirical studies comparing them. However, Fong and Ooka (2006: 349) summarized the process into the three social integration patterns as zero sum, pluralist and selective integration pattern.

2. 2. 3. 1. The Zero-Sum Pattern

The Zero-sum pattern has been the major structure applied to explain immigrant social integration. The basic argument behind it is that as immigrants stay in the country longer, social integration follows. Immigrants gradually reduce their participation in ethnic activities while increasing participation in the wider society. At the same instance, immigrants begin to drop their identities and close links with their ethnic friends and group of people (Fong and Ooka, 2006: 351).

In recent years, a number of studies have challenged the nature of the zero-sum relationship between ethnic adherence and integration into the larger society. Full integration in this process may be trapped in structural constraints as internal colonialism. Again, other studies on second

generations demonstrate that not all children of immigrants with fewer socioeconomic resources have more difficulty integrating (Portes, 1995; Zhou, 1997; Fong and Ooka, 2006: 351).

2. 2. 3. 2. Pluralist Pattern

In the pluralist pattern, researchers used the premise that immigrants do not necessarily go through the zero-sum relationship rather they may voluntarily maintain their culture and previous ties with their ethnic group as they integrate into the wider society. Three lines of research have supported the pluralist pattern (Fong and Ooka, 2006: 352).

The first one suggests that retaining ethnic practices and ties are unavoidable among immigrants due to the very nature of ethnic organization to maintain ethnic practices. The second domain of research discovers ' the economic attainment of immigrants' through maintaining ethnic networks. The third line of research is emphasizes on the transnational nature of immigrant adaptation in line with the recent globalization process. Due to accessibility, immigrants' flow can easily initiate contacts in both host and home countries by travelling back and forth between them (Ibid, 352-353).

The transnational immigrants' continual linkages provide first hand information about the home country to the immigrants, and the information in turn helps them sustain and expand large-scale ties with the new country. The pluralist analysis clarifies that immigrants never stop their links even when they secure permanent settlement in the host country. On the other hand, they actively retain close social networks with their countries of origin and destinations with active participation (Fong and Ooka, 2006: 353).

2. 2. 3. 3. Selective Integration Pattern

Those analysts who explain the selective integration patterns among immigrants trace back to Weber's definition of ethnic group. Weber defined ethnic groups as:

Those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or customs of both or because of memories of colonization and migration this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists (Weber, 1968: 389 cited in Fong and Ooka, 2006: 353).

In his definition, it is implicit that ethnicity is 'subjectively oriented'. It helps to differentiate the binary dichotomies relation between "us" and "them" or "others". The so-called ethnic community, hence, presents meanings that aid individuals to identify themselves, and serves as a guideline for structuring daily activities such as family and work (Fong and Ooka, 2006: 354).

The selective view believes that individuals actively choose to define their ethnic boundaries by choosing their own preferred lives of social integration in both the ethnic community and the wider society in order to maintain their certain elements of their social identity (Ibid, 354).

2. 2. 4. Blau's Theory of Intergroup Integration

With sociological explanations, Blau (1977) developed a macro theory of social integration. He assumes the network structure to conceptualize the

linkage between individuals of various similar attributes based on multidimensional factors. Some of these factors among others include race, class, education, religion, cultural interests, and the like. The rates of intermarriage and other variables are taken as indicators of contact and integration of different group of people with each other (Collins, 1988: 424-25). Blau's model is criticized for not taking into consideration other factors than patterns of intermarriage and friendship. Since he used single set of factors that create network structure, his premise signifies that there are more pressures for segregation or for maintaining in-group solidarity against outsiders (Collins, 1988: 425).

2. 2. 5. Barriers to integration

There are many factors that determine the integration of immigrants into the social structure of the receiving country where they stay for the extended period or permanently. Among many others, some of these include: the proportional size of the immigrant to the native inhabitants, the cultural similarity of immigrants to the residents of the host country, characteristics of the individual, community of residence, structural location in the labour force, conditions of entry, and other societal factors interact to shape integration processes and to differentiate them across ethnic groups and societies (Kritz et al., 1981: xxvii-iii).

In strengthening the aforementioned factors, Bloch (2002) recognized about four key issues that have been identified in the research literature as central for the settlement process of immigrants. They are related to the political system of the host society, social networks of the immigrants, the individual characteristics of the immigrants and the circumstances of migration. They

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include such diverse matters as reasons for migration and aspirations of particular migrants, cultural distance from the new host society, language skills, educational background, support from co ethnics and possibilities of attaining civic rights (Bloch, 2002: 80).

According to Castles and Miller (2003: 220), the migratory process functions in a similar manner in all countries with respect to ' chain migration and settlement, labour market segmentation, residential segregation and ethnic community formation. Racism and discrimination are also to be found in all countries, although their intensity varies'. Differences can be seen in ' state policies on immigration, settlement, citizenship and cultural pluralism.'

Regardless of age, there are many barriers preventing immigrants from integrating into a host community. These include the background of the immigrants, lack of employment, language difficulties and unrecognized qualifications. These economic barriers are considered major obstacles to integration; however, there are also social barriers including physical disabilities, mental health, racism, family segregation, lack of ethnic support and inadequate community networks, and more particularly prejudice and xenophobia (e. g. discriminatory hiring practices, segregation in housing etc.) (Pernice and Brook 1994: 178; 1996: 511; Gray and Elliott 2001b).

Many of these economic and social barriers are interrelated and cumulatively affect the level of integration experienced by immigrants in their contact with the wider society that hinder a successful integration of the new immigrants (Nannestad, 2004: 289; Montgomery, 1996).

The same integration obstacles are common across countries. These are employment, language competence, racism and the individual personality of the immigrants. How an immigrant reacts to the loss of their country, family and social status, and how these personal traits are received in the social structures of the host country are common obstacles to integration. Some obstacles are however unique to some countries, for example welfare systems, citizenship rights for immigrants, bureaucratic processes and socio-cultural contexts (Mestheneos and Ioannidi 2002).

In addition to the integration obstacles described above, sub-groups such as older immigrants experience unique challenges to integration into a host country. Unlike younger groups, older immigrants experience relinquished social and institutional connections, and lose the basis of their self-esteem and social worth. These include a loss of social status and cultural identity, failing health and the inability to learn new languages caused by feelings of loneliness, isolation, anxiety and marginalization from the host society (Burton and Breen 2002: 47-48). Some studies find out that immigrants who are older and less educated are also less acculturated than other demographic groups. Others argue that there exists no gender difference in the overall degree of acculturation, but increased acculturation with increased levels of education and income.