

THE EXPERIENCE OF MIGRATION AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION: THEORETICAL REVIEW

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Abstract: *This paper aims to provide a theoretical review of migratory dynamics and cultural integration. This review delineates three primary stages of the migrant experience: the motivations for change and the decision to migrate, the transitional phase encompassing acculturation and adaptation, concluding with the process of cultural integration into host societies. The study performs an examination of selected literature following methodological academic standards, with the objective of highlighting theoretical diversity, clarifying similarities and differences across models, and identifying gaps that could provide a basis for future research.*

Key words: *Migration, Theories, Acculturation, Integration, Adaptation.*

1. Introduction

Migration is a global social, economic, and cultural phenomenon that significantly influences the framework of modern societies. The rising prevalence of population migrations, both voluntary and involuntary, necessitates a more profound comprehension of the migrant experience, especially concerning adaptation and cultural integration processes. This work seeks to deliver a thorough theoretical assessment of the models and concepts elucidating the dynamics of migration, acculturation, and integration through the pertinent classical and contemporary theories. The research examines different explanatory frameworks and clarifies their appropriateness for comprehending the experiences of migrants in multicultural countries.

2. Methodology

This study aims to provide an organized theoretical review of the theories and concepts related to the experience of migration and cultural integration. The literature review methodology was adopted according to an organizational analytical approach, by collecting and analyzing relevant theoretical and academic sources from reliable scientific databases such as JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar.

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The literature was chosen according to specific criteria. Initially, emphasis was placed on theoretical variety, encompassing several theories that clarify the facets of migration and cultural interaction. The assessment evaluated originality and scholarly value, focusing on works published in the past twenty years, with exceptions for classic sources that have had a significant impact in the field of migration and interculturalism.

The literature is classified and examined into three interrelated phases that represent the evolution of the immigrant experience from departure to adaptation and integration. These stages commence with an examination of the motivations for migration, encompassing both structural and individual factors, through a review of theoretical frameworks that elucidate the causes of migration. The review subsequently transitions to the change stage, examining the psychological, social, and cultural transformations encountered by immigrants, utilizing theories of acculturation and adaptation. The third stage concludes in an evaluation of the cultural integration process, analyzing models that elucidate the assimilation of immigrants into the host society, emphasizing the challenges of multiculturalism and critiquing conventional integration models.

Theories were assessed by analyzing the linkages and interactions among their concepts, and by identifying what distinguishes them from each other.

3. The Migrant Experience: From Departure to Integration

3.1. Migration drivers and theoretical frameworks

Different migration movements involve the voluntary or forced relocation of individuals to live in a new community. During this migration process, migrants tend to form groups with unequal power in the host society, whether at the political, economic, or demographic level. Consequently, the focus is not only on the plurality of these host societies but also on other terms such as “minority” and “ethnic group”, among others (Ibrahim, 2020). While migration can bring benefits such as cultural diversity, workforce growth, and innovation, it also poses challenges related to integration, resource allocation, adaptation, and assimilation, among other factors closely linked to the health and well-being of communities.

Migration theories have provided various explanations for this experience and have discussed many of its aspects. Although there is no single comprehensive theory in this regard, looking at these theories together can offer those interested in migration issues, as well as researchers and scholars, an important and comprehensive framework for understanding the migration experience and the subsequent processes of adaptation and integration.

The push-pull theory indicated the existence of two types of factors in the migration process. The first are “push” factors that drive people to migrate, such as poverty, conflict, and persecution in their home countries. Additionally, there are “pull’s factors that attract individuals to a destination, such as economic opportunities, political

stability, and social networks in the host country” (Stanojoska, Petrevski, 2012).

The evolution of academic discourse on migration has led to the emergence of world systems theory, which provides a comprehensive framework connecting migration to the global economic structure. This theory posits that migration is not solely an individual decision or a reaction to local conditions but is instead a consequence of the hegemony of industrialized nations over poor nations within the global capitalist framework. This dominance positions migration as a process intricately linked to a wider network of economic and political relations, encompassing colonialism and capitalist expansion, which facilitates migration to the industrial hubs (Cosma, 2010). Consequently, migration is not merely an individual or localized phenomenon, but rather an integral component of a larger structural process driven by globalization and the global economy.

World systems theory elucidates migration via the lens of the economic hegemony of industrialized nations over peripheral ones, whereas globalization theory broadens this perspective to encompass cultural, technological, and communicative aspects. In this context, globalization denotes the amplification of reciprocal impact among societies due to advancements in communication, transportation, and international trade, resulting in heightened interconnection among populations and the dissolution of conventional state boundaries. From a globalization standpoint, migration is perceived not merely because of poverty or insufficient opportunities, but also as an integral component of broader movements of individuals, commodities, and concepts. Media, the internet and communication with previous communities’ overseas shape impressions and expectations of lives in host nations, hence fostering the desire to migrate. Multinational firms, free trade agreements, and comparatively liberal border regulations in certain situations are concurrently transforming work and migration patterns. From this viewpoint, the identities and various affiliations of immigrants intersect, elucidating the tensions that may emerge between them and the host society when the values and customs of the immigrant conflict with the new cultural milieu, or when the immigrant experiences a dual attachment to both their original and contemporary identities simultaneously (Bauböck, Faist, 2010).

The dual labor market theory hypothesis elucidates migration by emphasizing the bifurcated nature of the labor market in host nations. This theory posits that the labor market is bifurcated into two sectors: the primary sector, encompassing solid, high-paying positions necessitating advanced education and skills, and the secondary sector, comprising low-paying, unstable employment, frequently found in service and cleaning industries. As a result, immigrants are predominantly attracted to this secondary sector, which is generally less appealing to native-born workers, potentially resulting in a stratified labor market characterized by varying income levels and working conditions (Elger, 2015). This partially elucidates why immigrants encounter difficulties in acclimating to their new society, often relegated to positions that provide limited prospects for promotion or economic security.

In this framework, human capital theory provides a novel viewpoint on migration, perceiving persons who migrate as making an investment in their future. It examines the influence of education, skills, and work experience on migration patterns. Accordingly, individuals with higher education and skills are more likely to migrate to places where they can earn higher wages and improve their economic prospects (Kindler, Ratcheva, Piechowska, 2015). Thus, this theory acknowledges the social and cultural factors that may affect individuals' migration decisions.

Research increasingly reveals that social variables are crucial in understanding migration intentions. Social network theory is pertinent here, emphasizing the significance of links between migrants and local populations in easing the migratory process. This theory underscores the significance of social networks and information dissemination, as individuals are more inclined to travel to locations where they possess established social connections and can depend on the assistance of friends and relatives. Migration is not driven exclusively by economic factors; it is also facilitated by the social networks linking new migrants to established individuals in the host country. These networks offer both social and psychological support while also aiding in recruitment and adaptation, rendering migration a continuous process influenced by social dynamics among migrants (Bauböck and Faist, 2010).

Regardless of the causes of migration, these migrant find himself faced with two possibilities: either they reshape their life anew and move towards integration and adaptation at different levels in their new life and new community, or they stand idly by in the face of his new reality, and thus will suffer from multiple difficulties related to the inability to adapt and integrate, which may lead to numerous psychological and social repercussions.

3.2. Acculturation and adaptation

During the journey of change that immigrants experience, there is a range of transformations and life adjustments, ranging from superficial modifications in dietary habits and fashion choices to deeper differences in language use, religious affiliations, and fundamental belief systems. Cultural change encompasses the transformations that occur in both material and immaterial cultural elements, such as arts, sciences, philosophy, and technology, as well as changes in the forms and rules of the social system (Al-Dos, 2024).

Therefore, the experience of an individual moving from their country to a new country and a new society, and having to interact with two different cultures, represents a burden on this individual. This requires them to have the ability to balance between these two cultures and to interact productively with the realities of their new life. The individual evaluation of these requirements varies according to a set of factors that may make them perceive them as elements of threat and causes of stress, insecurity, and instability, or they may perceive them as serious opportunities for personal growth.

When discussing the immigrant experience in multicultural societies, it is essential to delve a little into the process of “acculturation”. This concept appears in social and cultural studies concerned with migration issues and refers to the changes that occur when groups with different cultures interact directly and consistently. This interaction leads to modifications in the original cultural patterns of one or both groups, but often this change occurs more in one group than the other. These modifications, or what we call the process of acculturation, provoke different reactions, such as resistance to change or the stimulation of new cultural forms. Thus, we find that this phenomenon has two dimensions: the former is individual-psychological, and the latter is social. As we have seen, the process of acculturation occurs at the group level, and for it to happen at the group level, change must first occur at the individual level. The distinction between these levels is important as not all individuals participate to the same degree in the overall process of cultural assimilation that their group undergoes. There is significant variation among individuals in terms of their level of participation in these societal transformations (Berry, 2005).

The process of “acculturation” involves three sub-processes: cultural shedding, cultural learning, and cultural conflict. The first two scenarios relate to the unintentional or intentional abandonment of certain behaviors, which are then replaced by behaviors that enable the individual to better integrate into the culture in which they have settled. The phrase commonly used to describe this process is “adaptation”, as it involves the adaptive changes that occur within the individual who is acculturating, and these adjustments are usually accomplished with little difficulty (Ibrahim, 2020).

However, Berry (2005) elucidates in this context that conflicts may arise, but they are usually resolved when the individual adapting to a new culture aligns with the behavioral norms of the dominant groups. In such situations, assimilation is the most likely outcome. But when the conflict is at its higher levels, yet at the same time manageable, we are faced with the model of cultural stress. In this scenario, individuals acknowledge that they encounter difficulties arising from the interaction between cultures that cannot be easily or quickly resolved through mere adaptation or adjustment. Thus, cultural stress refers to the stress response that arises from life events directly linked to the process of acculturation.

The cultural problems that impose a heavy burden on the individual, which have not been effectively addressed, will result in extremely severe consequences, leading to high levels of stress that may drive the individual into personal crises where psychopathology is the appropriate approach to deal with, such as entering pathological states of anxiety and depression. In this scenario, the achievement is limited in managing the acculturation process, which may lead to regression or separation. It may also involve discarding one's culture without acquiring a new one, leading to marginalization (Sasak, Baba, 2024).

The process of cultural assimilation is influenced by two types of factors: personal and situational circumstances, and the original and local societal contexts of the individual. The cultural background of the individual provides a description of the cultural traits

they bring from their original society, in addition to the general attitudes and inclinations of both the new society and its individuals towards immigration and pluralism. There are some factors that researchers have presented regarding their association with the process of acculturation, whether before or during the process of acculturation. Among the factors they pointed out as present in the individual before engaging in the process of acculturation, which have a noticeable impact on it, are the age of the immigrant, gender, education, economic status, in addition to the individual's personal aspects that affect the process of acculturation (Berry, 2005).

The duration of the acculturation process is influenced by the nature of the problems faced during this journey, as some of these problems are complex and pose real challenges for the immigrant (such as language acquisition, job and housing search initially, followed by social integration and recreational activities). Additionally, these challenges are linked to the personality and capabilities of the immigrant, as well as to the opportunities, facilities, and fields provided by the host community. Based on that, individual experiences vary and differ from the beginning of migration until reaching advanced stages of adaptation or integration (Berry, 2003).

The work on psychological adaptation to acculturation has established a clear distinction between psychological adaptation and socio-cultural adaptation. Ibrahim (2020) pointed out that the first concept relates to a set of internal psychological outcomes, which include a clear understanding of the individual's personal and cultural identity, sound mental well-being, and achieving personal satisfaction within the new cultural environment. Psychological adaptation primarily includes the individual's psychological and physical well-being. While sociocultural adaptation refers to an individual's ability to navigate effectively in daily life within a new cultural environment, it encompasses various psychological outcomes that connect individuals to their new context, such as their ability to handle daily challenges, particularly in the areas of family, work, and school.

There are two main points to consider. First, the factors that predict these two types of adaptation are often different from each other. Secondly, it is suggested that psychological adaptation be examined within the context of stress and psychological disorder approaches, while social and cultural adaptation is viewed as closely linked to the framework of social skills. Studies examining the factors affecting adaptation show that positive psychological adaptation is determined by personality traits, life events, and social support. On the other hand, successful social and cultural adaptation is determined by cultural knowledge, the level of interaction, and attitudes towards different groups. Both types of adaptation are usually influenced by the effective use of the integrative acculturation strategy and the reduction of cultural differences (Alexi, 2015).

3.3. Cultural integration process

The process of cultural integration in social sciences is viewed from various conceptual perspectives, such as multiculturalism, assimilation theory, structuralism, and segmented assimilation.

In the literature related to the cultural integration of immigrants, the perspective of the assimilation theory dominated a large part of social thought during the twentieth century. This approach was based on several fundamental characteristics. This theory presented the fact that diverse ethnic groups naturally share a common culture that enables them to access social and economic opportunities like the citizens of the host country. And this process involves the gradual disappearance of the original cultural and behavioral patterns of immigrants in favor of new patterns. And once this movement begins, the process inevitably and irreversibly heads towards complete assimilation. Therefore, it is expected that diverse immigrant groups will “integrate” into the dominant culture through a process of cultural, social, and economic integration across generations (Drouhot, 2024).

According to Algan et al. (2012), social researchers did not overlook the role of the indigenous population, as they found that despite the difficulty of the previous assimilation process, the complete assimilation of different groups depends on the degree to which these groups gain acceptance from the host community, or what is referred to in this context as the “dominant population”. Over time, if this assimilation is achieved, it is very likely that ethnic groups will reach stages where they lose their distinctive characteristics. Therefore, the focus of assimilation theorists is on the successive generations of immigrants who distance themselves from their original culture.

In this context, Bolborici's (2016) study, which addressed the migration crisis and cultural identity, particularly “European identity”, can be cited. She highlighted the symbolic and cultural impacts of migration on European societies and discussed the growing fears among indigenous populations of a loss of identity due to continued migration. This reveals an aspect of the psychological and social dynamics that may hinder the achievement of full assimilation, as assumed by classical theory, and points to the tension between the pursuit of integration and the preservation of a collective conception of identity.

The segmented assimilation theory provided an explanation for the factors that determine in which segment of the host society a specific group of immigrants might integrate. It focused on the mechanism of interaction between various personal factors of the immigrant, such as: the country of origin, educational level, proficiency in the native language, age upon arrival in the host country, and duration of stay in the host country, with contextual variables, such as: ethnic background, socio-economic background of the family, and place of residence, with the aim of producing a specific integration pattern for a specific group (Sam, Berry, 2010).

As for the idea of multiculturalism, we are faced with a rejection of the integration process proposed by the assimilation theory. Researchers and scholars from this perspective see that multicultural societies consist of a group of indigenous people, alongside a heterogeneous group of ethnic minority groups. The multicultural perspective offers an alternative way to view the host society, presenting members of minority groups as active sectors and integral parts of the society, rather than merely as foreigners or outsiders (Bhat, 2020).

The structural approach emphasizes the relationship between socio-economic prospects and the social inclusion of minorities. Where inequality in access to wealth, jobs, housing, education, power, and privileges is viewed as structural constraints affecting the ability of immigrants and ethnic minorities to achieve social integration. This, in turn, will lead to the continuation of racial disparities in income levels, educational attainment, and professional achievement for immigrants. In short, we can say that the structuralist perspective focuses on the inherent conflicts present in the social hierarchy between dominant groups and minorities (Algan, et al., 2012). This approach has focused on the impact of the social and economic structure of the host country and on the ability of immigrants to achieve cultural, social, and economic integration.

Consequently, certain theories predominantly concentrate on the determinants of migration and the social, economic, and political environments in which migrants reside and labor, whereas other theories prioritize the process of migrant adaptation. Notwithstanding the distinctions among the theories with key focuses, there exists considerable overlap, as they all endeavor to comprehend the intricate processes of migration and integration.

4. Conclusion

This theoretical review illustrates that migration transcends just physical relocation; it is a multifaceted process encompassing intricate cultural, psychological, and social relationships. It is a process with comprehensive dimensions that contributes to reshaping societies themselves.

The experiences of migrants differ based on their individual, social, and cultural circumstances. Consequently, understanding migration dynamics requires an interaction between various theories and concepts that analyze this phenomenon from diverse perspectives. These theories illuminate several facets of this experience, encompassing the motivations for migration, which comprise structural and individual factors, as well as the acculturation and adaptation processes encountered by migrants, and the models of cultural integration and methods for assimilating into the host society.

Integrating these models and ideas enables the formulation of a complete vision that advances the development of more equitable and inclusive social and cultural policies. These policies can enhance migrants' prospects for social integration and foster mutual understanding among varied cultures, so creating an atmosphere conducive to positive

cultural relations.

In conclusion, this review underscores the necessity of theoretical diversity in migration, adaptation, and integration studies, pointing out the importance of continued research into the interplay between migration and cultural integration amid current and forthcoming global political and economic changes.

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