

Affirming and Transforming: Immigrant Identity Formation in the USA

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May 2019

Introduction

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, millions of people have been disenfranchised in the past two decades due primarily to war and natural disasters. Many of those displaced are relocated by relief organizations to Europe and the United States. These events have led to international conversations around immigration and citizenship. In the United States, there are clear differences between immigrants and other groups of migrants. Immigrants are assumed to have migrated out of a desire for better opportunities, whereas groups such as refugees and asylum seekers are fleeing danger and are powerless (Abdi, 2015). This paper does not intend to discuss the validity of these distinctions but instead, look more deeply into the immigrant perspective within the greater dialogue around immigrant identity as “us” or “other.”

Citizenship has been used around the world to distinguish between the in-group and out-group within the boundaries of nations. Citizenship provides constituents with rights and privileges that are not accessible to foreigners. One of the presumed privileges of citizenship is that it gives you a claim to belonging to that nation. However, belonging is rarely gained free of cost, both financially and socially, so many immigrants are forced to undergo assimilation. I am interested in the process of assimilation, whether immigrants do attain that sense of belonging regardless of citizenship, and what the process of attaining belonging is. Specifically, my question is: “how do immigrants affirm and transform their identities to navigate their feelings of belonging in the United States?”

Every culture is made up of beliefs, behaviors, traditions, languages, and values that individuals are then socialized into depending on the perspective of a specific culture. However, the ways in which immigrants select and reject these traits of their two cultural homes, their heritage and their new chosen culture, varies by individual. Immigrants do affirm and transform

their identities, whether intentional or involuntary, with the goal of reaching “enoughness.” I define “enoughness” as a liminal state of feeling a sense of belonging to two different societies and finding acceptance in return. Victor Turner defined “liminality” as a state of being in limbo, betwixt and between two full states (Turner, 2008). Hybridity, another strongly supported anthropological/sociological concept, declares that immigrants neither embody their heritage nor embody their new homes, but are a new combined entity with elements of both cultures. My exploration of “enoughness” adds to the dialogue by providing the preliminary steps of finding that hybrid state through affirming and transforming immigrant identities.

Methods

To best investigate this process, I have interviewed 6 immigrants about their experience. I am defining “immigrant” based on that of the Oxford English Dictionary: “a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country,” differing from those who identify as “refugees” or “asylum seekers” based on perceived agency in the decision to migrate. 9 people were originally recruited to be interviewed; however, 3 interviewees did not fit the definition of “immigrant” fully. Of the 6 interviewees, 2 are male. Regionally, 2 are from Latin America, 2 are from Asia, 1 is from Europe, and 1 is from Africa. Interviewees were selected based on known immigration background and snowballing technique, but each interviewee contributed a unique voice to the conversation. The age of interviewees ranges from 19-59 with 67% (4/6) younger than 30 years old. The intention behind the diversity within this group is so that a generalization can be made about the overall immigrant identity formation process.

All interviews were semi-structured with the guided questions aimed at encouraging interviewees to reflect on these three areas: the immigration process, recognition of difference or disturbance in belonging, and forming of new identity. The response to these questions flowed

back and forth through these three main areas, but each of these areas were present and vital to the interview. Semi-structured interviews were the best option for this research because it allowed the interviewees to dictate their own progress in the reflection while allowing me as the researcher to gather all the necessary information for my analysis. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and qualitatively coded to analyze the data.

Background

Human migration is by no means a new phenomenon. History has shown that humans have moved to escape danger or chase prosperity. Nation-states, on the other hand, are a relatively new creation that requires population stagnation in order to enact and enforce laws, to impart rights, and to collect income in the form of taxes (Coutin 2007). Immigration is a disruption to this system and is therefore often met with hostility (Abdel-Hady, 2006). This disruption is due to the belief that a nation-state is a community “which mobilizes a shared sense of belonging and loyalty predicated on a common language, cultural tradition, and beliefs” and immigration does not fit into this assumed belief (Vertovec, 2011:244). The hostility that results can present itself systematically through laws and interpersonally through native-immigrant interactions (Fernandez, 2017; Flam and Beauzamy, 2011).

The legal system is often used to dictate who may and may not enter the country and benefit from its resources. For example, in the United States the nationalization system used to overtly operate under the assumption of “whiteness as a symbol of ideal legal and moral citizenship” and thus incentivized immigration of people who fit into this category (Bishop, 2017; Calavita, 2007:10). Immigrants from the global south who migrate to the western world, on the other hand, are especially susceptible to hostilities. When a foreigner enters a nation-state, they bring with them customs and norms that may clash and differ from those of the native

society. Thus, the foreigners are seen as a threat to societal order and are forced to take on the majority culture and strip some of their own identity in a “cultural compromise” (Wimmer, 2002). Natives are unsettled by immigrants because they feel uncertain about immigrant national loyalty and they fear the loss of their national sameness (Meijl, 2010; Coutin, 2011; Vertovec 2011). To appease native anxiety, immigrants endure “symbolic violence” such as disdained looks, verbal assault, and condescending behavior to demonstrate their worthiness of belonging (Delanty, Gerard et al, 2011).

Immigrants experience an exuberant amount of adversity no matter what country they immigrate to. The layers of challenges they face can be summarized into three main stages: “pre-migration, during migration, and post-migration” (Fernandez, 2017). Looking at the United States specifically, these stages can be used to layout sentiments of exclusion and inclusion that immigrants internalize that facilitate their feelings of belonging.

Phase 1: Premigration

The United States alone has one of the largest immigration populations in the world, with 46.6 million immigrants (Fernandez, 2017). There are a plethora of reasons and circumstances that motivate people to pack their things and leave their home to live in a foreign land. Some of the motivations for leaving include personal insurmountable challenges people face in their home countries, such as economic instability, health problems, and loss of employment opportunities (Fernandez, 2017:6). Another catalyst of immigration is international exchange of labor. The U.S. bracero program of 1942, for example, was an initiative to give every Mexican legal residency in the U.S. with the caveat that they work exclusively in manual labor (Coutin, 2011; Gombert-Munoz, 2011). This direct movement of people from Mexico to the US was seen as mutually beneficial: the U.S received cheap labor to fill its growing agricultural sector and Mexico

alleviated its high unemployment rate. Despite the U.S-imposed stereotype on Mexicans as “lawless, unclean, uneducated, and threatening...[who] steal jobs and leech public assistance,” conditional acceptance was extended to the “less ideal migrant” for their personal economic ambition (Gomber-Munoz, 2011:106). Citizenship can act as a form of protection against rights violations in the work force, but non-citizens are especially vulnerable to being taken advantage of for low-wage employment (Coutin, 2011). In one way, migration can be a collaborative endeavor between migrants wanting to leave challenging situations and nations needing laborers. Immigrants are only asked to move from a dire situation to a less dire but still vulnerable state of displacement. The burden endured by immigrants are far more hefty than those taken on by the nation-state which send immigrants the signal that they are undesired and dispensable.

Phase 2: During Migration

Despite the popular belief that immigrants have more agency than refugees, the difference between these two groups is not quite so distinct (Abdi, 2015). Their mutual displaced identities highlight their shared vulnerability when entering a new country. The journey from their home to the migration destination is rarely as simple as boarding a plane and arriving in a few hours. Many migrants overcome “battling heat, not having enough food or water, traveling hundreds or thousands of miles by foot or train, and some [are] threatened by other” (Fernandez, 2017;11). Migrants undergo all these trials to reach a land they believe will bring them prosperity in wealth, health, and happiness (Abdi, 2015; Fernandez, 2017).

As a “disruption to the nation-state,” migrants are forced to integrate into the social structures of their destination to reduce this disruption (Wimmer, 2002). The United States has a deeply racialized past and present. The legal system was used to ambiguously inaugurate immigrants into racial category so that they may be made sense of by greater society (Calavita,

2007; Gomberg-Munoz, 2011). Immigrants are also very easily forced into an economically dependent situation because of the challenging circumstance from which they fled (Abdi, 2015; Calavita, 2007). Maneuvering immigrants into boxes of race and class are ways that the U.S prevents immigrants from disrupting their social systems; however, there is little protection for the cultural shock imposed on the migrants by the nation-state (Abdi, 2015; Calavita, 2007; Gomberg-Munoz, 2011). For example, one consequence of the higher value the U.S grants women compared to traditional Somali culture is that fathers have felt devalued by their families and there has been an increase in broken Somali families as a result (?) (Abdi, 2015).

One safeguard that helps alleviate some of the burden of migration for immigrants is finding community. Often this is done through tapping into networks of friends and family who have immigrated before and joining immigrant communities (Abdi, 2015; Gomberg-Munoz, 2011; Hernández-León, 2000). These immigrant enclaves give migrants the familiar comfort of hearing their languages spoken and their cultural foods cooked. Other immigrants find community in their religious practices (Fernandez, 2017). These networks mitigate immigrants' feelings of alienation by providing a connection to their new setting while reaffirming their identities and perspectives, and fostering a sense of belonging (Abdi, 2015; Gomberg-Munoz, 2011; Rolf Lidskog, 2017).

Phase 3: Post Migration

Living in the United States without citizenship is a precarious affair even for those who have legal status (Coutin, 2011). The U.S has conducted mass deportations of legal residents in the past as a “cleaning method” of ethnic groups (citation). Legal immigrants occupy a liminal space in which they are bewixt and between labels of “American” and “foreigner” (Turner, 2008). As mentioned, citizenship has been used as a tool to accept or reject “Americans-in-the-

making” (Coutin, 2011). Regardless of legal status, there is a clear distinction between citizens who have claim over U.S resources and protections and noncitizens who live in limbo (Coutin, 2011). Although there are circumstances of conditional acceptance as in the case of labor exchange between nations, “belonging” in the legal sense for immigrants includes passing a series of moral and patriotic trials. For immigrants, these trials have higher standards for them than their automatically nationalized citizen counterparts.

Despite the need to assimilate and conform to the host country, immigrants also find value in their heritage. The United States, as a multicultural nation, has a rich history of immigration and immigrant communities have found ways to use public spaces to reaffirm their presence and their right to occupy these spaces (Grimson,2018; Lidskog, 2017). There is power in numbers, and marginalized groups in the United States have leveraged their identities to demand political representation and community resources (Bernstein, 2005). To add to immigrant community empowerment, these enclaves help to welcome and assimilate new arrivals in a way that preserves their culture while helping them navigate their new setting (Abdi, 2015; Portes et al., 2008; Hernandez-León, 2000). These immigrant communities act as resources that alleviate some of the feelings of exclusion they faced by providing a space of inclusion (Santiago-irizarry, 2008).

Immigrants who endure the symbolic violence from natives and the systematic tests of the nationalization process are legally given the right to name themselves “American” (Delanty, Gerard et al, 2011). However, different factors determine how much right this group feels they have to the label. According to the 2004 21st Century Americanism Survey, “whites born in the United States are extremely likely to say they think of themselves as American,” and someone whose ethnic group faces discrimination is less likely to identify and American (Schildkraut,

2014). I believe that this phenomenon occurs because of the layers of rejections immigrants face throughout their process.

Synopsis

The immigrant migration process has been written about at length, however, one area of study that has been less developed is in immigrant identity formation. The purpose of this research is to see how immigrants process and internalize legal and interpersonal signals of acceptance and rejection in order to find belonging within the communities they feel connected to. Previous research has stated that immigrants must strip away pieces of their culture and values in order to reduce disruption in their host country. However, researchers have also found that immigrants find ways of asserting their heritage through immigrant community formation and through vocalizing pieces of their culture. By interviewing a diverse sample of U.S. immigrant about their immigration experience, this paper will shed light on the hybrid identity immigrants embody.

Transformation: Ways Immigrants Assimilate

A fundamental aspect of the immigration process upon arrival is assimilation. What cultural markers and values immigrants choose to adopt into their identity depends heavily on their interpersonal experiences in the U.S. In this section, I will explore the ways in which the US education system, English as a Second Language (ESL), aligning world views, and physical space all play a role in encouraging and forcing assimilation.

School and Society

Many of my informants named school as playing a fundamental role in helping them understand American culture. This is reasonable, considering that schools are institutions of socialization.

Socialization is a process of learning “to be” in a society, and schools facilitate this process for students because they are surrounded by peers and adults for a significant amount of a student’s day. School can be an indispensable tool for immigrant children to learn about their new home country from natives of that country. However, integration to a new culture is rarely painless. In Emmanuel’s case, the “natives” used symbolic violence in the form of teasing and ridicule to educate Emmanuel on the high value they placed on haircuts (Delanty, Gerard et al, 2011).

Emmanuel shared with me a memory of one day in middle school, “that day, I will never forget,” he tells me as he proceeds to paint a scene where he is cornered and teased beyond mercy for a poor haircut his father gave him. Since that day, he explains to me:

I just went to the barber shop. I think that's when I started integrating more [into US culture]. I just, I just went to the barber, I was like, I just literally paying anyone else to cut my hair. Like, I'll just pay someone. And even though I didn't really want to pay anyone, like I didn't think it made sense moneywise so I would like just save up from allowances, and just get a haircut. I'd just be like, alright this is just the best thing to do.

Emmanuel, as an African boy was read, in his new setting, as an African-American and as such, social expectations of that US subgroup were imposed on him. Within the African American male community where Emmanuel found himself, having a well-kept haircut was highly valued and he learned about this culturally appropriate behaviors and ways of being through his school mates. By not incorporating some visible symbols of assimilation, immigrants make themselves susceptible to being targeted either verbally or physically. Schools and other institutions can be beneficial agents of educating immigrants about cultural expectations. English as a Second Language (ESL), for example, was a common experience among my informants.

Throughout all my interviews with informants on their experiences of immigration and culture, each and every one of them named the importance of language. This appeared both in the importance of maintaining fluency in their native tongue and also in the importance of learning English as a tool for integrating into their new homes. Emmanuel, a proud Nigerian, shared with me one particular story involving his time with ESL that motivated him to become fluent in English in elementary school:

Back then, I would actually translate everything to Yorba in my head. Cause I had no idea what the heck anyone was saying. And like there was one time where I didn't know. I just, don't know what words are really. So like someone said like I think like, someone pushed me or something. And then like the teacher was like, 'did he do it on purpose or by accident?' I didn't know what either of those words meant. So, I just chose one and I guess I chose the wrong one because I didn't know what they meant... I was more hurt because she [the teacher] asked me a question I didn't know the answer to.

As he recalled this story, he leaned forward and began speaking faster, it seemed as if his mind was trying to communicate faster than his mouth could move. Although the incident occurred years ago, it is evident in his tone, body language, and word choice how frustrated he felt in his inability to advocate for himself. Emmanuel's interpersonal encounters at school facilitated his learning of what cultural habitats were vital to adopt in order to camouflage and decrease his encounters with symbolic violence.

Beliefs, Behaviors, and Belonging

Immigrants' access to their new culture allows them to explore and express aspects of their identity that were rejected in their countries of origin. Often, when people are born into a

society and they have beliefs and behaviors that deviate from the norm, they are labeled as deviants: they must either change themselves or live in that rejection. However, immigrants are given two sets of “normative” ideologies to choose from and have the potential of being accepted by either their native culture or their chosen culture. Emily, an avid people-watcher, immigrated to the U.S. from China when she was 15 years old.

China is a very socially conservative country and I'm not at all, I'm not socially conservative at all so I feel more comfortable being, you know, expressing my sexuality and really expressing my personality here, cuz in China, you know, women are, you know, stereotype of being reserved we're supposed to act a certain way and you know, and all that and that's just not who I am.

Emily did not have to change her liberal beliefs for conservative ones or suppress them because migrating presented her the opportunity to express her beliefs in a society that supports them. The acceptance she felt allowed her to change her behavior in a way that better represented her beliefs which made her feel more connected to the US than she had been to China. Other informants named the way in which Americans expressed hospitality and curiosity towards newcomers as a U.S. characteristic they appreciated and thus adopted American practices of greeting people. In this way, finding the validations of their beliefs in their new home country transforms immigrants' behavior to better fit those beliefs.

Emily also shared with me that she was able to pursue her ambitions in the US more freely than when she lived in China:

I want to work in politics one day and I don't think I have much of a chance of doing that in China umm cuz my family is not involved in politics at all and that's really how you

have to like, get into politics, like your family has to be politicians and that's how you get in.

In China, Emily felt too restricted in the professional ambitions and thus made the decision to immigrate based on the limitations her country of origin imposed on her. Structurally, the U.S. has a different educational approach and social expectations (less overt traditional gender roles) compared to China. Despite it being an adjustment, it is one Emily welcomes because she finds China's approach restrictive of her and the U.S.'s approach is in alignment with her preestablished beliefs.

The Subtle Influences of Place

Not all aspects of assimilations are as overt as getting a barber or vocalizing liberal values as Emmanuel and Emily can attest to. Emmanuel holds up his dinner of fried chicken and fries as he proclaims, "this is America right here." He means to convey that his eating habits have changed drastically since he migrated. In his dress and in his behavior, Emmanuel finds himself torn by how much he camouflages into US society:

Like, I kind of forgot I'm international for a second because like there's a, there starts to be kind of this feeling, when I've have been here so long, that like, I'll do stuff that's more towards where people would be like, oh, oh, like he, he's an African American...but like, like technically I wasn't born here so I'm not African American.

Ironically, earlier in the interview Emmanuel mentioned that he started going to a barber to fit in more in order to decrease the harassment he experienced, yet now he feels unsettled by how much he has come to fit in. Emmanuel is only made aware of his integration into U.S. culture when others identify him as "American," which he finds unsettling because this recognition

distances him from his Nigerian roots. However, it is not simply people in the U.S. identifying an immigrant as part of the in-group, but it is the host country recognizing that person as “different” and “other.” Emmanuel explains that when he visits Nigeria, and:

[...] when I started talking, immediately [I] stand out just cause like they'll know when you're coming from America, I'm going to speak English really well...like, I'm American cause I could speak English really well and I studied there and I've been there long enough.

Physical distance from the land that holds the norms, values, and customs one's traditions are based in can cause those symbols of culture to fade. Concurrently, as one's heritage fades, the lived-in culture becomes more and more prominent within that person. For many immigrants, it can feel like an inevitable and slowly approaching phenomena, unless there is an intentional attempt to delay the process. Emily, for example, explains her own fears of weakening her tie to China through the slow deterioration of her language skills:

I've been in the States for three years and there is not a lot of Chinese speakers around me umm really so um I'm losing my Chinese skills which is very normal apparently, I asked like, a bunch of my other international student friends and they said they're losing their language too if they don't use it, so, yeah I'm just really been lacking on that part cuz, you know, I'm not reading or writing or speaking Chinese at all so, if you don't use the language it goes away.

Earlier, I mentioned the importance of language as a tool for integrating into United States society; however, by speaking exclusively English, it also degrades pieces of the migrant's

heritage. In a way, loss of one's heritage allows them to be more integrated into US culture, however, this is often not the goal of many immigrants.

Affirming: Experiences of Rejection, Travel, The Mother Tongue, and Family

Although immigrants are often willing to rise to the challenge of assimilation in some cases, many immigrants rarely denounce their backgrounds and completely adopt a new identity. My informants stress that their heritage functions as a backbone and blueprint to their identities from which they add and erase specific qualities. Interestingly, much of the same habits that facilitate transformation in the experience of some migrants such as food, clothes, mannerisms, language, and shared worldviews motivate affirmation of heritage in other immigrants. However, some specific factors that has helped informants maintain a strong bond with their heritage include experiences of discrimination, historical/social knowledge of their country of origin, visiting their countries of origin, and their families.

Social Patterns as a Deterrent

In the same way that aligning ideologies can make migrants feel more attached to their new American identities, a discomfort with this new culture can allow room for appreciation of old customs. Estella, who spent the early years of her life growing up in a small tight-knit community in Honduras, finds the overly social norms of the US challenging to manage:

My friends is like, 'let's go to the movies and go to the mall. Let's go there, let's go here.'
Like, and I'm just like, I just want to be home, which is like a thing, like in my, like in Honduras...So like coming here, like that's something like that, my friends like, 'but you, why don't you like going out?' And I'm just like, I don't, and like so, and sometimes it's like they don't understand that I come from a culture where like I was not allowed to go

out and that's was the key part of my identity, but like, they like find me kind of weird.

And they're like, yeah, but you know, the fun thing is to go out. I'm like, yeah, I could go one time. And so, but like not so many times I feel overwhelmed with like going out all the time. Sometimes my friends don't understand that.

As it is often said, “distance makes the heart grow fonder.” many immigrants like Estella find that aspects of their new home can be abrasive, and they feel nostalgia for their old way of life. Other informants added that they feel nostalgic for the slower pace of life they had before they moved to the U.S., whether that was tied to their country of origin or their younger age is unknown. In addition to culture shock, rejection by their native peers is another experience that immigrants face that deters them from claiming to belong to the United States. Rejection can be aggressive and threatening and vary in intensity but are often experiences that remind the immigrant that they are different from the “native” population. Estella shares with me some of her first feelings of “difference”:

in high school I have this class, my writing class, so like I took ESL, I don't know if you know ESL, I took ESL because English is my second language...But once I know English well enough, I was put in a writing class with like students that English was their first language. And my professor, my teacher at that time, in that class, it was like me and two other Latinos, um, that we were placed with her and she would never helped us. And every time we would asked for help, she be like, ‘Oh, you didn't speak English so what was the point of helping you’ or like be like, ‘you know, you're like not intelligent enough, so I'm not wanting to waste my time’

There is no incentive to belong to a society that makes you feel unintelligent and unwanted, and it can make immigrants feel more connected to their culture because they rely on their immigrant networks. That is what Estella did:

we kept together [the other Latino students in the high school] like, we were a group really tight like, and it feels like in the way, it was to like kind of defenses against the little things that like they would do.

These acts of rejection and discrimination lead to feeling of solidarity among immigrants, especially those from similar regions of the world.

Tools for Holding On

Emmanuel and Emily expressed earlier that the physical space one occupies influences their social behavior and being in the U.S. inevitably necessitates following US social norms. Because of the power space can carry, many immigrants and immigrant parents invest in traveling to their countries of origin in order to help preserve their culture. Estella cheerfully explains:

for the last few years I'd been going at least once a year for different reasons. Like when, I just want to go and visit my family or maybe since I go because my dad and my parents need some stuff from there and they're like 'Estella, you go.' which I never say 'no' to, like traveling.

Estella laughs as she says so, but in actuality, by traveling to the epicenter of her cultural heritage, she reinvigorates her ties to her country of origin and affirms her Honduran identity. Immigrant communities are another important mechanism of preserving heritage because they are similar to an extension of the family. Within immigrant communities the mother tongue is spoken, traditional foods are cooked, and news from the mother land are shared. Estella feels that

she has “the full Honduran culture at home,” in the U.S. through her family and her immigrant community. However, even she admits that “there's limitations and it's like, there were not like, like the fruits I eat in Honduras,” and visiting home helps fill the gaps in her Honduran experience. However, not every immigrant has the financial means to travel often and, in these cases, I've found that my informants name their families as fundamental to maintaining a connection to their heritage.

Families like Estella's try to preserve their cultural backgrounds in the face of an ever-persistent alternative outside their doors in their new homes in the U.S. Although they are not resistant to certain parts of assimilation, like learning English, these families and communities try and pass on cultural artifacts to their children. For example, when asked, Estella explains clearly what makes her community distinct from other immigrant communities, and even other Latino communities:

We have, ok food related were like really proud of our food. So la Beleada, we have this, it like a flour tortilla, fold it in half and you can, normally the Honduran one, it has beans, cheese, cream, meat...like no other country has it like, it belongs to Honduras. It's like it represents Honduras...in the United States you saying we're Americans, we say we're Catrachos. We don't say we're Honduran, we say we're Catrachos... it means that we're from Honduras and that we're proud of being like that, it's, oh, we also have like la punta, which is a dance and they're like, if you're catracho than you know how to dance punta. Like it's just like, which is not true. Not everyone does it, but like, we just like, if you don't dance it, you're not catracho. Even though you're from Honduras...it's a dance we have, it's a traditional dance in Honduras brought by African descents. So, the dance

come from Africa in the African slaves that were settled in Honduras, brought the, like the dance and then you get this adopted as, so like a national dance kind of.

Throughout the interview, when talking about Honduras and Hondurans, Estella uses “we,” “us,” and “our” to clearly express how she understands her identity, as Honduran. Estella not only understands her cultural artifacts such as food, slang, and dance but she also understands the origins of her people and their customs which shows a deeper connection with her background. Many other informants expressed a similar level of understanding of their cultural backgrounds and many of them credited their mothers with upholding and replicating their culture. For example, Dunya, a Pakistani woman who immigrated to the United States in her 20s, explained:

because of my mom, I'm very connected... Yeah and hanging out with her, going to all the Pakistani stores with her and the ethnic food stores with her and the Pakistani restaurants with her and you know, yeah. Dealing with the cousins and, you know, like things that are connected to my mothers.

Many of the informants also discussed that speaking with their mothers helps them keep up with their native tongue, their mothers' traditional dishes keep their cultural cuisine alive, and their mothers often embody many of the cultural values of their countries of origin.

Hybridity and Enoughness

One of my major findings for this research is that immigrants have a great deal of agency in the realm of identity construction because they have access to more than one culture in which to ground their beliefs and practices and find belonging. However, to reach “belonging,” they must adopt “enough” of their new homes and maintain “enough” of their heritage in order to claim both. In this case, the measure of “enough” is not solely based on an immigrant's feelings

of connection to a particular culture or country as we've explored above. "Enoughness" requires external validation from communities the immigrants want to claim.

In the context of the US, that validation could be represented by gaining legal recognition of "belonging" through a green card or certificate of citizenship. Many of my informants specifically named their passports as an external identifier of their Americanness which is recognized and respected by both natives and other foreigners. There are many ways in which immigrants continue to feel validated in their connection to their homeland. Many informants mentioned their ability to speak their mother tongue as a primary method of legitimizing their claim to their native countrymen. Emmanuel states confidently that despite his residence in the U.S., his Nigerian countrymen will always continue to "claim" him grounded in his ability to translate between Yoruba and English. Now, you might be asking yourself: What is the significance of immigrants adopting and disregarding certain things and feeling validated in those choices?

When immigrants choose to nurture their connection to both cultures and receive recognition of belonging from both communities, they have reached this state of "enoughness." "Enoughness" opens the door to hybridity, which is the well-established concept that immigrants are neither their country of origin nor 'American' but rather a mixture of the two. Hybridity is the manifestation of "enoughness" in that once an immigrant can carry both cultural identities, they can easily move through them.

One of my informants, Ana, explains how she compares her hybrid French and American identities to skin or a garment to wear when she travels back and forth between the countries: "I take my old French skin and put it on and pretty soon, uh, the states is really away and it's the same thing when I come back."

“Enoughness” is similar to a tool used to measure how close someone is to hybridity. Ana, and other informants talk about reaching a kind of cultural literacy, where they can understand fully the perspectives of each culture and move between them. Cultural literacy was more explicitly spoken of by my older informants who also immigrated in their early adulthood. Ana, for example, immigrated here in her early 20s, visits France fairly frequently but also has American citizenship. She directly speaks to how she understands her identity:

I think at this point I do not feel French or American, but both, and I think I have the, the distance needed to evaluate, oh, this is what being American is like, oh, this is what French is like...so I'm kind of somewhere in the middle.

Ana is connected to different aspects of both French and American culture, however, she is not fully either and she has come to recognize that. Not all of my informants reached “enoughness” which I suspect may be due to the circumstances around their premigration; of those who reached “enoughness” immigration felt voluntary. Of those who reach “enoughness” they recognize their hybrid ability and named it as a vital component of their identity.

Conclusion

The original aim of this paper was to uncover the immigrant identity formation process. What I have found of this process is that there are mechanisms of upholding and adopting aspects of each culture: the culture left behind, and the culture migrated to. Because all cultures are made up of beliefs, behaviors, artifacts, and rituals, these are the categories from which immigrants could relinquish, uphold, or adopt into their identity from each culture. This research, however, went a step further and discovered that the identity formation process occurs in the hope of reaching the liminal destination of “enoughness.” “Enoughness,” unlike any other

liminal spaces, is the ideal destination for first generation immigrants because they are able to reach a state of acceptance and belonging from the two cultures they feel at home in.

“Enoughness” contributes to the Anthropological/Sociological understanding of hybridity because it establishes hybridity as the manifestation of a successful arrival at “enoughness.”

With more time I would have liked to explore further into the immigrant identity formation process by investigating the ideal state of second and third generation immigrants. The conversation around immigrants and immigration is a heated one, both in the US and around the world. Immigration is not a new issue, however, in this time of war and mass displacement, immigration has become a divisive issue. Many natives of countries that receive a large percentage of immigrants feel a sense of distrust towards these migrants due to a lack of demonstrated loyalty to their new country (Vertovec, 2011:244). My concept of “enoughness,” I argue here, mediates that concern by demonstrating that immigrants find ways to incorporate their host country into their own identities and come to view their new homes as part of themselves.

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