

MIGRATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

Steward Harrison Oppong

Polish Academy of Sciences, Graduate School for Social Research,
Warsaw, POLAND.

stewardhan@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The write-up explores the relationship between migration and reconstruction of identity. Available data from stylized facts and empirical literatures suggest that migration seems to have an influence on the reconstruction of the identity. The reconstruction of migrant's identity may be influenced by economic, political, educational, and demographic as well as policy formulations and implementation from host communities as it pertains to migration and integration of migrants. The critical issues involved in identity reconstruction are the role of group leadership, representation and the size of the ethnic groups in question. The perception of migrant communities as threats to the identity of the host communities and by extension a threat to internal and national security poses a huge challenge for the reconstruction of identity. One probable ways of resolving the conflicting signals and messages may lie in constant dialogue and mutual give and take between the migrant and host communities.

Keywords: Migration, Identity reconstruction, ethnicity, residence, resettlement

INTRODUCTION

Migration has been an important and controversial topic in the field of social sciences and beyond. Migration matters have become the focus of attention in both domestic and international politics attracting the attention of governments, governmental agencies, as well as international organizations. Migration perhaps is seen by most people in the host countries as presenting threats to their national security, internal gregariousness and international stability. The emergence and rise of right-wing and anti-immigrant political parties in the West tends to portray the tension that surrounds the issues relating to migration (Stivachtis, 2008).

The concepts of migration and security are partly subjective notions. It seems that the Comprehensive Security Framework of the Copenhagen School provides the main suitable epistemological approach to exploration of the correlation between the two. The application of this epistemological framework is again augmented by the subjective nature of the notion of the identity (Stivachtis, 2008; Buzan 1991a; Buzan and Waever 1998; Waever et al 1993).

The Comprehensive Security approach is essentially anchored on the Structural Realist framework of the English School of International Relations (Buzan et al, 1993) which provides the link between the 'objective' approaches of Realism and Neorealism and the 'subjective' descriptions of Social Constructivism and Postmodernism. Structural Realism of the English School opines that the 'the logic of anarchy' functions in divergent ways at divergent levels of analysis and in divergent security divisions. On the other hand, the Comprehensive Security framework of the Copenhagen School includes the structural approach of Nazli Choucri in which the security configurations incorporates military security, regime security, and structural security (Choucri, 2002).

This above framework clearly shows the linkage between the questions of security, migration and reconstruction of identity. All the remaining parts of the write-up will be approached as follows: the concepts of migration and reconstruction of identity, brief background information on migration encouraging factors, relevant theories and literature review and migration and reconstruction of identity and conclusion.

The Concepts of Migration and Reconstruction of Identity

Lee (1966) notes that migration can be defined in broad term as lasting or semi-lasting change of residence. This definition does not distinguish between internal or external migration, voluntary or involuntary nature of it, nor placed any restriction on the distance involved. But, it has be noted that every act of migration deals with an origin, a destination, and set of intervening problems associated with efforts to migrate from one area to the other.

Migration can also be viewed differently as the displacement of an individual who departs his/her birth or residence for a different location. Migration can take the form of internal relocation or international relocation. Essentially speaking, migration in most cases is internal, with migrants shifting to a different place of residence within the same country or region. The migrant often move from the rural area to urban area in search of better standard of living or any other goals that motivate the change of location. In relative terms, international migrations are less common compared with internal migrations with only 3% of humans residing in a country other than the country of origin. For the country of origin, migrants are referred to as emigrants, while the host country referred migrants as immigrants (La Cité des Sciences et de l'industrie).

Robinson (2007) stresses that the process of identity reconstruction essentially involves a subtle balancing act of deep rooted ethnic values, cultures, modes of operating etc with often new and in most cases different norms, cultures and interests of the host country where the migrant's resettlement takes place. The process of identity reconstruction is neither straightforward nor essentially successful, especially in cases where ethnic factors came into the calculus of decision making or perhaps threatened directly or indirectly or even perceived to have been threatened. The critical issues involved in identity reconstruction are the role of group leadership, representation and the size of the ethnic groups in question.

Migration of individuals from one place to the other carries with it the chances of identity reconstruction. The degree of identity reconstruction that may be involved may well depend on the kind of migration, the nature of migration (for instance, voluntary or involuntary) and degree of tolerance between the co-existing groups emanating from migration etc.

Brief Background Information on Migration Encouraging Factors

A number of factors may have been responsible as motivating impetus for migration to different parts of the globe. These motivating factors may be different depending on the geographical origin and the form of migration chosen by the migrant. Schapendonk and Moppes (2007) note that there are explicit factors from the Northern parts of Africa and explicit factors from the Southern parts of Africa that tends to encourage migration to Europe. To back up their position, they provided an account of motivating factors discovered while staying in Spain, Morocco and Senegal, with particular reference to Senegalese migration trend. One of the major motivating factors is the desire of migrating individuals to improve their standard of living in addition to that of their families. This desire is reinforced by the grandeur image of Europe that is shown in variety of media houses and the wave of westernisation within Africa and some parts of developing world. They quoted Oumar (2007) to have said that catchphrase regarding migration in one African country goes this way "Senegal is misery and Europe is paradise". Potential migrants essentially have often

simplistic view of Europe, in most cases, erroneous, biased and unrealistic. The idea that Europe is associated with economic wealth and social success is often taken out of context by potential migrants and generally, media has either not helped to put context to the issue or essentially is partly responsible for the hype and rosy picture painted about Europe. Perhaps, a complete picture of Europe that includes the information on opportunities, probable problems and even the extent of poverty may assist potential migrants make informed decision on the choice to migration.

Migration is also fuelled via variety of advertisements that come from different companies that strive to gain from the global migration flows. Ros et al (2007) note that commercialization of international migration is taking root, in which private individuals motivated solely by profit have transformed into the new champions of migration.

In resume, other motivating factors can be outlined thus: the existence of settled migrants relations in Europe and the networks that are created between the resettled migrants and potential migrants tend to encourage individuals to migrate abroad; religious communities and religious leaders in developing countries can positively or negatively influence migration decisions of potential migrants and migration decision is gradually shifting from being mainly collective, family, households etc to partly individual migrant choice (Schapendonk and Moppes, 2007).

RELEVANT THEORIES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Robinson (2007) examines some of the crucial factors in the process of identity reconstruction with reference to forced displaced groups and the role of this process in helping to shape the integration of Tibetan refugees in India, Nepal and Switzerland. He finds that models of India and Nepal represented typical instances of mostly successful identity reconstruction and resettlement or/and integration and the approach adopted by Switzerland in relative terms was less fruitful.

He also opines that displaced groups in most cases oppose the acceptance of foreign values, cultures, history, language, modes of operating and living in place of their own formed ways of life, culture, language etc. Essentially, displaced ethnic groups face the prospects of re-forming their identity anchored on modern socio-economic consciousness and way of life. It has to be noted that the experience of forced displacement and the reconstruction of ethnicity is based in a communal consciousness and gregariousness. This explains why displaced ethnic nations are profoundly historical while at the same being compelled or partly compelled to embrace modernity. The case could be made that the critical factors in the process of harmonizing the historical and the modern hinge on the influence of group leadership, representation, the size of the ethnic groups and the environment of the community coupled with the nature of government where resettlement occurs. The fundamental ingredient in the process of balancing the historical and the modern way of living deals with formation of narratives by the leaders, educators and perhaps, government in exile if it applies, which helps to maintain identity. The thrust of the formation of narratives hinges on the refugees' link to homeland if it applies in the case in question. This is a clear case of double process of de-territorialisation (displacement) of refugees from entry to their homeland and re-territorialisation (resettlement) through the development of awareness of new environment and way of life among refugees.

Mirsky (1991) notes that human beings have traditionally migrated from one part of the globe to the other, sometimes, across the globe in search of better economic opportunities, favourable political climates and educational empowerment of themselves and their loved ones. These voluntary changes in socio-economic environments are no doubt challenging and

sometimes stressful as a result of abrupt change in deep rooted identity formed over years (Norberg-Schultz, 1977).

It seems that a number of migrants suffer from attachment related problems once resettled in a new environment. This attachment may be the product of strong bond between some of the migrants and the society they left behind and challenges posed by de-attachment to former society in order to embrace the new modes of living and operating in the resettled society. The use attachment paradigm from a life span perspective is gaining currency as tool for visualizing likely effects of migration and identity reconstruction.

The interest in the attachment model from a life span perspective has led to use of attachment theory to explain the late adolescent-parent relationships during the period of separation from home transition and the period of student years of study (Narchal, 2007; Ainsworth, 1989; Collins and Reed, 1990). All the same, Masten and Coatsworth (1989) stipulate that having positive linkages with the peers, family, and adults is strongly correlated to ability to adjust to life stressors.

Speaking from ethological theory perspective, attachment is visualized as a lasting and affective connection that encourages independence where the attachment party offers a guaranteed base and support that transforms the individual into a master of his/her environment and the development of emotional stability (Bowlby, 1969). Initial attachment experiences contribute to the formation of self via internalization thereby affecting the development of the self and expectation from others, which in turn influences the formation of internal workings notions of self as worthy of love or not and of others as worth trusting or not.

This theory essentially suggests that individuals with insecure attachment in most cases display inadequate self-confidence and expression of trust in others. The opposite holds for individuals that were inculcated with secure attachment. The extreme of these two cases may be bad for the individual involved and the society in general. Therefore, migrant's with secure attachment and the one without secure attachment may adapt differently to their host communities.

Lee (1966) quoting Ravenstein (1889) summarizes the laws of migration as follows:

1. Migration and distance: "the great body of our migrants only proceed a short distance and migrants elaborated in a certain centre of absorption will ... grow less" (I pp. 198-99), b. Migrants that engage in long distance shift prefer to go to one of the centres of commerce and industry
2. Migration by stages: this form of migration is associated with displacement of ethnic group or population, which leads to 'currents of migration,' being attracted to great centres of commerce and industry which accommodate the migrants.
3. The occupants of the country that is immediately adjacent to a town of rapid growth migrant to the area in great numbers, the lacunae created by their departure are consequently filled up by migrants from more rural areas, "until the attractive force of one our rapidly growing cities makes it influence felt, step by step, to the remote corner of the kingdom (I, p. 199). b. "the process of dispersion is the inverse of that of absorption and exhibits similar features" (I. P. 199).
4. Streams and counter-stream" Each current of migration produces a compensating counter-current" (I.p.199) etc.

Finally, Ravenstein laws of migration have been influential in the study of migration, the encouraging factors that motivate migration and related issues and some of his propositions

seem to withstand the test of time. The above submissions in the literature clearly show that migration can be visualized from variety of perspectives and there exists an extensive array of materials in the field of migration and related concepts.

Migration and Reconstruction of Identity

To start with, individuals seldom discuss the topic connected with identity in everyday life. But, ethnic identity is strongly correlated with the exchange of biographies, homemade panacea and recipes, the preservation of family history archives and genealogy projects. For instance, a good number of Chinese opt to contribute to clan associations, bequeath their networks to younger generation, participate in community and social activities and heed calls for help from the poor or the unfortunate in the community (Yuen, 2010).

However, the driving forces of reconstruction of identities can be visualized from the political, economic and social forces in host countries. Commenting on reconstruction of identity of Chinese residing in Canada, Yuen (2010) observes that Canada have an influence in Chinese Canadians' choice of residency and community, even, this influence extends to migrants country of origin. On a related development, many of the wage earners in astronaut families from Hong Kong in the early 1980s and 1997 confronted the dilemma of choice over how often they should pay visit to their wives and children in Hong Kong in view of their busy schedules emanated from work commitments. Essentially, prosperous economy coupled with thriving environment for business, entrepreneurship and attractive wages for job seekers were powerful magnetic attractions. On the contrary, a favourable tax system in Hong relative to Canada and improvements in economic standing of Hong Kong had opposite effect on migration, in that, thousands of economically active and productive immigrants moved back to Hong Kong in search of better economic conditions while they left their families in Canada. On the other hand, in the next two years after many active Hong Kong immigrants departed, many Taiwanese families and emigrants from mainland China in the 21st century began to joint 'astronauts' essentially due to the similar motive to better their economic well being in a prosperous economy, with enforceable of property and contract rights, and opportunities to establish numerous networks. It may be argued that their ultimate choice of place to reside can partly be explained by how 'Canadian' they perceive themselves to be (Yuen, 2010).

Commenting further he noted that factors such as age, race, educational attainment and social status play important role in defining one's identity. Younger generations who spend their lives or substantial part of their childhood and teenage years in Canada tend to portray different identities relative to their parents and grandparents. For instance, in 2008, photos of one young Chinese Canadian pop-singer and several female pop-stars from Hong-Kong showing explicit sex acts hit in YouTube, Hong Kong including Canadian television channels. Many young Chinese viewed the photos as unfortunate, though, they regarded the stars as youth icons. As a consequent, video games, female celebrities and musicians seem to lead web searches of the young with reference to search engines such as Dogpile and Metacrawler. On the other hand, older generations of Chinese are less patient and embracing and were perturbed that young generation would openly embrace these explicit sex acts. This generational lacuna gives rise to tensions where divergent images of family and community take priority over the transitory nature of fame and chance of acquisition of wealth.

Narchal (2007) finds that attachment experiences in early childhood help to shape the development of mental representations of the self and others. Migration tends to introduce significant change through disruption of attachment patterns shaped during the developmental process with their families and relevant parties. Essentially, plasticity aids individual's adaptation to new environments, these differences introduce great stress on individuals and

thus, may help us explain migrant's responsiveness or non-responsiveness to reconstruction of identity emanating from migration and resettlement in a new environment.

Available information from the above literature suggests that migration seems to have an influence on the reconstruction of the identity of the migrants. This adjustment can take the form of economic, political, educational, demographical factors and even, the policy of host government as it pertains to migration. Different generation of migrants tend to respond differently to identity reconstruction emanating from migration.

CONCLUSION

The likely correlation between migration and reconstruction of identity brings together two rather subjective and complicated issues. It takes a long time for identity reconstruction to take place relative to the time it takes to migrate from one location to the other. Again, there is no guarantee that conscious, unconscious or even well intended reconstruction and by extension integration of migrants would be successful. As noted earlier reconstruction of identity may be partly successful or unsuccessful depending on the nature of migrants, the place of settlement, the nature of interaction of cultures, the degree of ethnicity attachments prevalent between the migrants and the host communities, feeling of sense of belonging or otherwise in the resettled environment and the generation of migrants involved in identity reconstruction.

In view of the above submissions, one may argue that successful reconstruction of identity stands a chance of succeeding where the migrant communities and host communities extends a hand of fellowship to one another, establish conflict resolution mechanisms, engage in constant dialogues on burning issues, and the adoption of gradual process of reconstruction of identity of migrant communities and by extension integration of migrants into the host communities.

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