BOGGED DOWN IN THE PAST

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Abstract

Grounded on almost eight months of insider's observations research data suggest, that many immigrants, mainly because of their limited communications with natives and without proper government assistance, are unable to break out from the pursuing past and instead, they are joining existent or forming their networks. It is also the case, that very often, those immigrants' communities, live their own lives which, in many respects, differ from the life of the host country. Findings allow the author to make a bold assumption about the harmful role of Russian-speaking communities on processes of integration of immigrants into the host society. Those communities not only do not contribute to the restructuring of behavioral and thinking patterns of immigrants but, support the opposite. The 'Russian' church, for example, while being a strong unifying factor for Russian-speakers abroad, instead of using its authority to help integration, is the first to resist and to promote the foreign to host country mode of life and, is not interested in changing its status quo. To ensure better integration and assimilation of immigrants into host societies, the author suggests, that the governments must be more proactive in organizing lives of those foreign speaking communities and diasporas whereas today, all this is left to chance.

Keywords

Assimilation, Australia, Immigration, Immigrants, Integration, Migrants, Russian-Speaking Diaspora

1. Introduction

The article aims to contribute to a better understanding lives of immigrants and migrants, written in response to one of the most pressing questions on the agenda of many public administration offices around the world: "What could be done for better integration and assimilation of immigrants into hosting communities?" The insider's look into lives of Russian-speaking communities especially crucial in light of the fact, that processes of adaptation and assimilation of Russian immigrants, according to Ryazantsev (2015, p. 158) remained poorly understood.

On the contrary to some well-known theories of immigrant integration, the author inclined to look at processes of integration and assimilation, the situation when critical futures of members of immigrant communities and host societies come to the point of resembling each other, differently. Distinctly, both defined as an extent of self-determination, to which immigrants identify themselves as being a part of a society of the host country. Then, similarly to Schunck (2014) and Brown and Bean (2006), the author uses both terms interchangeably. It believed, that such a new approach with a particular focus on individuals rather than on external factors such as time as per Classic Assimilation, economic mobility as per Racial/Ethnic Disadvantage, or structural barriers as per Segmented Assimilation models will allow finding new ways of solving the problem of assimilation.

In this regard, the Russian-speaking diaspora and communities, particularly prayer houses, seen by the author as obstacles which are holding back (bogging in the past) and not allowing for more complete and rapid development of senses and degree of self-determination of the individuals. As so, "among the factors influencing upon the process of social and psychological adaptation, religion is of the special importance" (Gabdrafikov, Khusnutdinova, Karabulatova, & Vildanov, 2015, p. 213).

2. Narrative

During 2015-2016, while the researcher was living and working in the Brisbane area of Queensland, Australia, by sheer luck, and thanks to his Australian friend of Soviet ancestry, the researcher had an opportunity firstly to meet, and then, practically to become one's own, or in other words, an insider to a few Russian-speaking communities in the area. For about eight months, the researcher stayed in his friend's house and was an active participant in the social life of those communities (worships, picnics, dinners, weekend schools, concerts, cultural events,

social gathering, etc.), whose members, in no small extent, belong to various religious lines of the Russian and Protestant Churches. It should be noted, that Russian prayer houses, where you can meet the most of Russian-speakers engaged in a collective action simultaneously, and which serve unifying and binding functions, are perfect venues to monitor collective behavior. Unwilling to miss such lucky circumstances, researcher started to collect qualitative data which formed the basis for ethnographic research titled: "Perceptions of Russian-Speaking Immigrants Towards the Host Country: Case Study of Australia." For the study, the researcher applied term immigrants to all those (including migrants, immigrants, and refugees) who, regardless of motivating reasons, decided to change the affiliation and country of residence and intend, in one way or another way, to remain and build their future with Australia. However, because the research topic implies some limitations, much has been left as if behind the scene; therefore, this article is intended to clarify what was not covered in the aforementioned study. Particularly, special attention needs to be given to what the researcher called 'snared by own idols and demons' or 'bogged down in the past,' the pattern of behavior peculiar for most Russian-speakers with whom researcher communicated or observed. Research data suggest that such a behavioral pattern is one of, if not the main, obstacles to the integration of immigrants into the host society. In short, it is kind of conduct, which in many ways resembles the time loop from famous *Groundhog Day* by Harold Ramis. It also represents the trap, from which, contrary to the main character Phil, many immigrants cannot escape. Being unable to re-examine their new reality, re-set priorities, and deal with great idols and demons from past on their own, lacking any assistance from host communities, most immigrants are doomed to be locked in those time loops indefinitely. Those loops, filled with lifestyles, practices, believes, images of a deity and other malevolent beings from 'previous' lives, nurtured and encouraged by the very same communities and fed on the common sense of belonging to the culture of home countries. It often results in something, that Haritatos and Benet-Martinez (2002) called "identity confusion, dual expectations, and value clashes." Similarly, Al-Matrafi (2017, p. 436) calls this "a 'double consciousness,' that results in the feeling of being 'out of place.'" It would be not a problem if evil demons, time to time winning in the eternal battles of good and evil, not breaking out and protesting against everything alien, unacceptable by their own culture and rejected by remnants of the past. At the same time, they are also seeking justice for all kinds of humiliation and compromises that immigrants went through for the sake of a 'happy present' as well as frustration from an impossibility to find themselves in their new lives. And then, in the worst-

case scenarios, we are witnessing the growth of extremism, intolerance, hostility, isolation, segregation whereas, in all other manifestations, haunting past serves as a serious obstacle to further integration of immigrants into the host country society.

Paraphrasing Matthew 4:9 and Timothy 4:1 from *The New Testament* of The Holy Bible (2008), the situation recalls one where the idols desire to be worshiped and demons teach the false doctrines, and as such, those who worship false idols are, wittingly or unwittingly, pledging their allegiance to the evil spirits. In this regard, it would be necessary to ask the question: "How to rid of the mighty influence of evil spirits, leave them in the past, and free up the minds for the present?"

Adopting the well-known phrase 'no person-no problem' quoted in Rybakov (1988), the best way to deal with this issue would be to prevent it from happening in the first place, it means, closing or significantly reducing immigration programs, which most significant component, according to Markus (2014), is the skilled and family reunion migration. While it makes sense to invite some bright talents or highly qualified professionals instead of investing time and money into preparing its specialists, it does not sound compelling to give up its own skilled trades vacancies to foreigners. The desire to solve employment issues quickly and at the expense of skilled workers from abroad only indicates the inability of the state to develop its competent forces as well as to deal effectively with related social problems. It sounds particularly acute in lights of the fact that, as of July 2017, some 730,600 Australians were seeking full- or part-time employment (Husna, 2017). After all, how long does it take to prepare a skilled workforce, a month, months or a year?

On the other hand: "What are the odds that a foreign tradesperson naturalizes faster than that?" Under the current immigration practices, not only a year but, an average four to six years period needed for immigrants to become Australians (to hold an Australian passport), obviously is not sufficient to change, what Carpenter and Dunung (2012, p. 103) called "the collective programming of our minds from birth." In this way, while dealing with one problem, the state often creates another. And, since it is already there, the government needs to deal with it by focusing related policies and effort on better integration of immigrants into the host society, aiming to turn immigrants into full-fledged citizens. Ideally, it should also provide them with some assistance and support needful to free them from their haunting past. And, it is not only about often ineffective short-term language, and cultural awareness courses offered right now but, it is a prolonged and painstaking work on remaking the human material, turning it from an

estranged workforce into participating human capital. This task seems to be even more challenging when talking about asylum seekers and refugees. While skilled immigration, by default, implies some active participation of newcomers in economic activities of the host country, there is insufficient evidence of the same intentions from these two categories of immigrants. Following a recommendation by Scott and George (2007, 539), who placed family adjustments on the top list of causes for expatriates' foreign assignment failure, the same level of assistance and support also need to be given to all family members of immigrants in the country, especially to those who are applying for citizenship. The special focus needs to be placed on the development of core competencies critical for expatriates' success abroad such as adaptability, cultural sensitivity, team building, and maturity (Scott and George, 2007). Whereas, right now, the whole attention of immigration initiatives placed on the technical skills identified by Scott and George only as augmented skills.

In reality, immigration politics seems to ignore the voice of reason and supports the opposite, inviting people that are not capable of renouncing their past and leaving them to cope with challenges on their own after admitting them to the country. Research data suggest that all immigrants in their relation to the host community could be conditionally divided into three distinct groups: participants, avoiders, and sisypheans. While the former is the least numerous (about 15 - 20% of the total), the second and third constitute an overwhelming majority. The first group is comprised of the highly skilled professionals with excellent or close to it level of English proficiency, who are involved in various kinds of intellectual activities, a combination, that significantly contributes to further self and professional development and growth. Members of another two groups, in their majority are skilled trades workers, construction and service workers, laborers, housekeepers, some professionals, and others, including family members from the first group. The English proficiency and education levels of those are very different and very often will remain so for a long. Finding themselves doing what they did the best back to their home countries, skilled workers do not feel any urge or need for further changes (that's why the researcher called them avoiders). Their jobs, often not dependent on language proficiency, along with limited self-contained communication circles consisting mostly of their kind, contribute to the development of further resistance to changes.

Surprisingly, even those higher degree-holders within the last two categories, due to language difficulties and due to Australian protective work and educational practices, sooner or later, forced to change the colors of their collars. This fact, in turn, does not encourage their

further professional self-development and even dulls the original feelings of self-worth, self-confidence, and self-esteem related to their former careers and qualifications back to their home countries. Whereas protective means, that while officially Australia recognizes foreign degrees and skill, in reality, foreign diplomas are often listed behind some local, lower level certificates and qualifications. In practice, the foreign degree-holders need to forget years of education and given no option but, to waste their time either in lower qualified jobs or to start everything from scratch which, in a way, resembles a Sisyphean task. Both situations do not contribute to maintaining a sense of urgency for a change (which in our case is integration into society), and without it, according to D. S. Cohen and Kotter (2012), the change is not possible. And here, we understand the 'change' not only from the point of professional development but also in a much broader sense of transformational changes and personal development of the individuals.

Following Marx (1859) logic, that social status determines the men consciousness, differences in English proficiency along with professional and class affiliations, job opportunities as well as an educational background of immigrants, predetermine their communication circles and, at the same time, are the sources of differentiation and integration into Australian society. In this way, immigrants from the first group, participants, who have more opportunities to communicate with natives, also being accepted and in demand, aiming for success, more likely willing to go further thus, to integrate. On the contrary, avoiders, and sisypheans, deprived of opportunities, due to lack of or inability to communicate with natives, sometimes because of their immigration immaturity, are forced to form their Russian-speaking communication circles, multiplying existing and defaming new communities of Russian-speaking diaspora, and thus limiting their chances to integrate into the host society. This observation has its confirmation in the work of Munck (2005, p. 110) who stated that "most migrant workers are excluded from the mainstream of society, marginalized in low-paying, insecure work." Detached communities continue to live the lives brought from abroad, celebrate their holidays, pray to own gods, nurture their ideas, which all together, supports a state of being stuck in the past. According to R. Cohen (2008, p. 26), those communities are emerging from a "growing sense of ethnic group consciousness in different countries, a consciousness that is sustained by, amongst other things, a sense of distinctiveness, common theory, and belief in a common fate." It manifests in about everything, starting from the organization of the daily lives of immigrants, relationships within the Russian-speaking diaspora and ending with the way of thinking. It is especially noticeable amongst the mature and older age generations of the first-wave immigrants, especially those who

came to the country under the family reunion programs. Understanding their limits in a new society, they become, as it were, the custodians of the traditions and foundations of those countries from which they arrived and in every possible way keep clinging to the past. In a way, they are the cornerstones upon which diaspora and community life are based. Moreover, being the guardians of foreign (to the host country) culture and traditions, they are transmitting this knowledge back to their families.

A good example could be the case of one of the observed immigrants. Even though his excellent Australian education and prestigious job, which both imply close communication with the native population, forced him to abandon the most from his former life, his immersion in the life of Russian-speaking diaspora and influence from Russian-speaking relatives prevented him from escaping the vicious power of the past and pernicious genetic memories intrinsic to former generations. During eight months of observations, the researcher never seen him communicated with native Australians outside the job. At home, on vacation, everywhere the Russian language and the Russian-speaking diaspora. Following the logic of linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf, who in Carpenter and Dunung (2011: 56) suggested that, "the way of life we were raised in - will affect our approach to every decision" and then, that, "we dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages," one can safely deduce, that all of this will also affect the children, significantly reducing the chances of successful integration for subsequent generations. This well corresponds with findings of Palakshappa's study on the assimilation of White Russians in Dandenong. Referring to children of the second-wave immigrants Palakshappa (1972) concluded, that despite the fact of having all needed to participate fully in the life of the host society, the Russian identity seems to be preventing them from doing so.

Along with other factors responsible for such behavior, Zander (2004, p. 51) suggests immigrants' perceptions, particularly, 'perception of prejudice of their Australian peers.' Analysis of collected during eight months of observations data, allows the researcher to conclude, that these, very same immigrants' communities, are amongst the most significant obstacles to processes of integration and assimilation. Cultivated and supported by diaspora and particularly by prayer houses culture of countries from which immigrants arrived, norms of conduct based on the different values, often alien to the host country perceptions of what is right or wrong, fidelity to native idols and ideas, all this predetermines the behavior of immigrants. These thoughts quite well correspond with Mol (1976) Identity theory, that sees religion as a mechanism of sacralization of identity whereas, the sacred is understood not as faithfulness to

religious principles but, sacred to individual values of their daily lives. On the other hand, the situation is aggravated by the fact, that being to some extent self-sufficient regarding communication and socialization, these communities do not feel the need to change anything which could spoil this idyll.

After all, any movement towards integration would mean a shift away from the community, a reduction in the number of its members, parishioners, and ultimately, a shrinkage of the community's account (monetary or human). According to the researcher's observation, any departure of a parishioner from one church to another, which also meant switching communication circles, was extremely undesirable. Even though the deserters fell out from the progressive communication circles of the former community, their names for a long were on hearing, the act itself, if not directly condemned, was not supported and not encouraged. An illustration to this could be the case of one immigrant (in the second generation) who, being in a state of spiritual search, managed to switch several different churches and who, at the same time, communicate with members of a few different communities. After all, disappointed, frustrated, and tired of internal politics amongst community members, utterly disillusioned with Russian church services, at the end, the observant became a regular parishioner of the Australian Protestant Church, whereas, the rest of his Russian-speaking family, including children, remained adherents of one of the Russian religious sects in Brisbane. According to this observant, none of the Russian-speaking prayer houses, including communities, not only did give him anything new but, on the contrary, was trying to drag him into the swamp of the past. For the sake of justice, it should also be noted, that although the native Australians (family members) from time to time are getting in touch with Russian-speaking communities, they do not affect the current state of things and, as a rule, remain loyal to their communication circles made of native Australians. Thereby, for many immigrants, once encountered welcoming atmosphere and comfort of communications within Russian-speaking communities, it is effortless to forget the initial reasons of why they moved to another country and, perhaps, assumed obligations to become a full-fledged resident of their new home. Fortunately for them, the situation and others, in every possible way conduce and support this feeling and, at the same time, oppose the integration.

3. Discussion

It should be noted, that everything described above applies only to a limited observed circle of Russian-speaking immigrants living in the vicinity of Brisbane. It also could be the case, that everything described is inherent to just this small part of the Russian-speaking diaspora in Australia and has no relation to other communities.

The author did not intend to criticize or cause any criticism in the direction of how Russian-speaking migrants settle their lives in Australia, but he considered it his duty to share the research data with wide publicity. This, basically, explains the fact of the removal of these observations into a separate article from the original research titled: "Perceptions of Russian-Speaking Immigrants Towards the Host Country: Case Study of Australia."

One of the main conclusions of this study is that the immigrant communities, which are grouped and formed around Russian-speaking churches not only do not contribute but even inhibit the processes of assimilation and integration. It happened because of the presence of what R. Cohen (2008, p. 16) called 'diasporic consciousness,' that is fed on a strong connection with the former lives of immigrants and on their current effort of creating a 'national homeland' tor what Karabulatova and Akhmetova (2015, p. 205) called "islands" of Russian culture" as an alternative to a stressful attempt of assimilation. Such situation possible because of the fundamental differences between the ultimate goal of assimilation and the private interests of those prayer houses, whose primary objective is the preservation of parishes and status quo. On the other hand, it is also spurred on by the indifference of the state, which has almost excluded itself from the processes of integration of new citizens which is also confirmed by observations as well as by numerous hard facts. The opposing role of religious organizations on integration processes was mentioned in the recent research dedicated to studying factors of social adaptation of migrant workers in Russia by Gabdrafikov et al. (2015). On analogy with the current study, the scholars concluded, that assimilation is more likely to be successful when various associations of citizens work in close cooperation with local public authorities, which is not happening in the case of Russian prayer houses described here. According to Gabdrafikov et al., despite its popularity among immigrants, not religious organizations but the national cultural centers, the form of ethnic self-organization of citizens that operate jointly with the state, are the most effective facilitators of integration.

And finally, it is necessary to say a few words about how the findings correlate with the premises of the main theories of immigrant integration. Similarly to the New Assimilation

Theory by Alba and Nee (2003), the author comes to a very same conclusion, that some institutions may slow down assimilation; in our case, those are the Russian-speaking communities described above. In turn, such deceleration up to the complete blocking, according to the Ethnic Disadvantage Model, is caused by cultivation in some immigrant groups of ethnic identity and consciousness, which is 'bogging down in the past' as per current research. Consequently, the Segmented Assimilation Model identify these as cultural factors that, along with contextual and structural, separate unsuccessful assimilation from successful. Thus, the data of this study not only do not contradict the most well-known theories of assimilation but, to some extent, complement them. This makes the results of research specifically relevant to the further development of such models.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, if we want immigrants to become an integral part of a stable and cohesive society, the authorities must take these observations into account and try to play a more proactive role in managing lives of foreign speaking communities and diasporas whereas today, all this is left to chance. Moreover, it is all happening under the mottos of preserving cultures and multi-culturalism used by the government to justify its inaction and reluctance to understand, that minorities it needs to maintain should be those native to Australia and not the foreign. Cultural diversity must be seen as a constitutive part of the whole and not as its opposite. In this regard, the prayer houses, which are amongst the most influential influencers of collective behavior and which serve a binding and guiding role on lives of immigrants' communities, the fact often missed or unspoken in the body of social research, could be an excellent place to start from. In its essence, the church should play a unifying rather than dividing role in maintaining the relation of immigrants and the host country. Instead of contributing to the development of the social conflicts by as it was mentioned by Mol (1976: 97), "reinforcing one unit of social organization at the cost of others," religion could help to reconcile those conflicts.

On the other hand, is there a need to create counterparts of those English-speaking churches (read Australian) that already exist? Would it not be wiser to organize a warm reception of immigrants into already existing religious communities, sects, and churches? After all, as per The Holy Bible, Ephesians 4:4-5, there is "one Lord, one faith" thus, could be one church. Would not it satisfy the communication and spiritual needs of newly arrived while, at the same time, will include them in the active social life of natives? Similarly, other Australian societal

organizations, networks, clubs, and communities could also take their proactive stocks in integration and assimilation processes by ubiquitously including immigrants into their activities and social life. In any case, all this should be done with utmost caution, considering already existing realities, simultaneously developing other methods of integration. It will not be superfluous to conduct an in-depth analysis of all processes that are taking place in immigrant communities with the involvement of insiders to shed some more light on the issue. Why insiders? Because, certain things are simply not meant to be spoken out loud, especially to those, in whose hands your destiny is, for instance, immigration authorities. Such research, along with findings presented here may force the governments to, what was suggested by Sassen (1999, p. 25), "a radical re-thinking of how we handle immigration." Such effort, in turn, may help to change the current situation with the integration of immigrants into host societies to a better.

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