
Migration And National Identity

Introduction

Today, 38 percent of people migrating to different locations in the world are families and, 50 percent of them reside in the United States. Migration in the modern age has led to exceptional levels of diversity in different locations across the United States and the world, transforming communities and cultures across the globe. However, immigration has not come without its share of challenges. National identity, especially in the age of economic uncertainty and culture change, has received massive backlash in the wake of political improbability across the planet. Globally, immigration has brought the political, social, and cultural debate about national identity. As a result, various notions have emerged about what it means to be a true country-national. With the advancement in technology and modern methods of traveling, relocating to new regions has become easier than ever before.

Thesis Statement

Although some countries have not expressly defined what their national identity means beyond race and language, political and legal frameworks occur as the major impediment to immigrants who seek to identify themselves with their newfound national residence. In particular, some national identities insist on historical and ancestral elements, but with vast migration trends currently experienced in the world today, defining national identity based on long-standing connections to a country may not be accurate.

Background

In the recent past, there has occurred a passionate debate revolving around migration and national identity. The debate about restrictive and flexible immigration policies has emerged in xenophobic, multicultural, and citizenship-dominated societies. In the United States, the outlining of the migration debate has been framed by three main events. The events include, 1994 save our state initiative in California, the 9/11 terrorist attack, and the passage of the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act" (HR 4437) (Hollifield, 2016). The Save Our State initiative of 1994 in California intended to block migrants from accessing critical services in the state ranging from education to healthcare. Further, native citizens were advised to report anyone suspected of being an illegal migrant. On the other hand, the terrorist attack of September 11th, 2001 shifted the debate from economic and social factors to security concerns. More restrictive immigration policies were introduced to prevent people from migrating into the United States.

National identity became a topic of interest, especially regarding homeland security. The passage of the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act in 2005 contained several controversial issues such as the construction of a Mexican-US border wall to avert illegal migration of Latinos fleeing harsh economic crisis and war (Hollifield, 2016). Although the bill was largely passed in the House of Representatives, the Senate provided a more comprehensive measure that aimed to legalize large populations of immigrants. The

controversial events shaped the debate revolving around migration and national identity. Individuals of a particular nationality were extensively profiled in America as being either terrorists because of the 9/11 attack or associated with drug gangs. Consequently, in the United States, immigration has widely been linked to national identity and criminal acts.

Identity commonly refers to self-definition. Typically, identity is formed through childhood experiences; however, the identity may evolve due to unique occurrences in an individual's life. The feeling of national belonging may arise as a result of a historical connection to a particular country or migration to a new nation that offers better opportunities than the previous nationality (McLaren, 2016). Many people associate a national identity with ancestry and deep connections to a country. Further, McLaren (2016) argues that national identity primarily focuses on citizenship, individual rights, and political connections. Therefore, to become part of the identity, one must participate in the political process of the country. However, some people may not have ancestral connections or ethnic backgrounds of a particular nationality, but loyalty and productiveness to a nation may incorporate migrants to a particular national identity.

Conversely, multicultural policies occur as a significant impediment to the inclusion of migrants to a specific nationality. National policies have extensively limited acceptance of migrating groups that seek to reunite with family or moving for work purposes. Moreover, specific policies have stalled the efforts of migrants to become functional members of a particular political community (McLaren, 2016). In essence, restrictive policies are cited as the key obstacles to migrants compared to factors such as language and culture (Andreouli & Howarth, 2012). Nonetheless, a more significant percentage of nationalities have become welcome to migrating individuals and families who seek better living conditions, or quality working environments.

Position

International migration primarily occurs when people flee from war, seek favorable work opportunities, education, or reuniting with family among other reasons. In 2017, the total number of international migration was 257.7 million moving from one destination to another for varying reasons (Migration Data Portal, 2019). Although individual countries are extremely restrictive and unwelcoming to migrants, throughout history, migration has been an essential part of shaping the cultures and beliefs of nations. In particular, native Americans, for example, African-Americans, Latinos, and American Indians migrated to the country due to diverse reasons but have significantly contributed to the building of essential instruments of the country including culture, cuisine, infrastructure, and even government policies. Therefore, the controversy of discrimination based on national identity and denying migrants access to a country must not exist as migrants are important individuals in shaping the identity of a nation despite their origin. In today's modern environment, laws should foster the integration of migrants into communities especially those affected by war and natural disasters.

Supporting Argument

The United States has a long history of being regarded as a country of opportunities for immigrants. However, American natives have widely expressed concerns that society is not welcoming to foreign nationals. Although many immigrants may not identify with the American nationality, they have mainly contributed to building the nation both today and in history. According to Abramitzky & Boustan (2018), the nature of migrant selection has changed over

the decades. In the past, the selection was mixed, and the basis of being chosen was either positive or negative. In the contemporary world, selection is purely based on skill. Ariely (2011) points out that nationalism is a form of social identity, but the key difference with other forms of social identities is that it can either divide or unite members of a community. Nonetheless, evidence indicates that migration is commonly regarded as a vital component for people who seek to identify themselves to a particular nationality. Patriotism and nationalism come out as the most significant elements of national identity. Conversely, people may still be patriotic to countries they do not have deep connections with provided they are comfortable in their new republic. This phenomenon may shape the national identity of migrants as they can comfortably relate to the culture and social lifestyle of their current residence.

Conclusion

In retrospect, not many nations have a specific definition of their national identity. Therefore, people migrating to particular countries may adopt existing national identities provided the law allows them to assimilate into the society fully. The world has had dramatic changes over the decades and traveling has become a standard feature among populations. As a result, migration from one location to another has become easier, but the challenge still facing many nations regarding immigration and national identity is the policy framework for integrating migrants into their societies. Nevertheless, despite the recent migration trends witnessed globally, the impact migrants have in shaping national identity cannot be ignored.