

**SCTCMG 2021****International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»****SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES OF AMERICAN IMMIGRATION**

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**Abstract**

The United States is a country which is known for its heterogeneous population that comprises different races, religions and regions. Immigrants face certain socio-psychological issues when moving to the United States associated with different culture and living conditions. This paper represents a historical as well as sociological analysis that compares the immigrant life in the middle of the XX century with the present time. On the basis of the performed survey, a list of common socio-cultural and psychological issues of the American immigrants has been comprised. The results of questionnaires show key points of the American melting pot which is brightly outlined in the article “American Dreamer” by Bharati Mukherjee in 1997 but keeps its relevance nowadays. The represented lines of the conducted interviews are used to highlight the main points of misunderstanding that make the US immigrants feel restrained and isolated. The article contains a brief description of the main events that took place in the immigrant life of Bharati Mukherjee. The shared experience of an Indian immigrant is conceptually fulfilled with the views of survey responders. Alongside the way of Mukherjee’s transformation from the position of a detached onlooker to the legal status of a committed immigrant, this paper includes the parts of immigrant stories that are vitally important nowadays.

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## **1. Introduction**

The America's recognition as one of the richest and most influential countries in the world makes residents of other countries leave their homes and fly overseas to build the life they have always strived to obtain.

However, most immigrants face different social, cultural and psychological issues upon arrival. Desiring to become the American citizens, immigrants are expected to prove themselves worthy of the title "American resident". The life story of an Indian immigrant, Bharati Mukherjee, may sound depressing and socially tiring. Yet, it cannot be the yardstick against which any other experience of the U.S. immigration looks similar. It is just one example of coping with socio-psychological difficulties of immigration.

Any immigrant's determination to become a citizen of the U.S. is followed by the obstacles to go through. Standing out among the native Americans, any newcomer may feel his "exotic" origin and irrelevance for this country. The sad identification may be acquired due to a number of external reasons: skin colour, language accent, lack of speech fluency, etc.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The United States of America is singled out among other countries for its unusual history and outstanding capacity to accept everyone within one land. Its wide-spread titles such as "the melting pot" or "the land of opportunity" are recognized by everyone in this world nowadays. Still, it can be difficult for immigrants to feel like they fit in as it is difficult to acquire new culture, learn new language, adapt to the new living conditions.

Immigration remains an integral part of political debate in the United States. Its reform is one of the most controversial issues in the American country today. The controversial legal status adds to the uncertainty that many immigrants feel.

However, new social movements are currently created to defend the rights of the naturalized Americans. The activists of this movement are involved in human rights work and the fight against institutional disparity.

## **3. Research Questions**

The subject under study is the issue of immigration on the territory of the US. A number of questions arouse with the stated topic. The main goal of the paper is to highlight the key aspects of adapting of the American immigrants to the new living conditions.

### **3.1. The observance of the U.S. Constitution by the American people on the U.S. territory**

According to the U.S. Constitution, disagreement based on one's religion, race or social affiliation cannot be observed on the American land. The U.S. Constitutional laws are spread around the whole American land and apply to both the American naturalized citizens and immigrants.

### **3.2. The main obstacles of immigrants to come through on the U.S. territory**

Many immigrants from countries with lower living standards than that in the United States experience the so-called “immigrant complex”. One of its reasons is the language barrier. If a person lacks fluency in their English, they often doubt if they are understood by others properly or not. The ability to communicate effectively determines profoundly the way the person gets settled into this country. Therefore, language barrier is the first obstacle to go through. Another challenge is called the “communication crisis”. When you are in another country, it is difficult to resolve any issues in a foreign language without the support of other fellows around. It is difficult psychologically to start getting along with the citizens of the hosting land. Nevertheless, the solvation of the language barrier problem can benefit immigrants in this case.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The research aims to give a sociological justification of the outlined problem. Obtaining the status of a naturalized U.S. citizen becomes possible with one’s sustainable choice and strong determination.

## **5. Research Methods**

The results presented in this article were collected by means of two major modes – searching for the topic databases and interviewing the naturalized Americans of the current period. The interviewing was carried out by means of the social media services – Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat+. A sociological questionnaire was composed to perform a survey among the U.S. immigrants from Russia, Ukraine, Latin America and China. In total, 152 people were interviewed.

## **6. Findings**

Today, naturalised Americans continue to face problems that psychologically affect their identification in the American society. According to the Pew Research Centre, the public attitude towards immigrants has become more positive since the mid-1990s. A 2018 survey of American adults states that half of them (51%) believe that immigrants are participating in strengthening the United States through their talents and hard work, while the rest (41%) say that immigrants bring more problems than benefits because, “*they (immigrants) take over our jobs, our housing and put additional pressure on the health system*” (Al Jazeera, 2019). Of course, in order to understand the attitude of Americans towards newly arrived foreigners, it is necessary to consider various aspects that influence their opinion, i.e. age, ethnicity and party affiliation.

Bharati Mukherjee (1997), the author of "American Dreamer", shares her life story of immigrating to the United States. Mukherjee’s strength can be observed in her determination to become a citizen of the U.S., despite the obstacles in her way. The author claims that she was brought up in a homogeneous society in which one's mother tongue, skin color, family's welfare and religion was similar to others. She writes that she struggled to reconcile her high ranking status within the Indian caste system with the need to prove herself worthy of being called an American citizen. Evidently, coming to America, immigrants

want to become the true American citizens and experience all of the advantages that being a citizen provides (Lalami, 2017). However, when they try to obtain the American citizenship and be a part of the American culture, they face many social and cultural issues.

“America is called a melting pot of citizens from different backgrounds” (Chakraborty, 2014, p. 201). However, many refugees or seekers of political asylum do not feel very welcomed on the American territory. A major proponent of the “us” versus “them” rhetoric is the former President of the US Donald Trump. His campaign slogan used to be “Make America Great Again” which identified the America’s need to be fixed. One of his first steps in fixing America was attempting to abolish the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program, which is a program that helps illegal immigrants brought to America to be supported in the way that only minors are able to obtain citizenship. Later, he was curious about the identification of illegal immigrants in the US as he wanted to restrain the influx of immigrants. Trump’s speeches could seem sudden and sharp. He welcomed the immigrants from Europe – Norway, Sweden, but was inhospitable to those who came from Asia and Africa (Kirby, 2018). Therefore, to become an American immigrant can be the main target of a self-assured and ambitious person who has his dreams to be realized.

The United States of America is defined in Mukherjee’s (1997) article as a sovereign country. The Indian immigrant develops this point claiming that “the US, like any sovereign nation, has the right to formulate its immigration policies” (para. 6). Still, America’s ideals are embodied in such concepts as liberty, openness, individualism.

While the story of Bharati Mukherjee was told by an Indian U.S. immigrant, the performed sociological survey and interview was carried out among the U.S. immigrants of Western Europe, South America and China. The interview displayed the following list of features that make adapting to the new living conditions more difficult: culture origin, language fluency, speech accent, etc. The listed issues question the immigrants’ abilities for proper thought or discreet expression (Lee, 2009, p. 739). Nevertheless, according to the U.S. Constitution, immigrants should not be expected to cut ties with their origin or culture completely (Alba, 2005).

Hereby, the citing from one interview is given, “*I immigrated to New York where there are a lot of Russian immigrants, so it was easier for me to adjust. However, not being good at English makes people think I am not smart. This is hard, because I know how to express myself in Russian but I am often badly judged because I can’t find the right words to express myself*” (Serene, 28 years of age). Serene’s first arrival in New York happened before her graduation from the Russian university. She came to the USA through a school exchange program in 2011. Like Mukherjee, she also had to leave her family behind, which was one of the scariest and challenging things she had ever done in her life. Her parents were very supportive. They assured Serene that she is mature enough to decide for herself. So, she finally left Russia and tried her chance to fulfill ‘*The American Dream*’ in a better place far away from the family.

Apparently, changing one’s culture is essentially losing one part of who you are. When faced with adversity, while trying to be accepted, the choice for a culture change is always a personal decision. Hereby, another immigrant states, “*When I was a little girl, I used to like watching Hollywood movies, especially those from the USA - "Home Alone", "Matilda", "Mrs. Doubtfire", etc. The adventures observed in those films helped me to form a dream of my own, which was one of the major factors that*

*pushed me to hold on. I left so many things behind - my close family members and friends, my college and university reminiscences, my college goals and perspectives which were set up in Ukraine. I had many dreams of better opportunities that I learned from films about America”* (Rosa, 48 years of age). The responder faced the migration issue which is called the change of socio-cultural environment. Therefore, the responder’s native culture and the new one blend respectfully on a new land. As Keisha N. Blain puts it, “We must think of American culture and nationhood as a constantly re-forming and transmogrifying “we” (Blain, 2020, p. 16). Therefore, the society’s goal is to achieve acculturation that exists through the mutual exchange of cultural elements. This inter-exchange tends to improve the mutual understanding and peaceful acceptance of other countries.

The coming immigrants who hope to obtain the status of naturalized American citizens encounter issues associated with their English language proficiency and education. Apparently, the concept of ‘*the American Dream*’ embodies a number of obstacles to come through which include hard work, good professional rank, social maturity.

The lack of listed aspects results in the situation described as follows, “*Since coming to America, I have learned a lot about the American culture and its people. From the very beginning, I have been experiencing certain resentment of my presence due to my accent and lack of speech rapidness. The hints of incompliance usually sadden me as I am not a thick-skinned person and feel their resentment or disappointment. Knowing my legal status of being a naturalized citizen and how long it took me to get there, I don't think such treatment is fair. My accent and the fact I am still learning English has no basis on my level of education or my personal growth. I feel hurt to observe such ignorance which is expressed towards legal immigrants - people who have proved their meritorious dignity to be called American”* (Daniel, 37 years of age).

However, three main factors can be primarily determined in favour of immigration:

- the increase of highly qualified specialists lightens the burden on the educational system of the United States, reducing the cost of their payment or training;
- the increase of low-skilled labour forces fills the positions of low-wage jobs for the American citizens and reduces the production costs and prices, especially in construction, agriculture and services;
- large-scale training of foreign students at the American universities ensures the expansion of the American political, economic and cultural influence in the countries of emigration.

Immigration is also important in terms of changing the demographic structure of the population. In particular, the American population is aging noticeably, although not as rapidly as in Europe or Russia. It is expected that the share of people over the age of 65, which was 12% in 1990, may rise to 22% by 2030 (Ramirez et al., 2019). As a matter of fact, the attempts to condemn the classification of two types of Americans (those who were born with citizenship and those who gained it later on) seem to be significant for the general understanding of the American culture. Going through an enduring period of naturalization on the territory of the United States, it is often hard to realize all the steps to go through to achieve the goal and finally become the American citizen.

## 7. Conclusion

The American immigrants face many social, cultural and psychological difficulties when trying to adjust to living in the new country. They have to significantly change their life-style in order to comply with the American traditions and living conditions.

Immigrants feel uncertain when there is a language accent and the immigrant's speech lacks the usual American rapidness, or when an immigrant presents their educational incompliance. It seems psychologically difficult to those who have gained the American citizenship and become the naturalized Americans but still remain alien for the U.S. culture.

It can be concluded that any US immigrant has to be ready to face socio-cultural difficulties upon arrival. The issues are observed in several ways – language or accent judgement, social and educational status.

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