In the vicinity of multi-culture: Perspectives on convivial living

Abstract

Multicultural life transcends our static selves into the negotiable, fluid individuals in order to live together "harmoniously", at least that is where the notion of conviviality was built. Besides these trends, certain limitations and contrasts are inevitable, which gives dynamics to the individual's perception, attitude, and behavior outside or inside their homes, certifying the everyday flux of deconstruction, fixedness, opacity, conflicts, and frictions between individuals, all not separately existing but rather interweaved, entangled to the core. Relating to these complexities this article aimed to support a more compound understanding of living with difference and ideas of solidarity between individuals.

Introduction

Demographically, while in previous eras Europe was mostly a region of emigration, this pattern reversed after the Second World War when immigration to Western Europe increased exponentially, becoming a hub for settlement comprising people from previous colonies and from surrounding EU or non-EU countries. In 2004 and 2007 the territory of the European Union was enlarged with the inclusion of several central and eastern European countries, resulting in a notable influx of immigrants from these new Member States to Western Europe (Koops & Martin, 2019). Nowadays in the European Union, about a fifth of households include at least one person who was not born in that country (first-generation migrant) or has at least one foreign-born parent (second-generation migrant) (Agafiței & Ivan, 2016). In connection with this multitude of cultures, for more than a decade, scholarly work has paid attention to how people in multicultural environments live and cohabit together, and how everyday life became inclusive of acceptance and experience of diverse cultural traits and interactions. This phenomenon is termed "conviviality" (Neal et.al. 2019) as a "capacity to live with a difference" (Hall, 1993).

Theoretical framework

The main root of "conviviality" in the 21st century is the high power of globalization, which entails flows of cultural forms, which are increased and accelerated by everyday mobility all around the world (Eriksen, 2020), whether it be physical, or ideological. Scholarly works of the concept of "conviviality" has accentuated and reflected on three major subject matters. Firstly, the everyday interactions and creolization that presupposes and accentuates the ability of identity to transfer itself from bounded and fixed to deconstructed and negotiated identities that form the propensity to live together in difference. In his work Paul Gilroy (2004), has emphasized deconstructive negotiation, defining conviviality as "the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multi-culture an ordinary feature of social life". I am paying attention to the word "process", implying that these multicultural everyday interactions do not create a different way of living, which can also be understood as a creation of another static being. Rather it can be understood as a dynamic continuance of reforming, retranslating, and reconstructing identities. The second stance on conviviality, negates the idea of individual's alteration of their identities, but rather focuses on everyday civility and courtesy, the unwritten code of conduct, that people embody and implement through the proximity and interactions with other people in their daily lives (Wessendorf, 2014). These codes of conduct interdicts any disrespectful, discriminative and hostile behavior and attitude towards others, thus offering friendly communication and relationship between the multitude of identities. The third point of view in conviviality is the existence of commonality or shared grounds between diverse identities(Amin, 2012). This idea has pulled down the generalization that the first two approaches have given, specifying the interaction at certain places, within certain identities that shares and relates with each other on the matter of certain life trajectories.

Research method and question.

My research was to explore the influences of the diverse cultural, and social environment that immigrant family is exposed to and how it reflects in their lives and their relationship with multitude of others in their daily lives and the intergenerational relationship in the family, looking at it from the perspective that home can also be multicultural space, considering the cultural variations between parents and children. I have conducted my 15 days of fieldwork living with a Mongolian family living in France. They have settled their lives in their host country for a decade now. It is a traditionally structured family, where husband is the main provider and wife is a

homemaker. The children in the family were all born and raised in France and are immersed in social and cultural environment of the country. I used research method such as participant-observation by staying in their home and held conversations about their life history in France, their social lives and their perception of intergenerational relationships. As my time in the field were not sufficient enough, I had held additional clarifications through online platform as well.

1.1. *Living with difference within the commute*

As the theoretical framework suggests, the need for creolizing themselves, at least at some level, serves as a prominent feature to live with difference. From learning the language to the everyday interaction with institutes and other individuals, an individual is compelled to transform and re-transform themselves in many different ways. However, where does the creolization comes from? I would say, it comes from necessity to seek and generate difference in themselves. In his work Valluvan (2016) described conviviality as "deconstructive practice of interaction".

Deconstructive in a sense that at the starting stage of the settlement in the host country immigrants have to pull themselves from the initial cultural and social stance, which also migrates with them, at least in the beginning. Home country cultural elements, their personality traits and previously held social ties, does not guarantee or contribute further stability and well-being for immigrants. Practice in a sense that, that state of results them to have an agency and drive to pursue the creolization with the host society, utilizing interactions with others in their everyday lives to sustain and better their conditions. My interlocutors have arrived in France, just like any other immigrants, with the complete unfamiliarity of the context in which they arrived. And just like any other immigrants, the deconstruction of self in terms of challenging and pushing themselves to adapt in the country took place, for each partner in different ways in terms of whether economical, social and cultural spheres.

Mrs. G: It is a good thing I learnt the language. You become more confident. Even in the immigration offices, now I am more clear on my perspectives than I was before, it is very helpful… Other immigrants for example, the people from countries where they were taught French from childhood, they have a better way, method of communicating with these offices, we were not at that time. But now it is different… (06/12/2023, France)

Through her experience and observation in interacting with local authority, educational institutions, Mrs.G has built the characteristics of consistency, determination and eagerness to better her communicational tools, starting form language itself to the manners, expressions, and body languages to effectively convey her issues, point of views and ideas to the "other".

Mr.G: I did some voluntary jobs, they require you to do it sometimes… Voluntary jobs are for other people, right. It seems that this kind of activities grounds you and enhances your sense to help others, not only you. (06/12/2023, France)

These activities gave Mr.G understanding and view of the sense of larger community and the perception that you are a part of a whole, where you will only be you just because of others, overthrowing self-serving rationality. Learning the language, acquiring jobs becoming familiar with the institutions and learning the procedures, understanding manners and communicative approaches, accepting and building a diverse environment they all required a stamina to transform their initial selves.

However, deconstruction of self, can also be bounded. As I have said above, everyday life in a multicultural society involves a multitude of interactions with many different individuals that one encounters almost everywhere: in the shopping center, at the hospital, at the park and at beauty salons. Still the most deep or complex and continued interactions and relations can be built within the circle of commonality: neighborhood, workplaces, school environment, or even in the scope of the dwelling they are living in etc. that the immigrants most often engage with. In their work, Neal and others (2018, p.24) acknowledged that "it is those areas of common or shared ground … in which bounded notions of race and culture may dissolve – or at least be downgraded as the line of differentiation". Understanding this, we can also see that even though everyday practices makes us rethink and transform ourselves, the basic area that we encounter with multi-culture, bounds and limits the absoluteness of our deconstruction. The multi-culture, that my interlocutors face in their everyday lives reflected/reflects such limits. Back's description of "neighborhood nationalism" (1996) expresses such boundedness, where white residents and Asian residents come together to unite based on their traditional values, thus excluding the difference of ethnic identity to form united front. Just as Back described, Family of G has been interacting with different individuals from different ethnic background throughout their biography of settlement and has been cordially relating with each other in their daily lives to the point that nowadays they still have

tight-knit contact with their previous neighborhood residents. Up until present time, most of these individuals have been contacting Family of G for support whether it is about immigration issues or for occasional meet and greet. But unlike Back's description these neighborhoods mostly comprised of immigrants rather than the whole picture of diversity in terms of combination of immigrants and non-immigrant local individuals, thus creating the boundedness within the boundedness itself. Another sphere of boundedness within boundedness can be workplace environments. Mr.G works with other immigrants, and while they chat and interact with each other daily in a more cosmetic way and hang out together during their breaks as colleagues another factor also creates limitations in their interactions.

Mr. G: Colleagues of mine now are very "huurhun" (this word is a Mongolian word that literally implies "cute", but in the context it would mean "nice", "likeable"). They are like me immigrants as well… I don't go out with them that much, afterwork. They are young people and after work they attend clubs and do things that are for younger people. I do not have that much interest in these endeavors. (06/12/2023, France)

From this point you can see how multicultural interactions can also create boundaries, in terms of the specific diversities among the diversity itself, at one time uniting them in their professional endeavors, however at the same time differentiating and creating boundedness.

Mrs.G on the other hand, has built her social network based on motherhood, in relation with her children's educational involvement. She has befriended fellow mothers from the school that their kids go to, and maintains contact and interaction by occasionally visiting them for their kids to play together while them having a teatime during their children's playtime. Their communication is built on the common premise of motherhood or an immigrant mother, thus preserving the conviviality in the bounds of shared identity. Slightly from the different view, I have understood how conviviality is based on empathy, which ban be understood by putting differences aside and focusing on similarity. Family of G has helped newly came immigrants to contact institutions for matters that are important for the settlement, rooting these supportive gestures on the ground of their ability to put themselves in their position.

Mrs.G: We are not a high official but we understand their hardship. We went through the same things. (10/12/2023, France)

They have occasionally, within their capacity, helped them with small yet crucial for others, sum of money they could lend to fellow immigrants. So in the end, living with difference can also reflect and search for common grounds.

Another leg of conviviality to stand on is "courtesy". As Nowicka (2020, p.21) implied "Courtesy is a way of acting as though one would be in personal relations with others who are not ones kin". This definition surely disentangles individuals acts of decency and kindness beyond the scope of familiarity and already-established connections. However, from the point of view of convivial studies, and anthropological studies this definition is presumably problematic. First of all, the term "kin" has long before lost it's monogamous, or "bi-gamous" meaning of blood relations and relations through marriage. Kinship for example, can be relations with the people that forms any meaningful and impactful relationship, starting from the close bonding and alliances with the seller at the nearby grocery store, that you have been customer to since you were a small child, or a bus conductor whom you meet in the bus on the daily basis. And second of all, Nowicka defined "courtesy" as "a way of acting as though". With an invisible yet visible public ethical code of conduct diverse people act and react to certain behaviors and instances in a manner of which it is most expected: apologizing for stepping on the foot, saying "thank you" to the waiter, or notifying someone that their backpack is open and it needs to be zipped. These are all instances of common public civility or courtesy. However courtesy, would also imply consideration, cooperation, and generosity in providing something which correlates to the real sincerity, rather than "just acting as though". Mrs.G has told me a story how she and her husband met and befriended an immigrant woman from a country in African continent, through offering her a ride to the school, as she was late. As they were about to leave the woman asked whether her other friends can join them in the ride, to which they unquestionably agreed, even though the number of passengers in the car exceeded the allowed quota. After this interaction they have become good friends, and one of them has invited my interlocutors to her wedding day, which they have joined and celebrated together. Conviviality as courtesy has a promising sense of egalitarianism, which will make us close our eyes to evident dissimilarities between people in multicultural environment (Gilroy, 2004), however it does not fully mean that we are totally deconstructing ourselves to become one cell with the others. Indeed, there is Edouard Glissant's notion of "opacity" (Bystrom, 2020), that acknowledges and detests the conventional understanding of conviviality as producing a homogenous society. Gidley (2013, 368) hints to the existence of "parallel perspectives, often

utterly incommensurate" as an unavoidable side of human nature living with difference in diverse environment. I understood "parallel perspectives, often utterly incommensurate", in a way that every individual has their unique perspective, that another individual could not understand or relate to, even if that other truly wants to. For example, the above stated wedding that they were invited, has been a unique experience for them in terms of cultural consciousness, which comprised of wedding rituals or customs that combined bicultural traits, that were unfamiliar, peculiar for them to relate to. Their view and value regarding marriage and divorce is different than some of their fellow immigrant friends, or locals that in their perspective is less "serious", yet still they continue to being mates by not questioning and not intruding these different cultures, traditions and perspectives, rather jump past these differences, thus certifying the questionable nature of deconstructive negotiation.

1.2. *Living with difference at home*

According to Koops and Martin (2019), in demographic and sociological studies, relationship within members of the family, their attitudes and behaviors can become a viable measurement of social integration into the host society. Thus common approach became to research family behavior among different immigrant groups and their children in comparison with the native families in the host country, to understand and explore the distinction and similitude, which in turn enables to gain important insights on the distance between people in terms of their culturally and socially adapted traits. In this part of the article I am experimenting to combine scholarly works of intergenerational dynamics among immigrant families and scholarly works of "conviviality" and it's dynamics within themes of conviviality as collaboration, conviviality as a reflexivity and conviviality as commonality. In a way, these two concepts stand far from each other in terms of sphere, scope and diversity, however it is in many way relatable in terms of interpersonal relationship, external influences and multicultural differentiation in the family in terms acculturation and adaptation and solidarity.

There are two contrasting views and hypothesis in literatures revolving around intergenerational dynamics in immigrant families. Some scholars acknowledge that the adaptation to the context of arrival produces a reduction to family solidarity as opposed to the families that did not migrate (Zhou, 2009). This outcome is related to two social mechanisms. One being that, most migrants move to Western European countries, which is ground for them to experience a

shift from collectivistic to an individualistic society. Within this realm, "cultural differences between parents' home-country values, norms and behavioral patterns and the mainstream…culture" (Foner & Dreby,2011, p. 547) has causal effects on conflicts between parent-child. In non-Western cultures, family obligation, filial piety, and respect for the elderly are relatively stressed more compared to individual autonomy and freedom to pursue personal interests (Kwak & Berry, 2001). Eastern countries, including Asian countries, prioritizes filial piety in the household, creating a strong authoritarian hierarchy between parent and child, whereas in Western societies children are more accustomed to the idea of individuality and freedom in expression, behavior, thus in most level contrasting to the value that their immigrant parents have inherited. First of all, we have to understand whether individualism really is the taboo concept for parents from a different culture and secondly, in what sense, in which situations two cultures clash.

It was a shopping day, me and my interlocutors went to the store to buy groceries which was followed by a stop in the kid's clothing store. As we entered and paced through the aisles, Mr.G took his telephone out of his pocket to video call one of their children, who was 4 year old, to show the varieties of clothing and to make him choose what kind of jacket he would want to have. That process, came as a surprise to me. Firstly, I could not remember the way my parents have made me choose my clothing when I was at that age. Secondly, I was intrigued by how individualistic their child was. I expressed my surprise at that time, which they responded nonchalantly that this is the most common way of children there. This is only one example. I observed how individualistic traits reflected on their children starting from food preference, choosing their sports, choosing how they would spend their leisure time, whether it be meeting friends, going to certain places and attractions, choosing their birthday party menus, themes and ornaments. This lead me to once again reflect on how the children absorbed the outside influences from their peers, and how parents in turn deconstruct themselves from their authority and accept and encourage individualism, that were more tuned down or unavailable when they were growing up.

Convivialist Lourdes Arizpe (2015) has pointed to the collaborative nature of civil society, where individuals re-define their attitudes and selves towards each other to create have a wholesome unit which leads to a successful convivial existence among heterogeneity. However, this approach is faulty in a sense that society consists of superdiverse entities, that would mean

that they will have super diverse interests, capacities to redefine themselves in favor for others. Prioritizing individual's rights and well-being, it implies a mode of living together that accommodates diversity of both individuals and groups, but also in turn creates rivalry between individuals' desires and positions (Nowicka, 2020). An example on a more micro-level social space of an immigrant family, cultural traits such as prioritization of respect and compliance to certain expectations of behavior and children's response towards these expectations can become a source of conflict. Conflicts are observed to be arisen from the most mundane disagreements between parents and children such as excessive screen time, online gaming, not tidying their rooms etc. Even so, deep on the frame of these conflicts there are major cultural elements of parenting in Mongolia. First of all, listening and complying to the requirements of their parents and elderly people in terms of criticisms of bad behavior. Second of all, Mongolian culture has long been centered on raising a child for them to become responsible and "hardworking" (this word is the closest equivalent in English language to the term that is specific in Mongolian language) from early age, including and participating with children in daily endeavors, and requiring them to be orderly and tidy, planting a sense of work ethics. With this cultural traits, certain "dark sides" of individualism clashes, where children becomes more self-minded, and adamant, to the point that it leads a parent to become strict in their position as well. However, parents tend to compromise and bring solutions to sources of conflicts. For example parents in the family of G, bought bikes for their kids spend their times more in open air, and has scheduled and planned outdoor activities for their children's liking to sustain their activity, away from the excess screen time.

On the account of conflicting in a more macro-level, Mr. and Mrs. G's negative perceptions on the questionable nature of Western society in terms of excess privilege and entitlement for younger generation, that at some level is believed and acknowledged to be leading to child delinquency was observed to be of major concern.

Mr.G: I would not say that all the children here are raised loose. But there are many instances of children growing spoiled and self-minded in a negative way, which leads them to get an interest in illegal things, like doing drugs, alcohol or leading promiscuous lives from a very young age. I worry about that. (11/12/2023, France)

The term "conviviality" relates to not only the most positive sense of living with difference, but it also entails conflict and friction between an individual and the outer environment (Wise &

Noble, 2016). It implies individuals inner most agency to negate and oppose to the elements of their social experience, aside from having a "flawless" collaboration and all agreeableness.

Another mechanism on intergenerational dynamics is a fact that family disunity has been linked to acculturation gaps between a parent and child in several studies with different populations. A study of Chinese-Canadian adolescents shows that acculturation gaps, in terms of value and idea (Tardif & Geva, 2006), as well as in terms of communicational limitations, that arise from different language fluency level between parent-child affects distancing and alienation between parent and child, as conversations can lag in depth and complexity (Birman, Poff, 2011). Typically, the younger members of a family, like kids and teenagers, are fluent in host country language with much of this integration happening via early education and socializing with peers.

Mr.G has been experiencing such difficulties with their children, leaving him much sorrowful and at times discouraged, that is why many of the in depth conversations between him and his children been mostly intermediated or narrated by his wife. However, living with difference, especially with their children can turn into a spirit and motivation to regain and recommunicate with them by changing the chain. He started to put more emphasis and push himself on communicating with them more about their school lives and everyday events that is revolving around them, in return children are more inclined to open up and if necessary explain what their father did not understand, in consideration of his language barrier. In a way what previously discouraged him, has become irrelevant and outdated. I connect these dynamics with the major root of "conviviality", which is reflexivity. According to Neal et.al (2018) "reflexivity" is a key element of convivial relations, relating to it's capacity to step beyond "taken-for-granted identities" (Samanani, 2021). Dr. Samanani confused me with the term "taken-for-granted identities", however I understood that he is referring to the position of an identity that is static and fixed, which is less esteemed/valued in a multicultural setting, thus reflexivity is a way or a tool to refer to self, to examine and contemplate the dyad of me–others, thus through enforcing agency you alter and deconstruct your position in relation to an external context, situations and individuals.

Other scholars have suggested that the psychological, social and economic difficulties connected with the process of migration, the stigma and social marginalization experienced in the country of arrival, and the desire to preserve the origin country's cultural identity and traditions might help strengthen generational solidarity within families and, thus, engender higher degrees

of cohesion and support exchange than those observed among both native populations and families remaining in the origin country (Albertini et.al, 2019). The process of migrating can bring a range of difficulties, including mental stress, social barriers, and economic troubles, along with a stronger sense of togetherness and mutual dependency. Consequently, these families may display more unity and provide a stronger support system to each other than that observed in experiences of discrimination and exclusion in the destination country. Paradoxically, these challenges may lead to a strengthening of family ties among migrants.

If to connect this view with convivial studies, one of it's major themes, such as commonality can be applied. The basis of concept of conviviality refers and prioritizes deconstructive attribute of an individual, starting from "reorienting" (Samanani, 2021) themselves in an unfamiliar public environment across their differences to reaching a solidarity, which in turn is understood to being the main motivation of such deconstruction. However, these transformations often entails relations in many different situations, places such as workplace, neighborhood, designated clubs and associations. Neal stated (2018, p.24) that "it is those areas of common or shared ground … in which bounded notions of race and culture may dissolve – or at least be downgraded as the line of differentiation". With this in mind let's take home and family as being the designated place for common ground. Family of G has experienced accentuation on their difference in many different places during Covid-19, either from locals and immigrants from different ethnicity on the grounds of them being from Asian origin, had several instances for their child's bad experience because of having ethnic-specific facial features. This brings to another side of "always shiny and happy" conviviality that posits behind the notion of deconstruction of self to produce egalitarianism and equality through daily encounters as Gilroy (2004) states, gatherings labelled "convivial" often remain highly exclusive along the lines of friendship, kin, gender, class or ethnicity and race (Nayak, 2017), thus the difference in race, ethnicity is not fully dissolved or disregarded. This also can be connected to the oldest of theoretical approaches regarding ethnicity, which is the primordialist approach, that view ethnic identity naturally, or at least organically, formed (Kataria, 2018), and is static and innate and prioritizes primordial attachments are the "givens' of social existence" (Geertz, 1973), thus positing that ethnic identity is a fundamental human need for belonging and meaning. Putting these theories in multicultural society together with super-diversity concept, indication of difference within difference, racism within racism is clear. Because of these experiences they are very much aware of the term "racism",

"discrimination". These instances of marginalization has become the common ground and a source of psychological support in the family, especially from parents towards their children. In this instance the differentiation in culture within the family dissolves and family solidarity upstages.

Conclusion

During their journey of settling in a new country, immigrants are continually engaged in the ongoing process of negotiating and reconstructing their established identities. This journey begins with the immersion into and understanding of the host culture, followed by interaction with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Immigrants actively participate in projecting and co-creating their identities, as they become more culturally aware within unfamiliar settings, necessitating a significant level of adaptability. This adaptability is crucial not only in various domains but is especially prominent in specific environments, such as those related to motherhood, educational institutions, and workplaces. In these specific contexts, immigrants simultaneously discover common ground with others while managing discrepancies and complexities that may not be immediately comprehensible. Despite these challenges, immigrants adeptly navigate these differences to foster understanding and connection, even in the absence of direct similarities. This adaptive and fluid process of renegotiating oneself is an integral part of the immigrant experience as they navigate the complexities and nuances of their new environment.

Just like immigrants experience and live with difference in outer environment, they also experience and live with difference in the confines of their home. Immigrant parents may find themselves struggling with their children's assimilation into the host country's culture, especially when the second generation has formed their identities based on the values and ideas of the host country from a young age. In these situations, parents navigate their own journey towards embracing individualism while also trying to relate to their children's different cultural perspectives, negotiating and rearranging the causes of conflicts and acculturation challenges. Nonetheless, the coexistence of diverse cultural backgrounds within the family can lead to finding common ground and ultimately fostering family solidarity. This process of navigating cultural differences within the family can even become a source of psychological support, particularly as parents provide understanding and support for their children in the face of marginalization.

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