MULTICULTURALISM AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN THE FACE OF HOMOGENOUS NATIONALISM IN FINLAND

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Abstract:

Finland as a country has not been on the receiving end of migration for a long time. However, in the last two decades, there has been an increase in the number of people immigrating to Finland than those emigrating. With the increasing cultural and ethnic diversity, the country's migration policies have attempted to accommodate immigrants even in the face of homogenous nationalism. This study examines the limits of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity and how it affects the social integration of immigrants into Finnish society. Based on the current population dynamics of Finland, there is tension between increasing multiculturalism and a native approach that informs the homogenous representation of the Finnish identity. There are clearly limits to which immigrants can express their cultural identity and conditions to which a middle ground for social integration between immigrants and Finnish citizens can be reached. With the aid of semi-structured interviews, this study seeks to obtain an empirical evaluation of the experiences of immigrants in the process of settling and socially integrating into Finnish society.

Keywords: multiculturalism; diversity; immigration; social integration

1. Introduction

As migration is increasing worldwide, Europe in recent decades becoming a major migrant destination (Adogame, 2010). According to the United Nations, there are more people migrating from the global south (Africa, Latin America and East Asia) to the global north (Europe and North America) than those leaving the global north (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2019). This has contributed to change in population demographics in those countries of immigrant settlement. In Finland where traditionally there has been more emigration than immigration, the country has been relatively ethnically homogenous (Kaasalainen & Huuhka, 2016). In the last two decades, Finland has had changes in its migration trajectory and there are now more people coming to the country than those

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leaving (Croucher et al., 2021). Immigration has led to multiculturalism and ethnic diversity with major cities like Helsinki being cosmopolitan. The growing ethnic diversity contributed by immigration is a challenge in the face of homogenous nationalism in Finland (Anniste et al., 2017). Since a majority of the Finnish population is ethnically white, by contrast, most immigrants in Finland are from the global south and hence multiculturalism and ethnic diversity are perceived as a threat to white Finns.

As Finland progressively becomes more ethnically diverse and develops its political institutions, it is important to examine the limits of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity in this new immigrant destination country (Liu et al., 2019). Research conducted has revealed that Finns respond differently to ethnic diversity (Saarela & Finnas, 2009). In some cases, it is taken positively and in other cases, it is taken as a threat to local cohesiveness and cultural aspirations. While ethnic diversity and multiculturalism can be taken as a positive thing, especially in the reduction of prejudice and racial discrimination, there is still a large percentage of the native population that think of it as an impediment to nationalism. Migrant groups are not highly welcome in the national dialogue and any cultural influence exhibited by immigrants is likely to be faced with resistance (Mussino et al., 2019).

The question of ethnic diversity and multiculturalism continues to gain ground in Finland as scholars of migration and sociology continue to examine the socio-economic and political terrain of this northern European country (Ryazantsev & Gadzhimuradova, 2021). At the heart of these discussions, the major focus has been trying to understand the differences in immigrant and native cultures and how that affects social integration. Since Finland is largely ethnically homogenous, it becomes difficult for immigrant and minority groups to survive within this society (Jartti et al., 2002). The remaining available option for immigrants is to adapt to the culture and social system of the natives. A diverse population brings a range of cultural traditions and customs to the host country. However, as elaborated above, multiculturalism and ethnic diversity bring with them challenges and there may be tensions between different groups (Korpela et al., 2018).

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which multiculturalism and ethnic diversity have impacted Finnish society. Additionally, it examines the experiences of immigrants and ethnic minorities in the country of Finland through interviews that are conducted with a chosen category of immigrants. Through this line of inquiry, this study makes available important information that offers a deeper understanding of the complex issues surrounding multiculturalism and ethnic diversity in Finland.

2. Methodology

This study takes a qualitative research approach which makes use of interviews as a means to collect data. The aim of this study was to examine the limits of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity in Finland through the evaluation of the experiences of immigrants. In order to clearly understand the dynamics of the Finnish population demographics from the perspective of immigrants it is essential that interviews be used.

2.1 Study population and interviews

Interviews were administered to 30 immigrants from East Africa living in Finland. The study participants were selected by use of the snowball sampling technique. This is because obtaining personal data concerning people living in Finland is a difficult task due to privacy policies. By applying snowball techniques, chosen participants were able to recruit other suitable candidates for the study that they might have known (Goodman, 1961). The interviews were conducted between the period of 15/11/2022 and 15/12/2022 in immigrants' homes and areas where they were comfortable responding or available. For a clear understanding and to avoid confusion different themes were addressed separately in a semi-structured format. The language of instruction was primarily English and Swahili, which are the official languages of a majority of East African countries.

2.2 Data analysis

This study employed qualitative content analysis for the purpose of interpreting text differently with justification from the applicable context. Qualitative content analysis is often preferred because it takes a thematic approach whereby concepts carried in texts of speech or writing are taken as a whole rather than analyzing single units like words or even sentences (Flick, 2014). This aspect was essential especially for this study that involved the taking of interviews since the analysis of each word would have been tiresome and to an extent irrelevant and unnecessary.

2.3 Challenges and limitations of the study

The entire process of conducting this study did not transition smoothly. At some point, there were challenges and limitations that needed overcoming. The biggest challenge faced was the problem of time especially during interviewing. It was difficult scheduling interviews since most of the interviewees were working long hours. Another challenge was financial constraints since it involved the usage of money to move from one point to another in order to catch up with interviewees.

In the initial layout of this study plan, there were many anticipated challenges that needed a way out. The most perturbing part was the process of finding interviewees to respond to the research questions. East African immigrants living in Finland reside in different places whereby accessing their addresses was going to be something difficult. The researcher communicated with different Embassies in East African countries to ask for help in finding the addresses of the immigrants. Unfortunately, the embassies were not helpful since giving out such information as the residences of immigrants could contravene privacy terms.

It took more than a month and since there was no response from the embassy the researcher took a different approach to finding the addresses of the immigrants for interviewing. It involved contacting the few immigrants that were known to the researcher and then using them to identify their family and friends that they knew. This second approach was successful and then a schedule for interviews was arranged in which all of the anticipated interviewees were willing to participate in. This nature of the

process that was taken in identifying the addresses of the East African immigrants necessitated the use of snowball sampling that was employed in this study (Schonlau & Liebau, 2012).

Since churches are amongst the institutions frequented by the immigrants, the easiest way to meet some of them was by going to their congregation. In the case of this study, most interviewees attended an international congregation in Helsinki which conducts services in English. In the congregations, the researcher was introduced to other immigrants that willingly accepted to take part in this study as informants. Secondly, the informants were found in academic institutions where they are studying. Some that the researcher found at the University of Helsinki introduced the researcher to their friends that were also willing to participate in the interview.

After identifying the addresses of the immigrants, the next step was to convince them to participate in the interview. At some point, it was disappointing since some of them were unable to participate due to lack of time or even other circumstances that they could not explain. Getting to the next immigrant was uncertain also because some of them could be found where their friends had suggested. In addition, some interviewees could accept to participate in the interview but later change their minds.

2.4 East Africa as an ethnic minority in Finland

Finland, unlike its neighbours in the Nordic region, has been historically homogenous in its national culture and population. Finland's population was 5.5 million people (UN, 2009). Though a greater number of the people living in Finland are Finnish there are other minority communities that have been historically incorporated as part of the larger Finnish community without necessarily being immigrants. The largest minority community are the Swedish-speaking Finns who form approximately 5.4 percent of the Finnish total population (Matikainen, 2005). This group enjoys extensive rights as a Finnish community given that Swedish is the second official language of Finland. Besides this community, there is also another small indigenous community known as the Sami which occupies 2.3 percent of the Finnish total population.

Finland has been an emigration country for a long period of time in the past. A large number of the Finnish population migrated to Sweden following the economic superiority of Sweden over Finland (Pekkala, 2003). The situation maintained so until late 1990 when the first immigrant communities began to arrive. These immigrant communities that arrived were the Ingrian migrants from Russia and refugees from Somalia. However, the period of time in which the number of people coming into Finland exceeded the number of people leaving is said to be the year 1980 (Heikkila & Jarvinen, 2003).

Following this first increased rate of immigration exceeding the rate of emigration, Finland has progressively been a migrant destination country. Trends of migration in Finland indicate that currently, the largest number of immigrants arriving in Finland originate from African countries. A large percentage of the immigrants arriving in

Finland have come there for employment purposes followed closely by those migrating for educational purposes.

The settlement of immigrants in Finland has however been mainly in the Finnish urban centers except for a few cases in which immigrants are forced by circumstances to settle in rural areas. This pattern of settlement has been greatly influenced by the degree of acceptability of the Finnish people to accommodate immigrants into their social sphere. The general perception of the common Finnish people is of a community that is generally culturally conservative. This has led to strong social identifiers within Finnish people that it becomes difficult for immigrant communities to penetrate. For if a community holds high their cultural perception and seems unwelcoming to new interactions it becomes almost impossible for outsiders to settle within and even integrate (Pollack, 2008).

Most parts of Finland are dominantly occupied by the Finnish people with the exception of cities and municipalities that have received immigrants in the past years making them multicultural regions (Saarela, 2009). Areas that have no immigrant settlements seem to be disinterested in immigrant communities and are less welcoming to immigrants. Upon the arrival of immigrants in Finland, their area of settlement is definitely informed by the number of other immigrants that have settled in that area. This has continued the trend of progressive settlement of immigrants in the already immigrant settlements and a simultaneous avoidance of immigrants settling in areas with no any other immigrants (Saarela, 2009).

For successive integration of immigrants into any host society there must be acceptability of the immigrants by natives of the host society (Rodriguez & Garro, 2015). If immigrants are treated with coldness and dismissive attitudes it becomes almost impossible for social integration to take place. In the case of East African immigrants in Finland, a majority of them are residing in the Helsinki region owing to the fact that this region is multicultural. Settlement and integration in multicultural regions are at least easy as compared to regions that are culturally homogenous because there is a mixture of cultures and the perception of the natives towards the immigrants is flexible since they interact almost on daily basis.

The perception by the East African immigrants that they might not be welcome in some other regions in Finland in which there are few or no other immigrants has been the basis for the settlement and integration patterns taken by this group of immigrants in Finland. Nevertheless, there are no verifiable cases in which immigrants have been discriminated against in areas within Finland that are sparsely occupied by immigrants. However, the general impression that carries most opinion goes that such regions are likely to subject immigrants to long periods of isolation before socially integrating into the Finnish social sphere (Saarinen, 2012).

Generally, immigrant integration into the Finnish social sphere involves many factors even when the right circumstances that influence integration patterns are favorable. First, the Finnish language presents a huge communication barrier for immigrants to reach the Finnish natives. The settlement of immigrants in areas where

other immigrants have already settled lowers the necessity to learn the language since there are other options like integrating with other immigrants in the first place. This affects the totality of the duration taken by the immigrants to understand the Finnish culture and to as well facilitate the process of social integration between the immigrants and the Finnish natives.

The notion of immigrant acceptability carries its effect as an influencer of patterns of integration as well as a facilitator of the process of social integration. Most African immigrants are prone to the natural fear of being racially discriminated against upon arrival in Finland given that Finland is dominantly white race country. These fears draw them to fellow African immigrants where they settle and initiate social cycles within themselves before opening up to Finnish natives. This also shows why most of the African immigrants are mainly concentrated in the Helsinki region where the population demographics are a mixture of different communities making the region a multicultural center (Sahlberg, 2011).

Differences in cultural and communication barriers have been the main reason why most immigrants settle in areas occupied by fellow immigrants before getting access to the Finnish social sphere. Other factors such as uncertainty of the traditions and cultural preferences become among the reasons why the immigrants formulate a notion of being unwelcome in some parts of the country hence maintaining a specific settlement and integration protocol. There is no specific way in which this notion can be changed. It seems to come naturally from both the side of immigrants and the side of natives. However, the feeling of being acceptable plays a role greatly on the side of the immigrants more than natives. To the natives, there is a generalized attitude of indifference towards people of different origins and descent which as well creates a separation between the immigrants and the natives.

The willingness of the Finnish natives to express warm reception of the immigrants can as well determine the degree of the perception of acceptability by the immigrants. Free interactions in social meetings and generous moods can help in influencing patterns of settlement and integration since this plays a big role in shaping immigrants' perceptions towards the native society. Given that this view of feeling acceptable lies deeply in the social dimension, it can therefore be solved by social mechanisms. However, such a social factor as the acceptability of immigrants by the natives of host countries cannot be directly regulated by the policy since it is subject to personal attitude adjustment (Niemelä et al., 2018).

Enhancing immigrant integration across the country of Finland will require that both immigrants and natives be in a neutral position whereby they will both accept adjustments to their normal routines. This prospect seems a solace to immigrants more than natives since with immigrants the change of their routines is something they can quickly harmonize with by the fact that they are away from their homeland. Conversely, natives of the receiver country in a way prefer to have their way of life as the dominant cultural path to be followed. These dissonances are what create social divisions and the

rigidity of either divide to compromise tightens the differences and makes each individual to be naturally attracted to people like them.

2.5 Experiences of immigrants as ethnic minorities in Finland

In this section, this study focuses on the personal experiences of East African immigrants and how it impacts Finnish society. Having settled in Finland as an ethnic minority group the experiences of the East African immigrants regarding multiculturalism and ethnic diversity in Finland are expressed as follows:

"I was motivated by personal interests to travel to Finland especially to come and study here. I was anticipating better life opportunities than it was back at home. However, things did not turn out to be like I thought and instead I found myself secluded from the native society. In the end, I only came to realize that every place has its challenges and the best way is to face them. Our challenges as immigrants can only be solved if we first begin by acknowledging them. Secondly, we have to come together and help each other realize our dreams." (Dominic)

"My initial intentions of immigrating to Finland were to make new friends and expand my network of friends. I came as a student and started working after finishing my studies. I connected with some natives both in my school and workplace but on most days find myself in immigrant groups because I feel like the existing political structures have not done enough to include minority groups." (Evanso)

The above statements by the interviewees reveal the expectations of many immigrants as they travel to foreign countries. Migration studies have investigated factors that contribute to the relocation of people from their motherland to a foreign land where they settle and begin a new life (Stark & Taylor, 1991). Amongst the main push factors of migration, employment stands first followed closely by education. The two contribute to most of the voluntary cases of migration (Castelli & Iapadre, 2012). In some instances, people migrate because of forced conditions like natural calamities and civil war (Schoorl et al., 2000b). The largest number of migration decisions have been made voluntarily. For instance, Dominic and Evanso moved to Finland of their own volition for study pursuits which in this sense is a way of looking for better and more accessible educational possibilities and the university research environment that Finland happened to have. This sample represents many East African immigrants who have migrated to Finland. Most of them made decisions to migrate voluntarily and they moved primarily for educational and employment purposes (Egharevba, 2009).

Further, from the discussions of the above two interviewees, it affirms that most East African immigrants in Finland have higher expectations of Finland as their host countries. The decision to come to Finland is motivated by the provision of services and better life opportunities that cannot be available back in their home countries. Finland's educational facilities are among the best in the world and this has attracted many

students worldwide although Finland has got rather the smallest immigration rate in the Nordic (Leinonen, 2013).

"I have lived in Finland for 10 years now. I came as an exchange student and remained for the rest of my course. It has been challenging trying to fit into Finnish society. There are clearly cultural differences and the Finnish way of life is totally different from our ways in Uganda where I come from. It is my opinion that no matter how long you live here as a foreigner integrating into Finnish society is almost an impossibility." (Aden)

"I have been living here in Finland for twelve good years. First, I moved here for further studies it took me four years to acquire my first degree in Computer Science and Information Technology. It was difficult getting a job because almost everyone here has studied more than bachelor's level in my field. I sought admission to Master's program which I completed in two years and then I was accepted into a PhD program which I finished recently and now got a job." (Wendy)

Aden and Wendy came to Finland as students, who graduated and got jobs where they are both currently working. They give a glimpse of their experience in Finland and equally talk about their decision to migrate to Finland which was motivated by the search for better educational opportunities. This decision is voluntary and cuts across the board for most East African immigrants who have come to settle in Finland. On the other hand, the interviewees also prove a point that Finland has been difficult socializing especially with locals which has made them feel isolated. In a sense, such situations speak to the fact multiculturalism and ethnic diversity can only thrive dependent on the reception of the natives.

"I moved here because I married a Finnish woman. Almost all my youth has been spent in Finland. I have had good interactions with the Finns I have known. My greatest problem has been the Finnish language which has made it difficult for me to interact with a majority of the locals. I tried to learn the language in school but it was really difficult for me. I also belong to different immigrant groups and we usually meet in our free time. (Sedrine)

"Personally, it has been tough for me settling here. I escaped from Middle East due to political instability and came to Finland. I am originally from Kenya and settling in Finland was like a dream come true in the beginning. Compared to where I was Finland is much better however it surprises me a lot that once you arrive her as an immigrant you have to learn their culture since Finland is not accommodating to other cultures. (Vionah)

Sedrine observes that the language has been a major barrier to his interaction with locals. While for him socializing with Finns has been successful, unlike most other immigrants, he is married to a Finnish woman. This has made it easy for him to be connected to the Finnish culture since he is part of it from a family level. Vionah on the

other hand thinks the contrary. Clearly, it has been hard for her to integrate into Finnish society which has made it necessary for her to learn the culture.

It is a common trend that most East African immigrants coming to Finland are mainly immigrating for educational purposes. It is no wonder that many young East African immigrants that are from poor families search for free education possibilities outside their countries to better their lives (Kirigia et al., 2006). It has been discovered that most poor families can dare to sell their land so as to be able to raise funds to support the education of their children in foreign countries where they believe there are better educational opportunities (Wangenge-Ouma, 2008). This shows that when individuals decide to make migration decisions a lot is involved and many people have been involved especially the family of the migrant.

Decisions to migrate are accompanied by expectations of improving the status of life through obtaining a better education or by getting better employment opportunities (De Jong, 2000). Migrants from developing countries especially East African countries encompass a lot of expectations from a single migration process. Ranging from better educational opportunities to employment East African immigrants look further to immigration to help in relieving political pressures, poor economic status and weak social systems (McKenzie et al., 2013). This shows that despite it being viewed as a voluntary decision, migration of the East African natives in a sense is pushed by desires of life such as hopes for a better life in a foreign country than it is at home (O'Reilly & Benson, 2009). Cases of migration being a salvage for a low life seems to be a trend for people coming from low-income earning families (Delavande et al., 2011). With such kinds of individuals, migration serves as an escape route that leads away from poverty to economic stability. The increasing use of technology has contributed to more cases of migration since now travelling has become easy and people can obtain information concerning a country on the internet (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). When individuals identify opportunities in a place they compare and if they find life is promising in those places then a migration decision is made.

In conclusion, therefore, the common experiences of East African immigrants in Finland and their impacts on multiculturalism are discussed here. Some of the experiences are more obvious than others, but they are all recognized as factors that cause people to emigrate. East African immigrants have got a popular cause of immigration to Finland which is hereby discussed mostly in the condition of their homeland. The cause is motivated by expectations of a better life in Finland than it is in their home countries (Bertoli et al., 2013). The immigrants believe prior to migration that migration out of the East African territory gives a ticket out of poverty (Jong, 2000).

3. Conclusion

Finland is a country with a relatively small population and a homogenous society. However, in recent years, Finland has become ethnically diverse in immigration. According to statistics Finland, in 2020 about 6% of the population of Finland was

foreign-born. The largest immigrant groups in Finland are from Russia, Estonia and Iraq. In general, Finland has improved in terms of how they treat immigrants. This is demonstrated by the formulation of policies by the Finnish government to promote multiculturalism and social integration like language courses and support for cultural activities. This does not, however, go without saying that there have been challenges where immigrants have felt discriminated against and socially excluded. Ethnic and minority group prejudice has been attributed to the homogenous nationalism of Finland. Immigrant groups are unable to thrive in a consolidated Finnish social sphere.

Most of the interviewees revealed that they had planned to participate fully in social activities but the first impression they got when they arrived was not only shocking but was indeed discouraging because they were referred to other international communities although that is not what they wanted. On the other hand, most of these East African immigrants seem to be thinking that areas such as places of work, family connections, educational institutions, hobbies and leisure are the most possible agents of social integration. Lastly, the future of social integration of immigrants in Finland needs to address the issues of minority groups for it to stand the test of time. Additionally, for that strategy to work, the country's social structure equally needs a total overhaul so as to create new social orders that will be considerate of the existence of minority groups. Migration affects far more than the social aspects of life. The political and economic aspects of life come in as well and this means a unilateral change of policies in one of the aspects cannot in any way affect the desired changes as suggested in this study. To achieve such a position, the entire social system must be profound. There should be mechanisms to eliminate exclusion, biasness and social prejudice for minority groups.

Conflict of interest statement
The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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