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IONELA VLASE

# Intersectionality, Gender and Migration

# Content

The third chapter offers a gendered analysis of transnational economic, cultural and social practices by Romanian migrant men and women in Italy. It does so by examining qualitative data (i.e. interviews with migrants and returnees), while interpreting these data by drawing on similar research run by researchers in Italy using quantitative data produced by Iniziative e Studi sulla Multietnicita foundation (ISMU, 2009). The chapter shows that women's and men's transnationalism is unevenly developed across a wide range of practices and behaviors that are underpinned by different cultural and structural factors, while socio-demographic factors, such as age and education, do play a significant role in the extent of migrants' involvement in transnationalism.

The three chapters together provide examples of the usefulness of a gender and intersectional lens in the study of migration. In doing so, the book calls for further research in this field and stimulates interest in gendered migration and its consequences on migrants' lives and the structural and contextual landscapes that generate migration.

*Chapter 1*

# Gender at the core of intersectionality in studying immigration in Romania

The rising trend of immigration in recent years, especially after the EU adherence in 2007, indicates that Romania is gradually emerging as a new immigration country attracting both third country and EU nationals alike. But, despite the rising migratory flows into the country, the research on immigrants' integration in Romania is still scarce. In this context, the chapter aims to explore integration experiences of immigrants in Romania by interpreting their experiences in relation to personal attributes, their belonging to gender and ethnicity groups, while also taking into account the structural context (e.g. immigration laws, Romanians' attitudes about immigration/immigrants, access to housing and labor market). There is a dearth of knowledge on immigration, immigrants' integration and attitudes toward integration in Eastern European region, and especially in Romania. To date, the main concern has been emigration by citizens of these countries, while there is a gap in the knowledge of immigration within this region. The change of structural conditions in Central and Eastern Europe and the Europeanization processes that the former candidate states

undertook in their path towards European integration have significantly modified the context of structural conditions for migration (Barnickel & Beichelt, 2013).

Acknowledging the complex interaction between structural conditions, and subjective aspects (e.g. feelings of belonging, aspirations, values) of the integration process as a whole (Castles *et al.*, 2002; Erdal & Oeppen, 2013), one should not ignore the interplay of subjective experiences of immigrants with different gender and ethnic background, and societal aspects (e.g. the context of reception of the host country, more precisely how immigration is framed through immigration policies, and what are the attitudes of the Romanian population towards immigrants) in shaping integration experiences. In order to do so, intersectionality (Anthias, 2012) provides adequate conceptual tools that enable researchers to better understand how the intersection of identity dimensions like gender and ethnicity shape the experiences of integration in the current Romanian context (e.g. the framing of immigrants' status by immigration policy, the gender culture prevailing in the place of relocation, the intersection between the biographical and historical time when migration occurred).

Intersectionality has been initially formulated in the early 1980s as a way to address the complex sources of women's oppression based on their multiple belongings to marginal categories of race, class and gender (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1983; Crenshaw, 1991). A more encompassing theorization of intersectionality within a translocal frame has been developed by Anthias (2012). Intersectionality is actually considered more as a process of permanent social (re)positioning of individual actors based on their

negotiation power that is contingent on their ascribed, multiple and crosscutting identities differently situated across time and place. This way of understanding intersectionality is particularly helpful for analysing immigrants' integration because it enables a more dynamic and flexible consideration of power relations by taking into consideration the variation of positionalities when shifting locales, while also allowing to understand "contradictory locations" of domi-nant/subordinate position of one individual in relation to various contexts (Anthias, 2012: 108). The use of intersectionality in studying integration is therefore linked to unequal and hierarchical positionalities that limit or enable the civic and socio-economic participation by immigrants and the process of building solidarity bonds between immigrants and natives.

Researchers in immigration field have started to address overarching research questions such as: How immigrants perceive and narrate their subjective integration experiences in relation to their multifaceted and complex identity? How immigrants produce the meanings of experiences and further assign them to their immigration career in the frame of their life-goals? What is the perception about (categories of) immigrants, and which are the most powerful predictors explaining the anti-immigrant attitudes? With respect to the latter question, the literature examines alongside contextual factors, the individual-level determinants (e.g. age, area of residence, gender, income, education, class position). Some authors also acknowledge the influence of the existence of a societal context characterised by the presence of a multicultural ideology (Ward & Masgoret, 2008) and the kind of nationalist feelings which

reflect different paths of the construction of state structures in the East and West (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2008).

The drivers of host population attitudes towards immigrants are worthy of examination because these attitudes can impact the process of immigrants' integration. Integration is usually described as a process that can be measured though various indicators such as those associated with socio-economic status (e.g. highest level of education achieved, employment status and current occupation, housing and health), as well as indicators of subjective experience of integration encompassing migrants' understandings concerning their assimilation into the host society and their prospects for participation and belonging to social, political, economic and cultural domains (Korac, 2003; Ager & Strang, 2004, 2008; Atfield, Brahmbhatt, & O'Toole, 2007; Erdal & Oeppen, 2013). Latter information tapping into subjective dimension of integration is considered crucial for the understanding of integration process especially since migration scholarship and policy makers witnessed a paradigmatic shift from top-down to bottom-up approach. While the former approach was mainly a tool designed by states to force migrants adopt host country's cultural values and socio-economic goals regardless of migrants' personal aspirations and cultural backgrounds, the latter approach seems more sensitive to migrants' own experiences, perceptions and orientations. As suggested by Korac (2003), immigrants' voice requires full attention if societies aim to raise their cohesiveness through tailored integration policies: 'If integration is to be understood as a two-way process, rather than a kind of medication that refugees take in order to "fit in", then they should

contribute to the processes in which integration is defined, facilitated and assessed' (Korac, 2003: 4).

The main assumption behind conceptualizing integration as a subjective process is that the process is largely shaped by the immigrants' assessments and aspirations and that by looking at the 'subjective world of the actor's experience' we will reach a more adequate understanding of the troubles and concerns witnessd by immigrants in the process of integration (Atfield *et al.*, 2007; Korac, 2003). One major implication of this way of understanding integration is the acknowledgment of migrants' agency, as actors who do intervene actively in the process of adapting to a new society, developing their own strategies of a successful integration and ways of relating to the host society (Korac, 2003). In addition, we consider immigrants as knowledgeable actors whose experiences also reflect the natives' attitudes towards immigration and categories of immigrants. Therefore, in order to make appropriate use of their narratives, we need to explore natives' attitudes as well, and to understand what factors are influencing these anti-immigrant attitudes. Romanians seem not very welcoming when it comes to receiving immigrants or other persons with attributes different than those of majority group (e.g. sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity). Regarding immigrants in particular, significant shares of Romanian respondents declare that they rather perceive the size of immigrant group large enough or even larger than needed (about one fifth of the respondents according to the Romanian Barometer on Immigrants' Integration survey, 2014), in spite of the fact that figures show that Romania has relatively few immigrants compared to other European countries. There is however a large share (33%)

of people who cannot assess the immigrant group or who avoid responding such question. These non-responses may partly conceal negative assessments that may not be overtly acknowledged because of social desirability of displaying multicultural attitudes, especially since Romanians became EU citizens and are therefore expected to endorse such attitudes as most Europeans are thought to uphold.

The most recent annual report on mobility of the European Commission released in January 2018[1] show that Romania, alongside Poland, do represent the countries in EU with the highest numbers of movers towards other European countries, while inflows of migrants remain limited leading to negative net mobility. However, in many instances actual numbers of migrants and perceptions of group size of immigrants in a specific country may not converge (Alba *et al.*, 2005). Research findings show that natives' biased perceptions regarding the over-presence of immigrants can be conducive to the rising of xenophobic attitudes and feelings of threats by immigrants (Miles-Johnson, 2018). These feelings can become exacerbated especially during economic downturn and during political turmoil or other negative circumstances (Fussell, 2014). In these latter contexts, migrants can be seen as real competitors in the labour market, people who steal jobs away from natives, or people who threat cultural aspects of natives' life or even increase criminality rates making neighborhoods insecure places to inhabit. Vlase & Preoteasa (2017) show that these different kinds of threats are present in comparable

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[1]   https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/2017_report_on_ intra-eu_labour_mobility.pdf

shares in respondents' views, suggesting that the fear of immigration is not negligible among Romanians. For instance, more than a quarter of respondents to Romanian Barometer on Immigrants' Integration (2014) declared that they fear to a large and very large extent that immigrants could take away natives' jobs, 14% of Romanians think that immigrants undermine cultural life of our country, and about one fifth of population fear to a large and very large degree that immigrants increase criminality, according to the latter source.

In the literature immigrants are also viewed as actors with different needs and resources due to age, gender, socio-economic and cultural background differences. This means that there are a variety of experiences of adapting or modes of integration and different strategies developed to face the challenges posed by the contact with a new culture. Immigrants' ability to creatively combine different elements of the two cultures in a so-called process of cultural hybridization constitutes an example in this sense (Castles *et al.,* 2002). The literature has made however few inroads into how gender of native population may shape attitudes towards immigrants. These observations represent therefore a starting point for this chapter aiming to address the relevance of gender, in intersection with other dimensions (e.g. education, ethnicity, social class), may influence attitudes and behaviors towards immigrants, facilitating or constraining their integration. Romania can be considered therefore a fertile ground for research since it enables a theoretical re-conceptualization of immigrants' integration in a context where immigration history, political context and economic circumstances strongly differ from other traditional immigration

countries (e.g. Germany, France, Norway). Even if the immigration in Romania remains lower in magnitude compared to these traditional immigration countries, this is not a legitimate reason to ignore the possible developments in the future and to downplay the consequences of immigrants' integration. Rather, scholars and policy makers shall jointly consider these developments and their attendant consequences if society needs to more towards more cohesion and solidarity contributing to the well-being of all, irrespective of their ethnicity, gender, class, and so on.

Research on immigrants' integration has received a tremendous interest from scholars from a wide range of disciplines (*e.g.* psychology, anthropology, sociology, social policy). Many researchers show that process of integration and its outcomes vary by categories of immigrants according to their attributes, by their skill level and by business sectors in which immigrants are active (Okólski, 2000; Benson-Rea & Rawlinson, 2003, Ackers, 2005, Juhasz Liebermann, Suter & Iglesias Rutishauser, 2014; Voicu & Vlase 2014). To date, the bulk of research dealing with integration of immigrants has done so by independently considering their various group characteristics, while only a handful of studies attend to the intersectionality of various categories in shaping the integration subjective experiences. One such exception is the work by Riaño and her colleagues (2015) who highlight the unexpected pathways of integration by high-skilled immigrant women in Switzerland depending on the intersection of several interwoven identity dimensions (e.g. gender, education, marital status) and structural characteristics situated in time and place (e.g. the framing of immigrants' status by immigration policy, the gender culture

prevailing in the place of relocation, the biographical and historical time when migration occurred).

Recent insights from migration literature evidence the need for the study of integration with a more complex approach that could be viably attuned to the current context of global cities in which both local and global opportunities and constraints affect individuals' lives beyond their belonging to ethnic/national boundaries and other predefined categories (e.g. gender, race, class). Such findings are a stepping stone in addressing the complex integration experiences and their outcomes. Intersectionality proves especially helpful in unpacking immigrants' experiences of marginalization and their agency in order to foster their integration and to overcome several intersectional vulnerabilities that emanate from their subordinate positions in relation to different dimensions that their identity is intimately tied to.

Romania is currently attracting an increasing number of immigrants. The number of immigrants living in Romania suggest that this country is increasingly being seen as a destination for many third country nationals and EU country nationals alike (Vlase & Preoteasa, 2017). Most of the immigrants in Romania are from Moldova, followed by Turkey, and China, along with some intra-EU national groups (*e.g.* Italy, Germany, France). The diversity of immigrants' origin represents a legitimate reason to add ethnicity as a dimension of research inquiries about subjective integration experiences, while gender will help reveal the patterns of integration contingent upon the interaction between different gender cultures of natives and immigrants. Studies that deliberately choose these two dimensions for analysis may not rule out the possibility that other