

Liminality in narratives of integration: Influence of social media use on situational ethnicity of migrants

Abstract:

Given difficult conditions in different regions of the world, it is no wonder that people embark on journeys to regions where they may feel secure, seek refuge, be able to acquire a livelihood, as well as carry on a type of living. At the same time, when migrants arrive in a new country that they have hitherto never been to, there is an expectation that they will integrate into the host country's way of life, buy into shared beliefs and prevalent value systems. Many migrants are active social media users and so their digital proclivities tend to define their narratives as does their physical realities. Therefore, deconstruction of digital narratives of migrants may lead to a conceptualisation of transitional ethnicities pertaining to virtual and physical journeys.

Preliminary evidence on social media use among migrants to Germany, do not attest to the unalloyed blessing that social media is in aiding integration. In contrast social media-based engagement by migrants highlights encouragement of effects of isolation, and consequent ghetto-isation. Drawing upon extant literature on anthropology of migration, we argue that migrants' use of social media creates a liminality that is synonymous to ambiguity and disorientation that may diminish through a composite adaptation of virtual and physical ethnic identities. Evidence for the study was collected through in-depth interviews of migrants in several Swedish cities including Stockholm, Jönköping, Malmö, and Gothenburg.

Movement of peoples from their place of birth to newer, unfamiliar locations are always fraught with experiences. In a way questions about migration relate to why people move, who moves, and what happens after they move. Anthropologists have tended to work at both ends of the migration process, beginning in the country of origin and asking what prompts individuals to leave particular communities and then what happens to them in their place of destination, including if and how they stay connected to their places of origin (Brettell, 2003). Whilst some of these journeys may be brief, longer ones with permanent stays at destinations can influence lives and livelihoods in various unforeseen ways. Compulsions to undertake journeys like the need to seek refuge, to secure a livelihood, to carry on a type of living, to be part of a civilisation as an aspiration, have existed ever since the birth of man. At the same time man made upheavals like wars, have also encouraged forced migrations. It is such forcible movements that seem to generate various kinds of situational ethnicities (Eriksen, 2001) in the newly emergent city spaces.

How is situational ethnicity among migrant communities influenced through the use of new technologies like social media?

References:

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