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## New Multicultural Identities in Europe

Toğuşlu, Erkan , Leman, Johan, Sezgin, İsmail Mesut

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CHAPTER 4  
Immigrant Identity, Social Adaptation  
and Post-Secular Society in Europe

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*Marcel Mečiar*

This chapter deals with several interconnected topics – the social identity of immigrants, the process of adaptation and changes in identity construction. First, the author briefly introduces some shifts in theorizing identity (with the focus on immigrant identity) that were caused by the narrative turn in social sciences, and presents a discussion on acculturation and the adaptation process. Second, an analysis of adaptation difficulties is further introduced via the real-life stories of immigrants from 8 countries of the European Union. The analysis follows several frameworks of the adaptation difficulties from the immigrant's subjective point of view: legal and social status; the labour market and work permits; the recognition of qualifications; education and learning a new culture; housing; interpersonal conflicts; stereotypes and misunderstandings. Third, the chapter attempts to outline how adaptation issues (both successes and difficulties) influence the formation of immigrant identity. The last section of the chapter discusses how the formation of immigrant identities has changed in the post-secular condition. The concept of post-secular society is not understood as some kind of totally 'new' reality that is somehow significantly different from a previous 'secular' reality (Moberg, Granholm and Nynäs 2012: 3), but rather as a reflection of the apparent contemporary resurgence of religion in the public sphere.

## Social identity, adaptation strategies and narratives

In this section, the theoretical background and the interconnections between the concepts of social identity formation (in sociology), adaptation strategies and narratives as a medium for identity research will be discussed.

Szaló (2003), when introducing his own perspective on social identity formation, follows social constructionist principles and post-structuralist conceptions about language, knowledge and power. In doing so, he “brings back to life” the social identity of an individual when – in agreement with Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) – he places it among the elements that form the social reality and not among attributes merely derived from heterogeneous social processes. The self-identity of human subjects and configurations of their social identities are therefore “inevitably connected to meanings, practices, and experiences that are constituted by particular discourses and institutions” (Szaló 2003: 13). He further distinguishes between *self-identities* which “refer to the forms of self-cognition that is formed by reflexive discursive practices”, and *identity-types* which “refer to the forms of knowledge that is constructed by discursive practices that constitute typification schemata relating to people in general.”

*Social identities* are then understood as particular identity-types that “typify/classify individuals by referring them to collectivities” while the typification schemata come from a discourse 1.) describing individuals as elements of collectivities (larger social groups), and 2.) articulating knowledge about the meanings of belonging to a particular collectivity (Szaló 2003: 16-17). Social identity can be viewed analytically from the perspective of social categorization (i.e. cognition, labelling, and classification of others according to identity-types – e.g. a woman, a teacher, French) and group identification (i.e. identification with a group, acceptance of a particular identity) (Jenkins 2000).

After a brief introduction to the concept of socially and discursively constructed identity we will focus on the concept of acculturation and adaptation of the identity-type (social category) of *an immigrant*.

Scholarly literature dealing with acculturation and adaptation shows that two dominant aspects of acculturation – a) preservation of one’s heritage culture and b) adaptation to the host society – “are conceptually distinct and can vary independently” (Liebkind 2001 in Phinney et al. 2001: 495). Emerging from these two analytical distinctions that can be turned into the real life question of a newcomer (A = “my cultural heritage” and/or B = “integration to society”),

the four acculturation strategies have been identified – integration (A+, B+), assimilation (A-, B+), separation (A+, B-), and marginalization (A-, B-) (Berry 1997: 9-10). The concept is based on Berry's acculturation model, which distinguishes between assimilation, integration, rejection and deculturation. Phinney's acculturation strategies follow four slightly different categories: 1) an individual who retains a strong ethnic identity while also identifying with the new society is considered to have an *integrated* (or *bicultural*) *identity*. 2) An individual with a strong ethnic identity while not identifying with the new society constructs a *separated identity*. 3) Another type, in which an individual who gives up an ethnic identity but identifies with the new society, results in an *assimilated identity*. 4) The individual with no identification with either has a *marginalized identity* (Phinney et al. 2001: 495).

When approaching the relationship between adaptation (as a question of belonging) and ethnicity, Floya Anthias (2002) chooses to fight the cultural essentialist weaknesses in understanding social identities with her own conceptual weapons. Methodologically, she uses a narrative (told stories) to reach her concept of translocational positionality, which refers to placement within a set of relationships and practices that implicate identification and 'performativity' or action. These relations and practices refer to social position (as a set of effectivities, as outcome) and simultaneously to social positioning (as a set of practices, actions, meanings, as a process). The concept of translocational positionality then leads to the observation that "issues of exclusion, political mobilization on the basis of collective identity and narrations of belonging and otherness cannot be addressed adequately unless they are located within other constructions of difference and identity, particularly around gender and class" (Anthias 2002: 502).

Similarly, Anna De Fina (2000) focuses on a narrative in her study of immigrant identity. She considers language to be the discursive practice that has an influence on shaping identity. Discursive practices reproduce and constantly form social relationships and socio-cultural constructs that people use to give sense to the reality around them. De Fina shows how the formation of ethnic identity takes place in the narratives (of Mexican immigrants in the U.S.A.) to a large extent built on defining the boundaries against other ethnicities, or at least on mentioning people's different origins in their stories from a new society. De Fina further states that "the ethnic mentions are used in the stories to affirm certain characteristics of one's identity and the identity of others via the presentation and evaluation of behaviours" (2000: 154). Identity (its ethnic component, or rather constructs and

boundaries connected to it) is a major point of orientation in society – especially in the multiethnic and multicultural environment.

Thus, the practical question asking how we can empirically study identity finds its answer in the concept of narrative. A narrative emerging from telling stories is a universal human institution and also a means of ‘carrying’ and manifesting discourse. Anna De Fina (2000) regards narrative as a discursive practice that creates, reproduces and continuously shapes “the social relationships and sociocultural constructs that individuals use to make a sense of their reality” (Foucault 1975 in De Fina 2000: 133).

### **Immigrant adaptation in stories of “a good practice”**

The study follows, re-evaluates and widens the scope of a practitioner-oriented project supported by funds from the EU. Within the project entitled *Trainers for European Citizens*, team members from eight European countries – working as pedagogues, trainers and social workers – conducted biographical interviews with immigrants who were at the time in the process of adapting to their host societies. The TEC project team gathered 23 biographical interviews in 2003 with immigrants from eight European countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Lithuania, Germany, Greece, Spain and Sweden). This effort brought up a set of narratives containing the biographical reflections of so-called ‘good practice’ – i.e. successful adaptation to a host society.

The research resulted in both new teaching tools for trainers and theoretical conformation of the complexity of migration, and of hardship (difficulties) in adaptation. The people who shared their stories with the research team represented all types of migration as they were classified in migration studies (Castles and Miller 1993). The narrative methods also helped to display the dynamics and changes in the adaptation process.

In this chapter we will not focus on the reasons for migration, but on the subjective perspective of an immigrant during the process of adaptation. Let us summarize briefly some aspects of the lives of immigrants in the new (European) society. The stories of individual actors can be seen in life stories that follow the original trajectories, each follows his or her own path, and each of them is independent and uniquely individual. However, it may be possible to reveal some similar or shared experiences and difficulties in their life stories.

1. *Immigration policy and the question of (not just legal) status.* The crucial issue for an immigrant in a receiving country is the legalization of stay (residence permit) on which access to the labour market (legal employment) heavily depends and which may lead (in different legal systems after varying numbers of years) to acquiring citizenship. The social status of an applicant for a residence permit also determines a way of acquiring the residence permit. There is certainly a difference between the social position of a student, highly qualified specialist, unqualified worker or a refugee. In some cases it takes several years to achieve the status based on residence permits.

During their long-term process of negotiation with the state bureaucratic apparatus, immigrants may experience unpleasant and unsettled feelings about the result of their efforts to obtain legalization.

*“Some two years ago we were even threatened with deportation to Sri Lanka because our asylum was not recognized, but a supportive circle of our friends and relatives was formed to stop us from being deported and to speak up for us in our struggle for permanent residence. A petition was drawn up and given to the parliament of the Federal State of ..., pointing out our level of integration and the trauma we have suffered [both were still undergoing therapeutic treatment at the time of the research]. After the medical reports had been submitted, officials prolonged our stay. At the end of 2003, we have to again take our latest health details to the immigration office to extend our stay again. So, even after almost 10 years then, we still do not have permanent residence status. It is hard to make bigger life plans in this kind of situation. We are well integrated, we work and pay taxes, we can speak German, but it seems that it isn't enough.”* [Asylum seekers and a married couple Prem and Cynthia, both aged 56 years. Country of origin: Sri Lanka, receiving country: Germany. Narrative focus (=Nf): 2001 and mid-2003.]

The case of a married couple from Sri Lanka who came to Germany as political refugees points to the discrepancy between ‘actual’ adaptation and the decision process of granting permanent residence status (i.e. the possibility/impossibility of permanent residence). The story of Prem and Cynthia is significant in terms of adaptation theory. Employment, the ability to communicate in the official language and integration into informal networks (friends, acquaintances willing to help with the petition) do not seem to be enough to grant them a permanent residence permit. The subjective qualities expressed by a sincere effort in the development

of cultural (German) and social (religious contacts in the organization and participation in non-formal education) ties stand in contrast to the solid walls of the immigration policy so far of “the most populous country in Europe” (Ringen 2003: 555). Although countries with high numbers of asylum applications tend to have stricter criteria and lower recognition rates for asylum claims (Neumayer 2005), the situation of well-adapted, integrated immigrants seems to concur with the findings of the German refugee interest group Pro-Asyl (Kopp 2000 in Neumayer 2005: 64), arguing that the chances of becoming recognized as a refugee depend on the country in which the claim is processed if significant cross-country differences in asylum recognition rates are taken into account.

As research has shown (Phinney et al. 2001: 500) social adaptation may depend more on local circumstances, personal relationships, and activity settings in economic terms. Nonetheless, national policies regarding the state recognition of immigrants are equally relevant. In this paradoxical case, the adaptation strategy of integration was not accompanied by parallel inclusion expressed by relevant legal status.

2. *Employment and the labour market.* Finding employment is another important aspect of an immigrant’s adaptation process that is usually hard to achieve. In cases where a special organization works with qualified professionals who can offer assistance, job hunting is more successful. The refugee co-ordinator of the immigration unit (Ahmad) played an important role in the successful adaptation of the newcomer (Hussein) in terms of maintaining his client’s self-esteem, in the following example from Sweden.

*“I made contact with Hussein. Together we went to the employment agency to register Hussein for work. Hussein quickly made new friends and was also able to visit his cousin who lives in Stockholm. Nevertheless, Hussein felt sad and he could not really enjoy his new life. I realised that Hussein had to find a job, because his whole identity and motivation depended on his chances of finding a job and doing his share. It seemed to be more important to him to have a job than to be able to speak Swedish.”* [Ahmad (about Hussein), Iraq – Sweden. Nf: 2003]

The specialized counsellor, in addition to the permanently established organizations and projects working with immigrant groups, confirms the importance of social support in the search for a job. More importantly, having a

job and doing one's share (for a society) became a necessary motivational factor for the formation of a person's integrated identity and preserving "the sense of belonging" (Maydell-Stevens, Masgoret and Ward 2007: 186).

Unemployment has an influence on the psychological condition of an individual and the social aspect of his or her existence (deprivation, inferior status both as an immigrant and an unemployed person, or a voluntary closure). Occupation can even be seen as a personal "salvation" because a newcomer desires not only to be economically independent, but also useful.

*"I love the job – and for a variety of reasons. I have always believed that helping other people is an important task. ... I also need the job to keep body and soul together, of course! After finishing the two Dutch courses and the course at ..., I had no further prospects and ended up sitting at home waiting for a second interview with the Belgian Immigration Service to be recognized as a refugee. I had no job offers at all until a consultant at the ... [a social agency] spotted this and advised me to apply for a job at ..., which turned out to be my salvation! My job is not only useful, necessary and interesting, but it is also my life."*  
[Khaldoun, age 31. Iraq-Belgium. Nf: 2003]

Khaldoun, who studied English language and literature (in his native Iraq, later in Yemen, and in the United Kingdom), is an example that defies the conventional notion of immigrants with employment below their qualifications. Certain numbers of immigrants, however, do not get a job in the same field or at the same qualification level (Vinokurov, Birman and Trickett 2000). "Immigrants are generally bunched at the two extremities of the skill spectrum – the professional and the unskilled (the immigrant workers may have been skilled in his or her place of origin but become de-skilled through migration)" (Harris 2000: 95). According to Harris, there is competition between native and immigrant in professions, whereas unskilled workers do not compete with natives for the same jobs. For that reason, unemployment rates tend to be higher for professional than for unskilled immigrants (Harris 2000).

Several interviewees talked about a specific social practice at employment bureaus that had to offer a job first to an applicant with citizenship.

*"At this time we also received our work permits, allowing us to find employment. In practice, this proved to be more complicated: as soon as we managed to find a job, we had to inform the employment office to receive permission only for*



*that vacant job offer. But, instead of giving us the job, the office would use this information to provide jobs for German applicants.* [Prem and Cynthia, both aged 56 years. Country of origin: Sri Lanka – Receiving country: Germany. Nf: 1994-1995.]

Another qualified immigrant (a sport manager) had to face a similar problem when – after a voluntary internship during his studies – his potential employer offered him a full-time contract. The struggle for the well-paid job he was very well qualified for lasted for over two years. The employer was able to wait for all this time because Diallo could work part-time on the basis of his student status. In France, in order to recruit a foreigner an employer first has to let the National Employment Agency (*Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi*) know about his offer. If after six weeks no French candidate, or citizen of the European Union, has been found who meets the job requirements, then the employer can make a request for a work permit for a foreigner.

*“So then, with the support of my employer, we embarked upon “a submission for a legal decision.” The first request dated from 1999. We were then in 2000. The response came back. Finally, permission to work had been given! But we were nearly into 2002!”* [Diallo, age 32, Senegal – France. Nf: 1999-2003]

The question of finding and obtaining suitable employment is closely linked with the following problem of the recognition of qualifications acquired in other countries.

3. *Recognition of diplomas and documents for qualification.* Many European countries have a problem with the recognition of foreign diplomas and other certificates of qualification. A qualified person whose diploma is not validated in the receiving country is often forced to take a job requiring lower qualifications (Harris 2000). Some newcomers may have difficulty in obtaining proof of qualifications if they were forced to flee their countries of origin – that is, asylum seekers or persons with refugee status. Yet, the help of kinship networks in the country of origin or of either non-governmental or governmental organizations can be accepted in this case, as the will for foreign credential recognition exists. One interviewee even encountered a problem with the recognition of his diploma obtained in another country of the European Union, which he perceived as a discriminatory practice based on his national origin.

*“Things were very different in the Netherlands. My educational qualifications were regarded as not being at the appropriate level simply because I was Moroccan... and I was told that I would have to start again from the beginning because my academic certificates were not recognized as valid. It was assumed that the academic qualifications of immigrants could not have the validity of the equivalent Dutch qualifications. Even my French diploma was not recognized! This was a great disappointment. I was later able to get a partial accreditation of my qualifications at the University of..., where I was allowed to participate in an academic research project, but was only used for field work. I feel that I am now too old to have much chance of being able to continue my studies. In the Netherlands I worked initially in a leather factory as a manual worker, and then later found work teaching French and Arabic in a private school.”*  
 [Lahcen, age 41, Morocco – the Netherlands, then Belgium. Nf: late 1990s]

Besides the negative impact on motivation that may affect the formation of marginalized identity, and difficulties with obtaining work that would be adequate to one’s qualifications, the topic of ‘brain drain’ was brought up by another conversational partner.

*“Even my wife, who was a pharmacist in Iraq, has so far only been offered work as a cleaning lady. Lecturing to newcomers or working for a social agency is often the best that we can get. Little wonder then that hardly any of the university educated refugees want to stay in Belgium and that there is a full scale brain-drain from Belgium in progress. Only the poorly educated stay as they have no other option open to them.”* [Khaldoun, age 31, Iraq - Belgium. Nf: 2003]

In the case where ‘highly skilled’ professionals (particularly researchers) emigrate from the country where they were educated and trained, the destination country receives the human capital as a gift. According to neoclassical economic theory it has made a ‘brain gain’, whereas the country of origin has suffered a ‘brain drain’ (Wächter 2006: 53). The approach towards educated immigrants in Europe can in terms of the previous metaphor be described as a lack of interest in a brain gain. Recent research focused on a brain drain from Europe to the U.S.A. does not fully answer the question of how many emigrating professionals come via Europe from Non-EU countries.

4. *Education and learning new cultures.* Education does not only fulfil the role of teaching immigrants the language of a host country. Stories and experiences of immigrants indicate the practical importance of courses dealing with the development of social and intercultural communication skills. Learning may become a mutual process, both from the perspective of the ‘new’ and ‘old’ Europeans, as well as from that of formal and informal learning. Formal education takes place in a classroom when a teacher provides the necessary knowledge to students a) for the successful completion of the course, and b) for further use in life. And the usability of knowledge and acquired skills is the most important factor for incoming foreigners. The informal side of learning is expressed in communicating with students outside the classroom or lecture hall and is very necessary both in terms of building confidence and also for the process of adaptation and learning a new culture. In some European countries with a rich history of immigration, there are already courses that teach and transfer socio-cultural competencies.

Human identity is formed through the reaction and perception of the physical world and through relationships with others, which are mediated by language – the use of language (in terms of discursive practices). “And while the tools with which people produce are the medium through which they gain mastery over nature, so language is the tool and the medium through which people gain influence over the behaviour of others and over their own actions” (Burkitt 1991: 139).

*“It is important that newcomers learn the language as soon as possible so that they can get started on something and not just sit around at home all day. It is only since I have been able to follow everything which is said on TV and can talk to people that I have come to understand Belgium.” [Khaldoun, age 31, Iraq - Belgium. Nf: 2003]*

Nevertheless, the language is not the only thing an immigrant needs in order to adapt to a new culture. If we understand language as a gateway to culture (in the sense of understanding values, norms, symbols and institutions), in particular it functions as the means for the transmission of culture. Usually, the newcomer acquires the rudiments of the new culture informally, which is sometimes insufficient, especially when members of the immigrant community as individuals are socially and spatially separated from the culture of the host country (in refugee centres, ethnic districts). Whoever feels that he/she needs to know more attends courses providing skills and competences for social integration.

*“That was cool! The course was about intercultural competence. There were about 15 people on the course, some Germans, and people from Turkey, Russia, Senegal, and so on. Everybody talked about his or her experience with other cultures, about confrontation, problems and ways to deal with them. They also put on culturally diverse theatre shows. I liked this course a lot and I had lots of interesting experiences.”* [Meïssa: age 35?, Senegal - Germany. Nf: 2001]

The actual preparation and teaching of such courses must necessarily be based on “sensitivity” in intercultural communication, since stereotypical ideas are lurking at every step and in the structures of language as well.

*“I take a very critical view of the Social Orientation course which I have to teach: even the course itself contains prejudices! I try to put this into perspective for my students. For me the most important element is communication. I find it striking that there is so little contact between newcomers and Belgians: it is exactly the contact that I want to promote, and in so doing to remove the obstacles. Here too I again emphasize the importance of the necessary acceptance on both sides.”* [Lahcen, age 41, Morocco - Belgium. Nf: 2003]

Courses alone cannot replace communication between members of different cultures. As the basic deficiency and therefore imperative, a need for informal contacts and for a tendency to value tolerance and solidarity remains.

5. *Housing.* Private housing is very important because staying in special accommodation facilities (camps, centres) may be stressful. Privacy is highly important in terms of psychological well-being and social significance in many cultures, although ideas about it may vary. Differences in the notion of private space may sometimes lead to misunderstandings. For instance, paying a visit is in some cultures a very common and frequent social practice.

*“You may only know the person you are going to visit a little, but there is no need to call in advance, to arrange it. You just come. You cannot say anything to contradict an older person. You have to stand up and remain standing till the guest is seated.”* [Tumisa, age 43, Chechnya - Lithuania. Nf: 2003]

Noise, crowding and partying during the night probably do not meet with understanding from tenants and apartment owners. But it can often be an

unwritten (but still significant) social norm tied to hospitality to visitors. The housing sector is also a social field of discrimination in which prejudices against particular groups of immigrants seem to play an important role.

*“I’ve not had any difficulties finding accommodation, for example. But other Africans have had problems. Owners who don’t want them, or who impose additional barriers.”* [Diallo, age 32, Senegal - France. Nf: 1999-2003]

As pointed out by social geographer Ash Amin (2004), some patterns of discrimination from previous migration waves persist and spread to countries with newer migration (housing, labour market, social rights).

6. *Interpersonal conflict and the problem of misunderstanding or prejudice.* Some people respond negatively to cultural diversity or with a certain degree of distrust, or fear, and these diverse patterns are collectively referred to as xenophobia. The immigrant experience shows that misunderstandings or stereotypes can be overcome through communication, assertiveness and patience, which, however, will not succeed without goodwill on both sides.

The issue of prejudices is more complex than just being reducible to ethnicity – it also unfolds along the axes of gender, class and age differences. Besides the phenotypic human characteristics, the recognition process is strongly influenced by the language or its method of use-speech.

*“And then there are also some amusing situations. I’ve an accent, after all. So, at work, when I answer the phone I sometimes get someone saying ‘No, I want to speak to the person in charge.’ So I have to explain that, in fact, I am the person in charge...”* [Diallo, age 32, Senegal - France. Nf: 1999-2003]

The quotation is a good example of the validity of Foucault’s concept about the relationship of power and language as discursive practices (Szaló 2003) and Goffman’s (2003) concept of stigma. The caller heard Diallo’s foreign accent and he took from the stock of his knowledge the stereotypical idea that a foreigner would not be a manager but rather an assistant. Diallo is stigmatized for his French accent. But he is not discouraged by the fact and maintains a positive attitude.

A newcomer is usually expected, given his status as a foreigner, to take a first step. Charity’s story shows that the strategy may be successful on the whole. Initial distrust can be broken right at the beginning, but this depends on a particular

situation, people and conditions in given society. In reacting to various forms of ‘othering’, an immigrant or an immigrant group “may develop arrangements of voluntary separation and strive for full-fledged recognition by emphasising their social ... inclusion on multicultural grounds” (Szalai 2010: 5), or may be singled out as the consequence of refusal on the part of a major society (e.g. large segments of the Roma community in Central Europe).

*“When I moved into the neighbourhood, I visited all the neighbours and introduced myself. I get on well with my neighbours and I have a wide circle of friends, both old and new Swedes. It was not difficult to become integrated into society. Sometimes I may hear someone saying stupid things, but I don’t take them seriously, I just consider it narrow-mindedness.”* [Charity, age 62, Ghana - Sweden. Nf: 1993-2003]

*“The management also often pointed me out as a good example for the local factory workers. This, however, caused some of my colleagues to sneer at me. I still remember comments I had to listen to, such as “Let Slanty-eyes do it, he’s the best”, and the like. On the other hand I remember the positive behaviour of other Czech colleagues, who frequently offered snacks for me to taste, like traditional Czech stuffed cake.”* Vervang door: [Nguyen, age 40, Vietnam - Czech Republic. Nf: late 1980s]

Charity and Nguyen construct in their narratives the positive pole of an immigrant’s identity. Charity is not taking everything anyone says very seriously and retains a positive attitude even in the event of some negative reactions from patients or derogatory comments of people in her environment. Nguyen in the same manner managed to integrate himself in spite of the xenophobic and even racist behaviour of some of his co-workers – which was caused by social strains during the economic transformation in the first half of the 1990s - and diminished the cultural differences and peoples’ crassness by learning Czech on a professional level (as a translator) via contacts with open-minded locals who became his friends.

Although narratives in the study consisted of stories of good practice as interpreted by successfully integrated immigrants, these people encountered many difficulties and faced many troubles during this long-term process. The interviewees presented several situations in which it had to be very hard not to change course into the direction of a marginalized or a separated identity, and which showed that the disadvantages resulted from “their social position” in the labour market and legal system of host countries rather “than from their

ethnicity” (Burnett 1998: 14). In this context the term ethnicity implicitly means not only belonging to an ethnic group but also cultural values and norms. While in this part we have approached the immigrant identity in the period before the open formulation of the post-secular thesis (Habermas 2007 in particular), the last part of this chapter deals with changes in the (perception of) immigrant identity that appeared after the realization of the post-secular situation.

### **Immigrant identities in the post-secular society**

The kind reader who has followed the text to this point may be thinking about why religion was not mentioned in the narratives analysed. The original research design contained the question about religious identity and about the adaptation of religious practices in a host country, but team members from the West European countries considered these questions to be inappropriate, because religion was deemed to be a matter of the private sphere. This brief account from 2003 figures as evidence of the situation before several significant changes during the 2000s took place.

These changes have roots in the post-1945 development of Europe which needed to be reconstructed after WWII. The states in Western Europe found a solution to the labour force problem that became obvious in later years in the immigration of foreign workers for temporary employment. “By the 1960s, migrant labour had become a structural feature of Western European labour markets” (Castles 2000: 7). When it became evident that the temporary workers would stay for good, the question of their integration emerged. Among the three main approaches to the incorporation of immigrants, besides assimilation and differential exclusion, multiculturalism (Castles 2002: 1154) was introduced as part of official policy, initially in classical immigrant countries such as Canada (1971) and Australia (1973). West European countries (especially Great Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden), too, began to apply, to varying degrees, multicultural policies in an attempt to integrate immigrants, in particular those of non-European descent (Modood 2007: 4). Multicultural policy has been criticized since the 1970s (Vertovec 2001: 2), with a growing intensity (but also reflexivity) during the 1990s, and was marked as dysfunctional at the beginning of the 2000s (Alibhai-Brown 2001). Multiculturalism was accused of developing ‘a parallel society’, i.e. causing the fragmentation of society into a mosaic of mutually (socially) segregated groups/communities. In less than a

decade multiculturalism was proclaimed dead (by the Bavarian state minister Horst Seehoffer) and the model of the multicultural society branded as a failure (by the German chancellor Angela Merkel and the British prime minister David Cameron) by some high-level European politicians.

Hence, the first change that has a potential influence on the formation of immigrant identity is the shift in de-emphasizing multiculturalism and openly focusing on so-called civic integration. The policy of civic integration imposes the obligation on newcomers to enrol in civic and language courses and to pass the civic integration exam if they want to obtain permanent residence permits or be accepted into the naturalization process. Although multicultural policies were fully abandoned only in the Netherlands, at the same time the civic integration approach (as a political doctrine and social policy) has developed rapidly since the late 1990s (Banting and Kymlicka 2012) and has been “adopted by, among other European states, Finland, Denmark, Austria, Germany and France” (Joppke 2007: 8).

The second process is associated with the changing perception of various religious communities among which co-existence with Muslim communities spurred the most frequent debates. Frédérique Harry (in chapter 8 of this collected volume) shows how the Norwegian far-right movements started to employ religion in their political narratives after Muslims in Europe became the centre of the public debate on integration. These nationalistic movements have in recent decades shifted the emphasis from a secular discourse that had left religion unnoticed, or was opposed to it, to a non-traditional<sup>1</sup> religious discourse by using the image of Christianity as a symbol for strengthening national identity. Post-secular society witnesses the utilization of the religious facade for the interests of secular movements and institutions. Harry’s study contributes to our understanding of the self-perception of Europeans (Norwegians) and empirically confirms that religion has since the late 2000s become a public and heavily publicized topic.

Riem Spielhaus (2006) presents a similar shift, in the example of Germany, in the perception of immigrants from Muslim countries who have come from different cultures of vast geographical areas. She claims that after decades in which immigrants’ religion was rather overlooked, “discussions on Muslims in Germany are now focusing on religious identity” (Spielhaus 2006: 17). In the debates before 2000, the immigrant issues were discussed in ethnic terms (‘the Turks’) or within the ‘natives vs foreigners’ dichotomy, whereas the more contemporary discourse emphasizes their religious affiliation. Allievi (2005) also points out that “the



immigrant has become the Muslim” and explains that some reasons for this shift are related to recent phenomena such as the increasing number of immigrants of Muslim origin and the emerging role of Islam as a public actor on the global scene. This change in perception brings the problem of homogenizing diverse groups of people with different cultural background and sets of identities that can easily be ostracized and become a political scapegoat. Moreover, the ongoing situation causes a change in the self-perception of settled immigrants, after which the importance of religious identification is steadily growing at the expense of other sources of identity. Roger Brubaker (2013) demonstrates how the relationships between language and religion have changed over the last 20 years. Although language has been both a subject and means of political contestation in the public sphere (and linked to issues of ethnicity and nationalism) and religion has been depoliticized into the realm of private worship, the counter-trend of recent years has led to the deprivatization of religion. Public religion differs from the domain of language in attempting intensively to “authoritatively regulate public and private life” (Brubaker 2013: 16). The study by Cüneyd Dinç (in chapter 2 of this volume), by explaining the importance of the role of religion in the lives of (Muslim) young post-migrants (generations born in immigrant families) in Germany, supports the thesis about gradual deprivatization of religion. All the types of post-migrant devout Muslims bring the question of religious traditions into the public domain with differing intensity as they lead the debate on whether to accept or reject life in German society.

The growth of religious diversity in the Western world can be linked to another significant change that puts into question the thesis about the secularization of modern society (Juergensmeyer 2011). The discourse is personified by one of the leading contemporary thinkers – Jürgen Habermas, who renewed the debate on the post-secular turn. Habermas (2008) assumes that a group of Western affluent societies (besides some European countries, also Canada, Australia and New Zealand), where people’s religiosity has decreased in the post-1945 period, are entering a new post-secular age.

According to Habermas, this spatially and temporally limited definition of modern societies as ‘post-secular’ does not invalidate the secularization theory as it refers to *a change in consciousness* (Habermas 2008: 20, italics in orig.) and further can be linked to the three following phenomena. The first phenomenon is based on an observation that the secularistic belief in the foreseeable disappearance of religion is weakened by global conflicts, while the second process refers to the growing importance of religion within national public spheres.

The third issue is directly linked to the object of this study because it considers the question of social integration and identities. Habermas (2008: 21) maintains that ‘the issue of tolerant coexistence between different religious communities’ is complicated by difficulties in the social integration of immigrants, and concludes that growing social inequality should not be allowed to block the process of integration. Furthermore, he argues that the democratic state should not limit the sources for the shaping of identities by reducing the diversity of voices and opinions within the public discourse.

## Conclusion

The outcomes of Habermas’ concept of the post-secular society and the message contained in it confirm the significance of the existing discourse about religious identities and link it directly to the situation in post-immigrant Western countries. The articulation of the post-secular discourse itself has a reflexive effect on society as well as on the scientific community (e.g. how social scientists approach identity at the present time). The consequences of the previously discussed changes – i.e. the emphasis on religious identifications – can obscure the understanding of immigrant identity, because widely used sociological categories (in other words, etic terms or *a priori* frameworks such as ethnicity and religiosity) may lack the explanatory depth and complexity necessary for the understanding or interpretation of what is specific for narratives about immigrants’ experiences. Unsuitable frameworks that are also changed from time to time – as we can observe in the case of the post-secular turn – can be counterproductive for understanding the common features of social adaptation and building more symbolic boundaries in the social reality can discourage social integration. Overemphasizing and (over)politicizing one of the sources of identity may cause a bias – as Spielhaus concisely argued in the case of ‘non-Christian’ immigrants in Germany – that religion is not the only source of Muslim identity and “it is certainly not the only reason for their actions” (Spielhaus 2005: 18). Stefano Allievi (2005) considers this the paradoxical situation in which the integration of Muslims and immigrants in general<sup>2</sup> gradually continues, while they are still perceived as one of the groups endangering European society. The social identity that is labelled ‘immigrant’ is constructed by the media and radicalized segments of society as a threat (the Other).<sup>3</sup> At the same time, autochthonous populations

strengthen their own reactive identities opposed to the Other within the borders of Europe.

This immigrant social identity does not overlap with the second analytical perspective, i.e. self-identity, which was presented in the middle section of the text, focusing on the narratives of the generally successful (but not non-problematic) social adaptation<sup>4</sup> of mostly non-European immigrants. The narrative texts expressed the commonness in the immigrant experience of striving to ‘fit in’ (to which a negative reaction after a failure to adapt can be a separated identity), the struggle to make a living and uprootedness (marginalized identity) from which identity issues and new identifications seem to stream and which are re/constructed in everyday life via language (Sabatos 2013), thoughts and social practices.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of all the changes, the question of relevant immigration policies, of balanced conditions in ‘the system’ and rights for immigrants still remains at the centre of the solution on how to stop the separation and marginalization of immigrant groups – that is, not to let them become minorities but ethnic *communities* (Castles & Miller 1993) and individuals with an integrated identity, i.e. people who did not forget their origin and who at the same time feel at home in the new society (Anthias 2002).

## Notes

- 1 The religious discourse may be termed non-traditional, because rather than reviving Christian values, it helps to form a sense of obligation to a national community. Traditional religion (Christianity) is put to the service of civic religion (nationalism).
- 2 Similarly in the U.S.A., according to Waters and Jiménez (2005), immigrants are being successfully incorporated into American society. (see Waters, M.C. & Jiménez, T.R. (2005) ‘Assessing Immigrant Assimilation: New Empirical and Theoretical Challenges.’ *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31: 105-25.)
- 3 This definition of social identity follows Szalo’s concept (2003), not Erickson’s theory of identity construction (Schwartz, Montgomery & Briones 2006). (see Schwartz, S.J.; Montgomery, M.J. and E. Briones (2006). ‘The Role of Identity in Acculturation among Immigrant People: Theoretical Propositions, Empirical Questions, and Applied Recommendations.’ *Human Development*, 49: 1-30.)
- 4 For a similar approach to immigrant identity that is oriented to narratives about experience and in which emic categories are interpreted and translated into etic ones during the analysis see (Maydell-Stevens, Masgoret and Ward 2007). About the analysis of immigrant

identity focused on a story structure see Benish-Weisman, M. (2009). 'Between Trauma and Redemption: Story Form Differences in Immigrant Narratives of Successful and Non successful Immigration.' *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 40(6): 953-968.

- 5 Besides anthropology, psychology and sociology, comparative literature appears to be a prolific discipline in publications dealing with identity issues.

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