

Social Insertion and Identity Construction of Second Generation Brazilian Immigrants in Canada

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Resumo: Este estudo espera estimular reflexões sobre a luta de adolescentes, filhos de imigrantes brasileiros, no que diz respeito à inserção, aceitação e pertença a uma coletividade construída por um grupo étnico diverso. O objetivo é analisar a inserção social e a construção da identidade de jovens imigrantes brasileiros. O instrumento de coleta de dados foi um questionário. Os resultados revelaram que esses jovens lamentam as perdas afetivas causadas pela imigração; têm dificuldades de inserção em um novo universo social e cultural; ainda dependem financeiramente dos pais; usam o tempo livre para viajar, dando a impressão de serem turistas em seu país de destino. Mesmo criticando o individualismo canadense e a dificuldade encontrada em fazer novas amizades, eles confirmam que não se sentem discriminados nessa nova comunidade. Entretanto, esperam retornar ao Brasil, ao calor humano dos parentes e amigos, por considerarem o afeto uma qualidade intrínseca de sua cultura original.

Abstract: This study hopes to stimulate reflections on the struggle of adolescents, children of Brazilian immigrants, regarding insertion, acceptance and belonging to a collectivity constructed by different ethnic group. The purpose is to analyze the social insertion and identity construction of young Brazilian immigrants. The data collection instrument used was a questionnaire. The results revealed that these youngsters regret the affective losses caused by immigration; have difficulties inserting into a new social and cultural universe; are still economically dependent on their parents; use their free time to travel, giving an impression that they are tourists in their country of destination. Although they criticize Canadian individualism and the difficulty encountered in building friendships, they confirm that they do not feel discriminated in this new community. However; they hope to return to Brazil, to the human warmth of friends and relatives, because they consider affectivity an inbred asset of their original culture.

The migratory flux of Brazilian middle class youngsters became really intense during the eighties because of the economic decline and increased urban violence, but over the years the profile of the Brazilian immigrant has changed.

The Brazilian community in Canada is a reproduction of three social classes in Brazil:

1. the “elite” – a small but powerful group.
2. the “middle class” – a larger group having greater social mobility.
3. the “lower class” – although they make up nearly half of the population, they do not have the opportunities to improve their condition.

There is hardly any social interaction between these groups. The first group consists mainly of Brazilian women who have married Canadians. The number of men and women in the second group is the same because the jobs are often taken up by self-employed women or those who already worked outside the home in Brazil. The third group is predominately male and generally consists of factory workers. Apparently, these three classes can only be found in Toronto, which is most probably due to the fact that the Brazilian communities in Montreal and Vancouver are small, functional and intellectual (SHIRLEY, 1999).

Some organizations were founded over the last few decades. The most important is the Samambaia Club, a non-profitable autonomous institution without religious or commercial objectives. It was established by the wives of business executives and aimed at promoting Brazilian culture through artistic, cultural, social and recreational activities (Brazil – Canada Guide, 2000).

Another organization called the Brazil Group was set up at the same time in Toronto so that Brazilian middle class families could socialize (SHIRLEY, 1999).

Other such associations like the Brazil/Canada Association (Toronto, 1993) and Brazil Net were established to improve commercial and cultural relationships between the two countries (Brazil/Canada Guide – 2000).

The main factors that have brought about Brazilian unity are the clubs and cultural associations like bands, festivals, radio and TV, which have often helped to create specific subgroups with the Portuguese and other Latin American communities. Culturally, Brazilians consider the family to be the main institution that extends to all the rest. They maintain strong family ties, including with the relatives in Brazil and as such many consider their stay in the country as temporary because they plan to return after accumulating the necessary capital (SHIRLEY, 1999).

An analysis of the results on Brazilian immigrants study (MAC FADDEN, 2001) brings to light a curious fact and many important aspects of behavior. This observation is in keeping with the Brazilian culture. Brazil has always been a country of immigrants and it seems that it hasn't had enough time to establish a migratory culture that has a community spirit in place of individualism. Brazilians prefer to remain in anonymity rather than become a part of statistics. A certain feeling of ambivalence also seemed to permeate the group in relation to the country of origin and this made them uninterested in participating in the study. Traditionally, Brazilians do not like to leave their country and friends, as leaving behind family and cultural values creates a great deal of emotional and psychological pressure in the community. On the other hand, the individual feels expelled and exiled from Brazilian society and economy due to the lack of quality of life perspectives, absence of social mobility and employment that impede a good future in the country of origin. Another factor that contributes to the feeling of rejection is the profound deception felt regarding politicians and their inability to fulfill campaign promises. It should be remembered that, despite the reasons for migrating, most of them still nurture the desire to return to their mother country but the innumerable difficulties faced to establish a sound economic condition hamper this dream of returning. On the other hand, despite of the strong affective ties with Brazil and feelings of being a foreigner; some of them have opted to stay on in the country because of the satisfactory relationships established in Canada. Although most of them claim that they have adapted and integrated in Canadian society some of the data demonstrate that the adaptation is

mainly based on family and work relationships and that any changes or difficulties in these areas may result in significant physical, psychological and social disorders. (MAC FADDEN, 2001).

Although the learning of new cultural values and practices can be facilitated by religious, educational and recreational interventions, the process is nevertheless a long interactive one involving the culture of origin and the new culture. Often, the difficulties encountered originate from profound socio-cultural, religious and ethnic differences between the two societies. Adaptation requires reorganization to a new life style, the incorporation of new values and attitudes and the amplification of a repertory of behavior and conduct (MAC FADDEN, 2001).

The integration and insertion of immigrants occurs through their descendents. Any analysis of this question must, of necessity, start with an evaluation of the individual immigrant's life project and how this is reflected in the second-generation children. An evaluation of the extent to which cultural aspects, such as family relationships, and the transmission of knowledge and values have been retained, modified or substituted is part of such an analysis. Using this approach, it is possible to assess what has been lost and what has been recreated from one generation to another. Another point to be considered is the influence that nationality can have on the group being studied. Prejudices, the use of pejorative terms, misunderstanding about the mode of life and a tendency to distance immigrants and their descendents are only a few of the difficulties faced in this area. A third point to emphasize is the value the children of immigrants attribute to their own background, and the influence this has had during the different phases of life. The simple isolation of a group can lead children to feel they are different, with different values and education. This may lead them to conclude that their origin is a hindrance or cause for distancing and can have a negative impact on their insertion. On the other hand, group attitudes and behavior can help the individual to value his or her origin in a new country (OSMAN, 1999).

Retention of the mother tongue, culture, customs, religion, leisure and contact with the homeland are important characteristics during the formation of the second generation. However, it is fundamental to assess how these aspects influence the relationships with national groups, how they may make integration more difficult, and the importance that immigrant children attach to this problem (OSMAN, 1999).

Some concepts about normal adolescence

Adolescent is a Latin word that signifies growth and development into a young adult. According to Erickson, the adolescent seeks his identity from the earliest stages of childhood and uses a continuous process of differentiation that widens as his circle of significant people grows. It is only during adolescence that an individual is able to identify his Ego with reference to time and space, recognizing the past and planning for the future. Identification is the most important part of this task and is accomplished through various processes. During this phase, it is very important to belong to a group as it * helps the individual find his identity within a social context — this is an adolescent need. The adolescent attains his identity by integrating childhood identifications, facing the challenges of the adult world and understanding his new position in the psychosocial, economic and cultural spheres.

Erikson (1976) discusses the concept of psychosocial moratorium. It corresponds to a socially authorized period during which the adolescent attains adulthood with psychological confidence. The type of moratorium used differs according to individual aspects of each adolescent and each culture. This period is often characterized by family and social instabilities as well as by misunderstandings that are often confused with pathological conditions.

Levisky (1995) deals with adolescence as a process that occurs during the development of the individual, and is characterized by a bio-psycho-social revolution marked by the transition of childhood to adulthood. According to this author; during adolescence there is an extensive reorganization of the personality based on mental structures, previously established during childhood, and changes in maturity that are reflected in the individual's conduct regarding family and social adjustment.

Expressions and manifestations of behavior and social adaptation, according to Levisky, depend on the culture and society in which they develop.

Dolto (1990) pointed out a prolonged adolescent stage depended on the projections imposed on the adolescents by the adults and society. Dolto explained that the last barrier was broken when the parents' anxiety no longer had an inhibitory effect on the adolescent. It is a fecund rupture, when liberty from paternal influence is achieved without any feelings of guilt. When the young adult is economically independent, the development of creative and learning potentials makes insertion and adaptation into a social group possible.

Puberty rites in primitive societies were methods of recognizing maturity and permitting entry into adult life. These rites hastened entry into adult life. Nowadays, this passage from adolescence into adulthood has become more complex and prolonged (LEVISKY, 1995). This is due to the diverse options and various demands that exist in relation to adult life participation. In order to attain the status of adulthood, it is necessary to accomplish various phases and prerequisites concerning various sectors of life — psychological, social, economic, professional, legal. The direct consequence of this is a prolonged process of transition. According to Levisky cultural transformations that occur over a period of time as well as social reactions to these circumstances not only shape the concept of adolescence, but also alter it.

The projections that parents make for their children, even before they are born are based on the presupposition that man defines and constitutes his existence as an interaction between his characteristics and the relationship that he establishes with others and the environment (LEVISKY, 1995). Thus, the environment through the relationship with the parents and culture with its diverse values interfere in the organization of the individual's constitution and personality.

The adolescent incorporates, develops and transforms the psychic movements that exist in his relationship with his parents and his culture, when he attains his own manner of being, thinking and living.

According to Katz and Costa (1996), the family, which is a social institution, acts as a conducting body that links up the subjectivity and modality of each period's values and ideas. Its

function is to reflect and condense the interaction between the adolescent and his ample social environment, serving as a model of identification in the constitution of subjectivity.

Levisky (1995) defines the vertices of the identification process as the internal constitutional aspects, a pulsating life with its fantasies, the relationship with internal objects and the environment obtained through a relationship with the parents and culture.

According to D'Andrea (1996), the adolescent conquers his identity when the diverse identifications performed by the ego are selected, synthesized and integrated during the development process.

The identification between adolescence and social dynamics can resolve most conflicts and promote the acceptance and tacit recognition of this phase of life, and may blur some of the differences between adult and adolescent life. This new condition suggests that there is still much to be studied about the consequences of this phase of life.

This study aims to contribute to our understanding of the integration and socialization of a group of second-generation adolescents of Brazilian immigrants in Canadian society. This study is not intended to answer complex questions about the situation of these adolescents, but rather is designed to stimulate reflection on the struggles these adolescents face in their attempts to adjust to and become a part of an ethnic group different from their own.

Objective

The previous chapter underscores the fact that the adolescent's process of socialization is influenced by socio-cultural factors as well as biological and social implications. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyze the process of insertion and identity construction of young Brazilian immigrants in Canada as well as the inter-relationship between several variables that are part of this process.

Method

This is a descriptive cross-sectional study that provides a dynamic understanding of the life of these adolescents, restricted

within defined space and time, regarding information on the mode of thinking utilized in life experiences that are fundamentally important for constructing the adult personality.

Although this study favors the qualitative methodology it also utilizes some quantitative analyses to enhance the understanding of some of these phenomena without obscuring their singularity. An integration of qualitative and quantitative research allows data findings to be crossed so that more reliable results are obtained, which are not products of a particular situation or specific procedure.

The sample population took shape as new information was added on. Quantity was substituted by information obtained from the data in the questionnaires.

Subjects

The study population was composed of male and female adolescent volunteers, whose ages ranged from 12 to 25 years, children of immigrant Brazilians and Canadian residents.

As a real estimate of the number of Brazilians in Canada was not available, the non-random sampling technique designated snow balling was used. This method proposes the establishment of an initial network of contacts that indicates subsequent interviewees and in this way builds a network of informants. The disadvantage of this technique is that generalization cannot be made from the data obtained, although the data obtained is reliable because it is associated with a qualitative method. The Brazilian consulates in Montreal and Toronto were the initial determining elements in this study.

Procedures

Data was collected for this study by applying a questionnaire based on an instrument, which has been utilized for two decades by the Adolescent Sector of the Department of Medical Psychology and Psychiatry, Faculty of Medical Sciences, UNICAMP. The questionnaire evaluates various aspects of normal adolescence including personal identification of the adolescent, family income, religion, friendships, school life, professional life, sexuality, identifying figures, fantasies,

temporality leisure and opinions on present life.

Qualitative analysis was performed after first reading the questionnaire, categorizing the answers and organizing a database to be utilized for calculating the percentage of each variable.

Results and discussion

Information obtained from the data of 20 questionnaires 17 from Toronto and only 3 from Montreal, was utilized to analyze the process of insertion and identity construction of young Brazilian immigrants as well as discuss the characteristics of this process. Eighty questionnaires went unanswered. This fact leads us to reflect on the withdrawal of this youth from their original culture due to the fact that there is probably no one to strengthen these ties and even more so, because the difficulties faced at this moment of their development are primarily due to the conflict between their original culture and the need to adapt to the culture of their destination.

Most of the young Brazilians who answered the questionnaire were males, their ages were mainly between 22 and 25 years and they were residents in Canada for a period of one to 5 years. Therefore, these young Brazilians were still at the onset of social insertion into the Canadian community, characterized by changes in routine as well as breaking cultural, social and family ties.

The end of adolescence demands integration into the adult community, facing vocational problems, emancipation from the family and developing satisfactory relationships with the opposite sex as well as personality integration (D'Andrea, 1996). Hence, these immigrants are faced with a difficult task of personality integration in a culture that differs in values from their own, creates a distance between them and their pairs in the group of origin and imposes the need to develop new linguistic, cultural and educational resources so that they can be accepted in their new country. They also have to overcome familial dependence in order to achieve maturity. In the face of this complexity, these young individuals should prolong the period of adolescence so that they have the necessary time to elaborate normal adolescent crises and enter the adult phase.

A portrait of the experience of the above mentioned

conflicts may be found in an almost equal division between positive and negative responses to the question related to whether social life has improved after immigration and an analysis of the same. Those who complained that it had worsened justified it by the loss of affective and social ties in their country of origin as well as the absence of significant news contacts in this new environment. The justification for positive responses in relation to social life after immigration were restricted to the qualities of the new culture (safety, first world country, greater language fluency) that were needed to elaborate affective and social losses, but did not mention any new ties as indicators of improved social life.

In order to soften the conflicts experienced during adaptation, adolescents utilize rationalization as a defense mechanism when they cite as indicators of an improved social life, elements that refer to increased cognitive competence and the Canadian quality of life indices.

The interviewees revealed a small dose of social activity to represent inter-relationship with the new country. A large majority travel at the weekends, a behavior that can be understood as a manner of getting to know the new culture, but it is still from the perspective of a foreigner touring a new country. This observation is even more evident during the holidays, when most young Brazilians travel possibly seeking internationalization of the Canadian culture, even though based on external elements that are aimed at contributing to the balance achieved by adapting to new country. Difficulty in social insertion is once again confirmed by the almost total absence of being members in clubs, social or sport organizations. These are activities that concretize insertion into the Canadian society. Although the population being studied is in an age group that is often associated with study courses, 72% of the interviewees mentioned that they did not attend courses, even though the school is seen as an instrument in attaining a good job the fact that they do not enroll in courses may help maintain these young people away from the social and cultural life of the new community.

A minority declared that they have difficulties at their studies and some indicated the English language as an important obstacle, while in the case of the others, this was due to lack of concentration, depression, stress, feelings of inferiority and

incompetence.

The insertion of the interviewees in religious communities is also very limited, just a few individuals feel that it provides them with support.

Although the value of a religious and educational community is well known as a mediator in learning new values and cultural practices, the profound socio-cultural differences between the two peoples makes the approximation of immigrants to these institutions a slow process that calls for a great effort in opening up to new values and attitudes that amplify the repertory of behavior.

The social life of young immigrants revolves around friends, since 86% confirm having them. These friends are mostly in the same age group as those who answered the questionnaire. Thus, even in an immigrant situation, the adolescent still needs to find a group of friends with whom he can identify and elaborate his crises, understand aspects of himself based on this relationship and integrate his personality in the direction of an adult life. Having more Canadians than Brazilians in their group of young friends is a manner chosen to effectively seek social integration and at the same time maintain friendship with other youngsters of various nationalities (Africans, Jamaicans, Chinese, Portuguese, Italians, Iranians) with whom they can share their experiences as immigrants. These young people struggle to belong to a community composed of people from the same ethnic origin and from other ethnic origins, constructing a “mixed” identity based on the diverse situations encountered and the various manners in which they are reinvented and reinterpreted.

Activities with friends include going out together (shopping, cinema, drinking beer, swimming), practicing sport and studying, which are also programs of young people in Brazil. This behavior with friends indicates that leisure practices from the country of origin are maintained by these adolescents, however, due to the globalization of customs, we cannot affirm that there is a difference in relation to the Canadian community, as this behavior does not represent a difference between cultures.

Besides finding the weather, culture and language strange, they find the national community individualistic, materialistic, uncongenial and cold. Identifying the element of the external world as negative, incorporating this into the ego structure may

hinder the development of the personality. However, there were other individuals who valued aspects of life in Canada such as safety, cleanliness and organization, public transport and education, which are positive items of identification that favor the development of identity with psychosocial growth.

The absence of friends from the country of origin, relatives, the Human warmth of their countrymen and their preferences regarding climate, food and language will convince 65% of the individuals to return to Brazil. the affective, social and cultural ties of the country of origin are maintained as references during the identity construction of these young people, reflecting and acting as a base in cementing together the different elements involved in the interaction of the adolescent immigrant with his present social environment.

Finally, these young immigrants are faced with the difficult task of personality integration in a culture that has values that differ from own, distancing them from their group of origin and imposing the need for developing new linguistic, cultural and educational resources so that they can be accepted in their new country. These evidences suggest that more time is needed to effectively elaborate their struggle as well as the incorporations demanded by the new culture.

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