

Editorial

Introduction to “Identity in Flux: Intercultural Conflict and the Dynamics of Belonging”

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Intercultural conflict is expressed as struggle due to a perceived incompatibility of values, norms, face orientations, goals, scarce resources, processes, and/or outcomes between at least two parties from different cultural communities in an interactive situation (Ting-Toomey and Oetzel 2001). While significant research has explored intercultural conflict across various contexts, such as workplaces (Cox 2001), interpersonal relationships (Ting-Toomey and Oetzel 2001), and geopolitical states (Gilboa 2006), there is a notable gap in understanding the dynamic interplay between identity formation and intercultural conflict in a globally interconnected and rapidly diversifying world. Existing studies often compartmentalize these topics, focusing either on conflict resolution strategies or on the fluidity of identity without fully addressing how intercultural conflict shapes, and is shaped by, the negotiation of identity in specific socio-political and cultural contexts. In these diverse cultural contexts, language, culture, and individual as well as collective identities are deeply intertwined, shaping how people experience and negotiate their place within multilingual and multicultural environments.

This interdependence becomes especially intricate in contexts of migration and, more generally, within multilingual and multicultural settings, which have increasingly become the prevailing condition in contemporary societies rather than an exception (Tseng 2020). Relocating to a different country often requires individuals to navigate the process of adapting to a new cultural environment while at the same time preserving connections to their ethnic background and heritage culture (DeCapua and Wintergerst 2009). For second- and third-generation immigrants, this dynamic is even more complex, as they commonly acquire bilingual or multilingual repertoires alongside bicultural or multicultural competences. These experiences give rise to hybrid identities that are shaped by engagement with multiple cultural frameworks and by the use of both dominant and minoritized languages (Grosjean 2015, 2019). A shared and central theme emerging from the articles published in this Special Issue concerns the negotiation, management, and development of the identities of minoritized individuals and communities within contexts characterized by unequal power relations and structures of dominance. Raising awareness among policymakers about these issues is therefore of critical importance.

Chadrhyn A. A. Pedraza’s article entitled “A Model of Spaces and Access in the Construction of Asian and Asian American Identities: “Blood Only Takes You So Far” is conducted within a superdiverse socio-educational context, specifically at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) in the southwestern United States, and focuses on the construction of identity among Asian and Asian American students. The study approaches identity formation through three main dimensions: expressions of Asian culture, relationships with other Asians, and physical characteristics associated with Asian identities. The article is grounded



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in a core principle of intercultural education and communication, namely, that identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed through power relations, historical processes, and meanings produced via social interactions. In this framework, power relations play a decisive role in defining boundaries between the self and the other, shaping perceptions of who belongs to “us” and who is positioned as “other.” Furthermore, identity functions as a tool for categorizing increasingly complex and diverse social worlds. From the perspective of understanding one’s social position and location (Anthias 2002; Howard and Graham 2016; McLean and Syed 2015), identity cannot be understood as fixed or homogeneous; rather, it is fluid and shaped through interactions within specific social contexts. Regarding methodology, the study targeted Asian students enrolled in Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the Southwest, who were required to meet specific criteria such as self-identifying as Asian or Asian American and having immigrated to the United States prior to applying to and enrolling in the selected HSIs. It was based mainly on unstructured interviews, and data were analyzed thematically. The results stress the participants’ reflections on their ethno-racial identities, which highlight the ongoing influence of race in how individuals interpret their racialized experiences, as well as the three spatial and contextual sites where participants’ identities could be negotiated and navigated, namely, culture, race, and relationships, which basically arose from interactions with their social context.

The concept of identity is also examined in the article by Georgia Spyropoulou and Ilirida Musaraj, “Navigating Identity: Citizenship and the Reality of the Second Generation of Albanian Origin in Greece,” which focuses in particular on “institutionalized” identity, as defined through the process of granting citizenship, and on how this process either includes or excludes second-generation migrants from social participation in the Greek context. According to the two authors, for immigrants and their children, the transition from being labeled “foreigners” to becoming “citizens” is far more than an administrative shift; it can transform how they are regarded by the state and the host society, as well as how they understand their own identities. As Brubaker (1992) observed, debates surrounding citizenship seldom focus on the defense of territorial borders. Instead, they revolve around the protection of the nation’s symbolic boundaries. Decisions about who is included, under which conditions, and at what price reveal a great deal about a country’s self-conception. With regard to its methodology, the research project “Becoming Greek-Albanian: Non-antagonistic togetherness in inclusive perspectives” was conducted as a qualitative study involving 50 participants of Albanian origin, aged between 19 and 40. Thirty of them belonged to the so-called 1.5 generation, having migrated to Greece during childhood, while the remaining 20 were members of the second generation, having been born in Greece to migrant parents. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews carried out in Greek. The interview guide was designed along a life-course perspective, covering stages from birth and schooling to early adulthood and the present, with a particular focus on self-identification, family and peer environments, and future aspirations. The data were subsequently analyzed using discourse analysis methodology. The findings indicated that the majority of participants maintained that obtaining Greek citizenship did not alter their ethnic self-identification. A smaller group reported that citizenship either strengthened an already existing sense of Greek identity or made it easier to express Greekness publicly. In addition, a third and analytically significant pattern emerged, highlighting a clear distinction between ethnic identity and political membership.

The article by Monerica Arnucu, entitled “Veiled in Pixels: Identity and Intercultural Negotiation Among Faceless Emirati Women in Digital Spaces,” examines how, in today’s digital world, where presence is often equated with personal visibility, the choice of Emirati women to remain faceless on social media presents a powerful counter-narrative. This

choice reveals the complexities of identity, modesty, and belonging in a hyperconnected, multicultural society.

The study takes a closer look at how these women manage their online identities by intentionally choosing not to show their faces on Instagram. Using digital ethnography and thematic analysis, the article explores how they navigate the balance between global expectations of self-expression and traditional values of modesty and honor. Over a three-month period, the study observes their activity on Instagram, analyzing shared images to examine how facelessness becomes a form of agency. The findings highlight the tension between Western-centric paradigms of identity and selfhood, proposing digital veiling as a transferable framework for understanding how modesty, discretion, and agency are negotiated across digital cultures. Overall, the article contributes to broader discussions on digital identity, gendered representation, and intercultural negotiation by foregrounding the silent yet strategic practices of women who remain unseen but not unheard.

The article “Teaching the Others’ History in an Arab National Context: Comparing Emirati and Syrian School Textbooks” by Maria Darla and Panos Kourgiotis examines how world history is taught in two Arab states with diverse historical backgrounds and international standings: the Syrian Arab Republic before the fall of Bashar al-Assad and the United Arab Emirates. Using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), the study analyses selected excerpts from each country’s history textbooks, highlighting both similarities and differences in historical representation. More specifically, the article juxtaposes historical narratives to provide insights into the interplay between state ideology and international relations. The findings reveal the significant role of domestic politics and regional geopolitics in shaping Syrian and Emirati perspectives on other Arab peoples, colonialism, the Ottoman Empire, and both Western and non-Western worlds. Most importantly, the article sheds light on what these societies consider essential to teach as part of the construction and articulation of national identity, particularly in the context of ongoing regional turbulence.

The article “Identity Negotiation and Conflict Resolution in Contemporary Multicultural Settings: The Contribution of Intercultural Mediators” by Zoe Karanikola and Georgios Panagiotopoulos builds on the previous discussion of identity construction in Arab national education by examining how identities shaped by such narratives are actively negotiated and managed in contemporary multicultural contexts through intercultural mediation. The study focuses on the key dimensions of the mediator’s role and is primarily based on a literature review of secondary sources, including laws, official documents, and materials produced by international organizations. The analysis identifies central thematic axes derived from key codes related, on the one hand, to the mediators’ profiles, specifically their mindset, skillset, and fundamental principles, and on the other hand, to the political and legal frameworks governing mediation. These frameworks include legislation, professional roles, training standards, accreditation processes, and examples of good practices. Ultimately, the article recognizes intercultural mediation as a decisive factor in social integration policies and emphasizes its strong connection to shared global and fundamental values such as equity, respect, identity protection, tolerance, active listening, and civic engagement.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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