ACCULTURATION ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN: THE IMPACT OF IDEOLOGICAL AFFILIATION UPON CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Oussama Mahboub[1]
University of Montana (United States),
oussama_mah@yahoo.fr

Abstract

The issues of immigration and asylum have always formed a major source of controversy between center-right and center-left parties in Europe. This conflict went to the surface with the massive waves of immigrants fleeing war zones in the Middle East and Africa. In this context, this research opts for case study as a qualitative-based research tool to trace the impact of the left-right continuous debate on the acculturation process in Europe. The study attempts to analyze a range of official European positions collected in a political atmosphere marked by asylum endeavor in the period that coincided with the events of the – then – Arab revolutions. The sample includes pro-immigration and anti-asylum segments among European officials, within the period of the so-called the Arab Spring. In evaluating the conflicting standpoints from immigration and refugees, this paper employs both Benedict Anderson's theory of Imagined Communities and John Berry's theory of Acculturation and its four strategies. Finally, following the process of extrapolating the analysis indicators of the perspectives of the European left-right wing leaders, the present study concludes with the idea that the pro-immigration trends proved to be more successful in shifting the discourse to serve their vision compared to their anti-immigration counterparts.

Keywords: Acculturation; culture; ideology; immigration; Mediterranean.

1. Introduction

The geopolitical instability in the Middle East and Africa led to a massive rise in the number of migrants and refugees in Europe, particularly its Mediterranean countries. This phenomenon sparked heated debates in the European public opinion and among policy-makers. As a result, the 2019 elections witnessed a remarkable shift towards the far-right parties that adopted anti-migration positions. Accordingly, relevant studies reveal that the left parties in Europe are in danger of extinction. In less than two years, the continent's social democratic parties suffered historic losses in France, the Netherlands, Germany and Italy. On a continent long-known for democratic competition between center-right and center-left parties, the collapse of the left could have far-reaching consequences that go beyond special partisan interests. Faced by the constant influx of refugees and immigrants, mainly from the Middle East and Africa, European voters have turned a series of recent elections into a kind of referendum on immigration. Right-wing populists have skillfully played on the fears of working-class voters by convincing them that traditional labor parties will allow immigrants to flow without restrictions. This study examines the ideological conflicts and their impact on the movement of acculturation by exploring the image of immigrants fleeing war zones in the European public opinion in general and within the Mediterranean countries in particular. It

---

[1] *Corresponding author :* Oussama Mahboub / https://orcid.org/000-0002-8745-5344

aims to investigate the positions of both left- and right-wing trends from the issue of expatriation to their nations, as well as their role in the acceleration or reduction of the movement of acculturation in the Mediterranean countries. The conflict of interests and the struggle over the issue of asylum have a habit of generating a vehement controversy among the two ends of the European ideological spectrum. This research, through opting for case study, attempts to trace the hypothesis that left-wing practices were more influential in shifting the discourse their way and promoting multiculturalism and integration, whereas the right-wing position consolidated exclusion and marginalization.

2. Theoretical Framework: Imagined Communities and Acculturation Strategies

In his book entitled *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that understanding nationalism requires considering the large cultural contexts surrounding its emergence, particularly the cultural systems of the religious community, and the dynastic realm. By going deep back into history, these two systems used to govern frames of reference. In this respect, the dominating conceptions of Christendom, Islamic Ummah, and Chinese Civilization were imagined in the global mind in terms of a sacred language and written script, particularly Latin, Classic Arabic and Chinese (Anderson, 2006, p. 120). Unlike the imaginable political systems adopted by traditional dynastic rules that employed divinity rather than populations as a source of legitimacy, nowadays' political system authorizes that a democratically-based state imposes its sovereignty over a demarcated territory in virtue of a legal legitimacy approved by the international community (Anderson, 2006, p. 19). Throughout the 17th and 18th Centuries' Europe, cases of discrimination and exclusions went up due to the revival of slavery in Portugal during this period. Moreover, the enlightenment helped also contribute to the division between metropolitans and suburban dwellers. The emergence of Creole communities in different parts of the world helped give rise to new social segments such as Eurasians, Eurafricans, and Euramericans, and this led to giving a base to a new social cognition reflecting modern racism (Anderson, 2006, p. 59).

John Berry presented the theory of Acculturation strategies to stress the distinction that marks persons' acculturation in host communities. He introduced a map of strategies in an attempt at shedding light on the relevant elements that facilitate acculturation, and the potential consequences resulted from this socio-cultural process (Berry, 2003, p. 23). In an attempt at conceptualizing the issue of acculturation, Berry differentiates between the dominant and non-dominant groups in society. Accordingly, the variations that happen within the two categories are outcomes of the acculturation strategies performed by these different cultural segments. During the procedure of acculturation, people's actions generate what Berry calls "acculturative stress" and "behavioral change," and the long-term far-reaching results of this socio-cultural interaction have a lot to do with the acculturation strategies adopted by members of each group (Berry, 2003, p. 21).
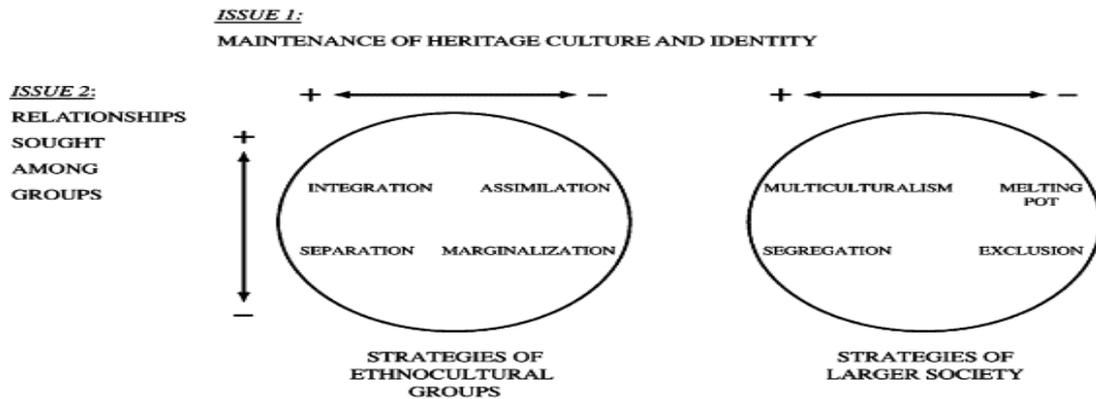
Figure 1: Diagram of Acculturation Strategies

In his theory of Acculturation, Berry emphasized the disparity between four components relevant to the acculturation process, namely assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. As an outcome of readjustment to new situations, according to Berry, the two groups are susceptible to some circumstances like change. In this regard, the changes are likely to be either normal or intricate. While the normal modifications target daily habits such as food, clothing and speaking patterns, the problematic changes result in depression, perturbation and incertitude as Berry labeled it "acculturative stress." Accordingly, adaptations can have two perspectives: psychological dealing with people's well-being and self-perception, and socio-cultural affecting the individual's interaction with other community residents (Berry, 2003, p. 21).

3. Aspirations of Cross-Cultural Communication in the Mediterranean
3.1. Prospects of Acculturation

To guarantee the interaction of different cultures is to invest in the future. The genesis of interest in acculturation refers to a growing concern over the consequences of European colonization and dominance over colonized peoples and native residents. In later stages, the interest shifted towards the way immigration changed the lifestyle of immigrants and newcomers after reaching their destinations and immersion in their host communities. The recent research, focused upon how ethno-cultural segments interact with each other and get affected by their attempts to co-exist in culturally diverse communities. Nowadays, political and commercial relations increased enormously in virtue of globalization. Accordingly, the world is witnessing more immigration waves due to socio-economic inequalities, and asylum demands because of political instability. As a result, a significant number of ethno-cultural groups started to permanently settle in many host destinations, and this gives rise to acculturation as an interaction between two (or more) cultures (Berry, 2003, p. 17).

The enormous advancement in terms of communication and transportation – as well as the ongoing socio-economic inequalities and political instability in various regions around the Mediterranean – made these European countries subject to be vital destinations for extra asylum and immigration waves that appealed for adopting protective measures to preserve the normal functioning and keep control (Beckstein & Rampton, 2018, p. 1084). Besides, the socio-political instability in the war-stricken regions helped exacerbate the massive rise of immigrants and refugees in Europe, particularly its Mediterranean countries. In 2014, the European Union received around 3.8 million migrants; approximately two million of them are refugees from non-European states. One year later, the number of people migrating to Europe went up to reach 65 million, 50% of them were from war-torn zones like Syria and Libya toward Greece, Italy and other European destinations. Accordingly, almost one million

persons entered Greece as migrants in 2015 (Schilling et al., 2017, p. 295).

The waves of immigration to and settlement in Europe throughout the previous decade were marked by a remarkable openness of European people. Besides, non-European residents were successfully integrating in their new societies. In this respect, many European voters had shown no antagonism towards immigrants or people pursuing asylum despite the early 2008 economic slump and the 2015 large waves of asylum seekers. Yet, European decision-makers did not share similar openness to immigrants. This fact raised questions about the less welcoming strategy adopted by politicians compared to ordinary citizens. In this regard, recent studies refute the claim that the growing support for the far-right forms a revolutionary change of the European public mind towards the immigration issue. Still, the recent massive waves of refugees have only infuriated a particular category of people who are consistently anti-immigrant militants under the pretext of maintaining the socio-demographic order. In contrast, pro-immigrant voters focus upon the advantages that the immigrants have and their ability to successfully integrate (Migration Policy Group, 2017, p. 02).

There is a remarkable division characterizing the European perception of immigration and asylum as this subject receives both acclaim and skepticism. Yet, this polarization is not equal between the two groups, namely the supporters and detractors. In fact, the issue of immigration is more prominent in the opponents' thought and discourse than in the proponents' speeches. European voters that oppose immigration have an inclination to associate it with a number of socio-economic dislocations, and choose to back anti-immigrant radical political parties. However, those who support immigration do not tend to consider it as a prominent issue that deserves debate, and have a tendency to concentrate on other significant topics (Migration Policy Group, 2017, p. 01). A quick look at how politicians in Europe reacted to immigration waves coming from the Mediterranean countries (like Syria and Libya) reflects a remarkable disparity as left-wing adherents adopted an open-arms strategy whereas right-wing trends instructed a folded-arms position towards diversity and pluralism (Beckstein & Rampton, 2018, p. 1087).

Immigration to Europe helped increase the levels of ethnic multiplicity. This clearly appears in Chancellor Angela Merkel's statement: "they have brought us more Europe, because we Europeans have learned in the course of our history to make the most of our diversity" (Radu, 2016, p. 29). Meanwhile, the far-right parties and their anti-foreigners' policies and xenophobia cases also went remarkably up. Accordingly, in 2016, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi warned a "climate of xenophobia" targeting Europe (Radu, 2016, p. 23). In this respect, major studies drew the conclusion that integration measures adopted by politicians and public opinion on foreigners were closely linked. They revealed that the implementation of immigration-related policies went in harmony with the general public attitude prevailing in a given country about such an issue. Yet, some other research argued that the policies influence the overall public attitude instead of being an outcome of it. In this respect, a major theory refers to policy-opinion circle employs relevant mechanisms known as policy feedback and policy responsiveness to assess the extent to which general public opinion and political atmosphere are influenced and reshaped by the implementation of policies (Migration Policy Group, 2017, p. 04).

In societies that are open to immigrants' integration, the perception of ethnic diversity as a potential threat is low. President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker expresses his wish: "we Europeans should know and should never forget why giving refuge and complying with the fundamental right to asylum is so important" (Radu, 2016, p. 27). Some studies reveal that immigrants' positivity of reactions and attitudes depend on the

community's opinion, social behavior and political policies. Relevant research shows that the public opinion on immigration in Europe is consistent and is growing – albeit slightly – favorably. In this respect, many anti-immigrant attitudes come from psychological fears of safety threat, economic instability and the suspicious motives of policy-makers in their longing for integration (Migration Policy Group, 2017, p. 08).

It is noteworthy that the European voters have a tendency to continue to welcome the reception of asylum seekers. Politicians, in turn, need to consider the inclination and take bold measures that help mobilize public support for openness. In line with this, Jean-Claude Juncker clearly states: "we Europeans should remember well that Europe is a continent where nearly everyone has at one time been a refugee. Have we really forgotten that after the devastation of the Second World War, 60 million people were refugees in Europe?" (Radu, 2016, p. 27). This idea is further reinforced as relevant studies show that immigrants living in open societies share the local residents their feeling of belonging and patriotism (Migration Policy Group, 2017, p. 02). Accordingly, estimations reveal that more than 70% of European people look positively towards a fair distribution of refugees according to each country's reception ability with considering the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employment, and asylum seekers. Still, although there was a remarkable open-arms strategy sought by the EU population, the relocation policy targeted only 16,000 refugees out of as many as 20,000. Such reluctance reflects the concern of policy-makers over an adverse reaction conducted by far-right adherents in case they explicitly approve the arrival of refugees (Migration Policy Group, 2017, p. 02).

The rights of minorities in society formed a major component of the left-wing policies, and received a real reinforcement in the measures and procedures taken by democratic countries. Nowadays, immigrants enjoy a broad range of opportunities to guarantee the esteem and recognition of their native cultural legacy and political persuasion (Beckstein & Rampton, 2018, p. 1089). In this respect, Chancellor Merkel contends: "we also have a duty to treat the people who come to us in need with respect, to see them as human beings and not as an anonymous mass" (Radu, 2016, p. 30). Such a vision is derived from the conviction that "relationships of trust between human beings are necessary for fruitful interaction and cooperation" (Beauchamp & Childress, 1979, p. 203). Therefore, the positions and policies adopted by the center-left parties helped promote the strategy of multiculturalism by the dominant segments and encourage the adoption of integration and assimilation by the non-dominant groups.

3.2. Obstacles of Integration

The results of the parliamentary elections in Europe (23-26 May 2019) showed a remarkable rise of the right-wing forces and nationalist parties in France and Italy, for example, and a clear regression to the left and center parties in several Euro-Mediterranean countries. According to the notion of policy feedback, the community's vision of immigration and integration, approved by official laws and measures, affects the sympathy with ethnic out-groups. As for the mechanism of policy responsiveness, it reveals that decision-makers in democratic countries take into consideration public attitudes when issuing and approving integration measures, in order to avoid triggering their voters' displeasure or public dissatisfaction. Therefore, the limitation and restriction of integration policies can be influenced and enforced by the prevailing public opinion, this is more likely to occur when public attitude is adherent to far-right groups. Hence, these two key mechanisms go hand in hand in influencing each other and in being used interchangeably (Migration Policy Group, 2017, p. 05). Yet, the acculturation process is subject to a host of discrepancies and hindrances

due to the disparity of preferences sought by the conflicting groups, and this phenomenon is referred to by Berry as "acculturative stress" (Berry, 2003, p. 26).

Just like families that may usually fail to meet the aspirations of their ideal models, political ideals also have a habit of falling short of promises (Mahboub, 2020, p. 43). Accordingly, Ortmann and his associates argue: that "common morality can fall short where its rules conflict, where it inadequately illuminates novel moral problems, or where intense disagreement prevails among rival stakeholders" (Ortmann, et al., 2016, p. 13). Accordingly, the right-wing supporters have a tendency to consider other cultural systems as a threat to the nation, and therefore, deserve no tolerance. Besides, they claim that the danger of these cultural paradigms is inherent in their incompatibility with the European boundaries of social and religious orders set by the host community. This lies at the heart of the conservatives' objection to multiculturalism since it promotes cultural diversity, sympathy and tolerance with other non-compliant groups. Perhaps this is what Junker condemned by his statement: "pushing back boats from piers, setting fire to refugee camps, or turning a blind eye to poor and helpless people: that is not Europe" (Radu, 2016, p. 27).

It is noteworthy that hostility towards immigrants is also associated with issues like the social contribution, economic performance and skills of immigrants. Besides, part of the criticism directed towards immigrants targeted their benefit from the European welfare system. Hence, the economic vulnerability of the native citizens prompts calls to prioritize them over non-native residents and minorities. According to a report by Migration Policy Group, "new 'radical right' political parties with anti-immigration agenda have been gaining ground in many countries and immigration is often rated highly on the political agenda by voters" (Migration Policy Group, 2017, p. 16). In contrast to these voices, Juncker affirms:

> Europe is the baker in Kos who gives away his bread to hungry and weary souls. Europe is the students in Munich and in Passau who bring clothes for the new arrivals at the train station. Europe is the policeman in Austria who welcomes exhausted refugees upon crossing the border (Radu, 2016, p. 27).

Hence, while liberals consider their intervention to promote the welfare state as part of their responsibility to protect and support those who cannot protect and help themselves, the right-wing adherents consider this action as an unjustifiable interference violating the values of self-interest and self-reliant character.

Among the controversial positions is the extreme right's sense of superiority and refusal of the United Nations intervention or compliance with its conventions and treaties. This entails the opposition to any commitments toward the international community's resolutions and threatens the global relations (Lakoff & Wehling, 2012, p. 55). In this regard, Martin and Rampton argue:

> This valorization of national autonomy, combined with sensibility for national pride and local sovereignty, makes clear why large-scale migration – particularly when managed by a supranational body like the EU – has incurred the hostility of many conservatives (Martin & Rampton, 2018, p. 1089).

This position led the center-left politicians and citizens to go beyond this antagonistic discourse. According to Angela Merkel's instruction: "I therefore advocate the adoption of a new approach based on fairness and solidarity in sharing the burdens," (Radu, 2016, p. 29) there was a serious intention by modest forces to promote values of collaboration and

diversity over voices of competition and individualism.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Polish and Hungarian politicians' hostile position toward the Muslim and Arab refugees coming from the Middle East and North Africa turned into a welcoming attitude towards the Ukrainian refugees as long as they are European, Christian, and white and civilized people. It is evident that these practices go hand-in-hand with conservatives who are usually suspicious of – and tend to resist – change, especially the sudden and gradual one that might lead to radical shifts. This explains their preference for society's homogeneity over its potential heterogeneity (Beckstein & Rampton, 2018, p. 1085). Among the claims associated with the anti-immigration views of radical right proponents are the difficulty of full or adequate integration and assimilation of newcomers from war zones, principled policy choice based on opposition to the growing pluralization of national communities, and the idea that mass immigration forms a potential threat to the security of societies and their normal functioning (Beckstein & Rampton, 2018, p. 1085). Accordingly, they have an inclination to divide society and emphasize the dichotomies of "good vs. evil" and "us vs. them," and this leads to imposing strict punitive rules against the non-compliant "them." Such an antagonistic position was rejected by Chancellor Angela Merkel when she revealed: "if Europe fails in this refugee crisis, it betrays its founding principles" (Radu, 2016, p. 22).

The reluctance of conservatives stems from the idea of conservatism that the human awareness of the present world, of advantageous political pursuits, and of the convenient means to realize these pursuits is often inadequate. Besides, the political options proved to have fluctuating outcomes and impose a threat on the status quo. Hence, there is a possibility that citizens might refuse change once it is set into action, or resort to unanticipated or even undesirable reactions (Beckstein & Rampton, 2018, p. 1086). Moreover, the conservative fear may stem from the fact that gradual and incremental change may turn into a drastic shift. In this respect, throughout the last half century, a number of European countries witnessed a remarkable transition from states of temporary migration to destinations of permanent mass immigration (estimations reveal that international immigration in Europe rose from 3.4% of the overall population in 1960 to 10.3% in 2015). As a consequence of continuing immigration waves, key Mediterranean countries involving France, Italy, and Spain are now hosting some of the world's highest percentage of international immigrants (Beckstein & Rampton, 2018, p. 1087). In response to this concern, Junker states: "over time, migration must change from a problem to be tackled to a well-managed resource" (Radu, 2016, p. 28). Junker's quote reflects a need to consider the positive side of the matter and benefit from the human resources and workforces generated from immigration.

One of the major components of the conservative objection to immigration is the idea that human impulses are inherent in native affiliation, historical allegiance, and long-standing commitment that characterize a homogeneous community. Unlike the liberals' emphasis of human race or socialists' focus on social classifications that go beyond national limitations, conservatives prioritize domestic loyalties and political commitments that permit members of a given community to accept to co-exist with new residents provided that society's organicism is respected (Beckstein & Rampton, 2018, p. 1088). Similarly, in a previous stage, "the Portuguese Franciscans in Goa violently opposed the admission of Creoles to the order, alleging that even if born of pure white parents [they] have been suckled by Indian ayahs in their infancy and thus had their blood contaminated for life" (Anderson, 2006, p. 60). In this respect, among the charges that were directed to Angela Merkel's welcoming policy of refugees is the promotion of sudden augmentation of immigrants, which stands against conservatives' stipulations of adopting a precautionary position towards this issue (Beckstein

& Rampton, 2018, p. 1087).

Interestingly, there is a real concern over the Muslim threat on Europe. The cultural disparities are considered by the right-wing adherents as a major obstacle to real and adequate integration. Accordingly, recent studies reveal that immigrants have a habit of adopting religious tendencies more than citizens in the host destinations, approving of religion to take part in public life and, in certain circumstances, demonstrating openness to the notion that a different lawgiver (like a religious script) can have more priority than democratic measures approved in the host country (Beckstein & Rampton, 2018, p. 1089). These practices starkly contradict the right-wing instructions and conservative perception of social order. Hence, "those groups that are less well accepted often experience hostility, rejection, and discrimination, one factor that is predictive of poor long-term adaptation" (Marc Bornstein and Linda Cote, 2006, p. 19). In a reaction to these practices, Junker made it clear that "when, generations from now, people read about this moment in Europe's history books, let it read that we stood together in demonstrating compassion and opened our homes to those in need of our protection" (Radu, 2016, p. 28).

Scholars emphasize the nature of parent-child relationship in an environment marked by acculturation (Bornstein & Cote, 2006, p. 11). Children who used to be properly nurtured and adequately cared for proved to be developing more self-dependence, discipline and responsibility than their counterparts who experienced neglect, ignorance, or punishment for expressing needs or complaints. This segment of deprived children is more expected than their properly nurtured peers, to be intolerant and adopt anti-social positions (Lakoff, 1995, p. 207). Communities that uphold cultural pluralism tend to supply its residents with a greater chance and favorable conditions for settlement. This positive environment comes from the supposition that pluralistic societies have no inclination toward imposing cultural shift (like exclusion or segregation) on non-dominant groups, and they are more open to diversity and a multicultural atmosphere (Bornstein & Cote, 2006, p. 18). Accordingly, a child who experiences neglect and disrespect is unlikely capable of showing respect or empathy towards others. This perception is highly employed by liberals in their vision of promoting collaboration rather than competition and prioritizing appreciation over disrespect.

4. Conclusion

This paper has examined the extent to which the stereotypical image of immigrants is deep-rooted in the European official and popular discourse and traced its impact on the movement of acculturation. The assumptions of Acculturation strategies appear in this study through some indicators that uncover the positions of the right-wing parties towards the issue of immigration and asylum, where they reject the idea of cooperation and non-Western pluralism. Moreover, the present research has traced the attitudes of the center-left parties that believe in the cultural multiplicity, intellectual diversity and peaceful coexistence. Importantly, the paper has shown that both positions were based primarily on visions that do not deviate from the political agenda and the general framework of ideology. In assessing the right- and left-wing attitudes toward the acculturation process, particularly across the Mediterranean, this examination has demonstrated that despite the rise in the number of European voters preferring imposing restrictions on immigration, the left-wing practices proved to be more effective in shifting the discourse their way and promoting multiculturalism and integration among the European and non-European Mediterranean regions. Future studies could address the various European positions from acculturation, immigration, and asylum in the post Arab Spring period.

References

Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism.* Verso.

Barrett, D. H., Ortmann, L. H., Dawson, A., Saenz, C., Reis, A., & Bolan, G. (2016). *Public health ethics: Cases spanning the globe*. Springer Open.

Beauchamp, T. L., & Childress, J. F. (1979). *Principles of biomedical ethics.* Oxford University Press.

Beckstein, M., & Rampton, V. (2018). Conservatism between theory and practice: The case of migration to Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, *57*(4), 1084-1102.

Berry, J. W. (2003). Conceptual approaches to acculturation. In K. M. Chun, P. B. Organista, & G. Marin (Eds.), *Acculturation: Advances in theory, measurement, and applied research*. (pp. 17-37). American Psychological Association.

Bornstein, M. H., & Cote, L. R. (2006). *Acculturation and parent-child relationships: Measurement and development*. Routledge.

Lakoff, G. (1995). Metaphor, morality, and politics, or, why conservatives have left liberals in the dust. *Social Research*, 62(2), 177-213.

Lakoff, G. (2004). *Don't think of an elephant: Know your values and frame the debate*. Chelsea Green Publishing.

Lakoff, G. (2016). *Moral politics: How liberals and conservatives think*. University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, G., & Wehling, E. (2012). *The little blue book: The essential guide to thinking and talking democratic*. Free Press.

Mahboub, O. (2020). Political Debate over the Reform of the American Health Care System: The Case of "Obamacare". *Revue de Traduction et Langues*, 19(1), 40-55.

Migration Policy Group (2017). Attitudes towards immigration in Europe: Myths and realities. *European Social Survey*, 1-18.

Radu, L. (2016). More or less Europe? the European leaders' discourses on the refugees crisis. *Revista Română de Comunicare şi Relaţii Publice*, 18(2), 21-37.

Redfield, R., Linton, R., & Herskovits, M. J. (2002). Memorandum for the study of acculturation, American anthropology: 1921–1945. Papers from the American Anthropologist, 257-262.

Schilling, T., Rauscher, S., Menzel, C., Reichenauer, S., Müller-Schilling, M., Schmid, S., & Selgrad, M. (2017). Migrants and refugees in Europe: Challenges, experiences and contributions. *Visceral Medicine*, 33(4), 295-300.