



NGO Committee on Ageing
United Nations, NY

**THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON
MULTIGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS OF
THE NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING**

REPORT OF PROGRAM

MULTIGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

ON MIGRATION

**Overview of Migration Issues and the Impact of Multigenerational
Relationships on the Lives of Migrants**

June 1st, 2006

Mission Statement of the Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships of the NGO Committee on Ageing

To build lasting bonds among people of all ages, to share the world by living in the present, learning from the past and planning for the future in order to increase the understanding and visibility of the interdependence of values and interests among generations.

SOME ACTION SUGGESTIONS

- Ø Raise awareness and appreciation of the importance of multigenerational relationships in families and communities
- Ø Promote programs for grandparents and grandchildren in schools and communities, in places of worship, recreation, health care, civic organizations and the media
- Ø Advocate mainstreaming of ageing and multigenerational relationships in the work of governments, the United Nations and NGO Committees
- Ø Celebrate a Day of Multigenerational Cross-Cultural Relationships at all levels of society

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- ✓ Kevin Brabazon , United Nations Representative for Generations United
- ✓ Juanita Carrillo, International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG)
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who, together with the Co-Chairs Norma Levitt (World Union for Progressive Judaism) and Rosa Perla Resnick, International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG), International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), International Immigrants Foundation (IIF), created a program filled with information, education and inspiration.

Special appreciation goes to Kevin Brabazon, as well to his son Jacob Brabazon and to Juanita Carrillo for summarizing the presentation of the program, and to Mary V. Toumayan, for recording and transcribing this meeting's proceedings.

With continuing recognition to the "World Conference of Religions for Peace" for their enabling support.

MULTIGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON MIGRATION

Time: 1:15 PM to 3:30 PM

Greetings and Introduction

Norma Levitt

Co-Chair, Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships
World Union for Progressiv Judaism (WUPJ)
United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP)

Moderator

Kevin Brabazon

Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships
United Nations Representative for Generations United
Adjunct Associate Professor at New York University (NYU)

Keynote Speaker

***“OVERVIEW OF MIGRATION ISSUES AND THE IMPACT OF
MULTIGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS
ON THE LIVES OF MIGRANTS”***

Eva Richter

International Federation of Business and Professional Women
NGO Committee on Human Rights, Sub-Committee on Immigrants and Refugees
Strong voice in the Field of Migration and its Social Implications

Panel participants:

Talar Iskanian-Hashasian (Armenia)
Immigration Lawyer

Irina Makarova (Kazakhstan)
Edward R. Murrow High School Student

Gabriel Verdaguer (Argentina)
Completing Master of Public Administration degree

Mara Medina (Mexico)
Boston University Graduate

Questions and Answers

Summary

Rosa Perla Resnick

Co-Chair, Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships
International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG)
International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)
International Immigrants Foundation (IIF)

PREFACE

Norma Levitt *

We welcome you to this, our sixth annual meeting, planned by the Subcommittee on Multigenerational Relationships. Our members are listed in this printed program, as they are engraved in our gratitude and admiration.

We have presented varied programs through the years on multigenerational issues: situations in offices and other work places; caregiving; Super Centenarians over 110 years of age; and different attitudes toward multigenerational relationships in various parts of the world. As in the past, today we are presenting the "human face" of the issues under consideration to enliven cold statistics as well as the findings from research studies.

Today the focus, because of our particular point of view and specialized interest, is on how multigenerational relationships can help to resolve some of the conflicts between and among generations of migrants, as well as to establish constructive connections. This is based on the fact that our work is centered around the United Nations' fundamental concerns and planned actions. Currently, International Migration and Development is one of the most critical issues in the world and, therefore, it is the focus of attention for the United Nations for the coming 61st General Assembly next September. The final summary of the program will close today's proceedings. The proceedings will be published and will be available on a website.

The Keynote Speaker of this program is Eva Richter, a migrant from Hitler's Germany to China, where she received her primary and secondary education in English and French schools, and then to the United States where she has had a distinguished career in university teaching. She now brings her life experience and her notable career to her retirement positions in the United Nations/Non Governmental Organizations world. She illuminates our program with her innovative presentation of multigenerational/intergenerational conflicts in literature.

A group of respondents bring to this program their personal reflections. They are varied in gender and generations, as well as in the widespread regions of the world. All program participants share their experiences of being migrants. They bring their vastly differing life stories as they deepen our understanding of the situation of migrants.

Professor Kevin Brabazon, a distinguished British-born expert in the field of multigenerational/intergenerational relationships is the moderator of the program today.

** Norma Levitt, NGO Main representative to the UN; World Union for Progressive Judaism; Co-Chair Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships, NGO Committee on Ageing; Wellesley, Phi Beta Kappa; Honorary President, Metro, UNIFEM, USA; Organizer/Chair, National Organizations Advisory Council for Children; Advisory for UN Environment Sabbath; Executive, World Conference of Religions for Peace; Honorary Life President, Women of Reform Judaism*

Kevin Brabazon *

It is my great pleasure to introduce the distinguished speakers today. We have a wonderful array with a wide variety of backgrounds which, I believe, adds a richness to the program. First is our keynote speaker, Eva Richter, who has been a refugee twice – first, fleeing Hitler’s Germany for China at the age of two, and then fleeing China during the communist revolution. She arrived in the USA at the age of 15 where she has pursued a distinguished career as a professor of English literature. This session is about migration in general, so Eva’s experience as a refugee is one reason for migration, but there are many other reasons that will be touched upon by each of the speakers today.

- *Kevin Brabazon, Member of the Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships; United Nations Representative for Generations United; Adjunct Associate Professor at New York University (NYU).*

Eva Richter *

As the pace of world migration has picked up in the last fifteen years, there has been an explosion of migration literature. In them, second generation children, born of migrant parents, straddle two cultures and strive to take and understand their place as natives in alien lands.

In America, unlike in many other cultures, intergenerational conflict is a rite of passage. It is a process by which the individual discovers his/her own identity and becomes an autonomous, independent human being. Any migrant here has to deal with the struggle with and within the next generation to achieve such an American ideal.

In *Desirable Daughters*, a novel of Indian migration, Bharati Mukherjee writes that in India, “There was no rebellion, no seeking after individual identity.” She describes how one of the novel’s characters, “became an electrical engineering student ... because his father told him he would be an engineer, and he excelled at it because that was what Chatterjees did. ... The Asian students ... handled duty very well.” But dutiful success unravels disastrously in America. The characters rebel against the mandates of their lives and fall afoul of the corruption that underlies this placid, self-satisfied façade which draws lines and never crosses them.

Amy Tan’s *Joy Luck Club* portrays a similar rebellion against expectations and traditional strictures, with the mothers as the authoritarian figures enforcing the cultural tropes. Jing-mei Woo rebels against her mother’s expectation for her and says, “unlike my mother, I didn’t believe I could be anything I wanted to be. I could only be me.” She claims her right to a separate identity, which her mother denies.

In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Gogol, a second-generation Indian boy, is the son of a successful academic and his wife by an arranged marriage. His rebellion takes the form of involvement with a well-to-do white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant girl, to whom he is attracted because of her family's easy sense of belonging and entitlement, which he contrasts unfavorably with the constant tension and marginality of his parents' lives. He tries to create an American identity, tries to avoid the disparaging label ABCD ("American-born, confused deshi," where deshi means Indian).

He is at home nowhere. A similar longing for ease and freedom of discourse and emotional expression between parent and child is portrayed in Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker*. The novel offers an insight into the formality of the relations between the striving immigrant, full of the sense of duty and obligation to his family, and the discomfort of the child simply wanting the comfort and cultural ease of the native-born. "I so wanted to be familiar and friendly with my parents like my white friends were with theirs. ...I wanted just once for my mother and father to relax a little bit with me. Not treat me so much like a *son*. ...Like it was their duty and not their love." In his family, emotional expression so characteristic of American life, is never permitted.

With all of the conflicts, dislocations and uncertainties, however, most of the more recent novels about migrant families end with some reconciliation and understanding of the problems the older generation has had in adjusting to the difficulties of American life. Though the father (or the mothers of *The Joy Luck Club*) may be authoritarian and domineering as he is in *Native Speaker*, *Desirable Daughters*, and Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents*, there is a good deal of sympathy for his plight and understanding that he may really genuinely have had the welfare of his children in mind when he insisted that his children not date, or that they conform with religious tenets, or matters of etiquette. But earlier novels assume a more confrontational mode. Two novels, especially, Henry Roth's *Call it Sleep* (1934) and Anzia Yezierska's *Breadgivers* (1925) can be singled out for their basically hostile portrayal of a brutal father, who represents the old world and almost crushes the life out of the new world pioneer. In both novels the father is portrayed as a powerful, abusive man who stands in the way of his children's happiness. Sara, the protagonist, asks bitterly, "Should I let him crush me ...? No, this is America, where children are people." She also sees in her father "a tyrant from the Old World where only men were people," and determines to become "a person," not just a "daughter," an exploitable female. She breaks away, gains an education, and becomes a teacher. Finally, she marries a man who is the model of the new, assimilated and noble man, and her father, though he maintains that in America "Respect for fathers does not exist," comes close to reconciliation with his daughter and with America, this barbarous and irreligious country. But only close.

In *Call it Sleep*, the father is physically abusive and beats his son for the unforgivable sin of taking a rosary from a Polish boy. The household is an unhappy one with conflict between father and child and also between father and mother. Finally, the father softens when the child is almost killed in a terrible accident, but the ending is far from the conventional, happy one. The gulf between the child with the dawning American consciousness and the parents is symbolized by the differences in their languages. The child is developing fluency in English; the parents must limp along in Hebrew or Yiddish, forever strangers, forever condemned to a struggle for success whose outcome is never certain.

Both these novels, which reject the restrictive, patriarchal old-world society and the brutal father-image for the freedom and self-determination of the new world, champion the assimilationist paradigm for the immigrant. The present multicultural paradigm is very different and is more sympathetic to the differences that the old world customs, traditions, etiquette and values bring to the new world. This may account for the greater tolerance between the generations portrayed in later novels and hold out hope for the resolution of some of the most problematic of the cultural and generational conflicts.

In Chang Rae Lee's *Native Speaker*, Henry listens to the voices of two workers, one Korean and one Hispanic, talking with one another. He listens to their stilted English and knows he would have ridiculed them as he did his father when he was younger. "But now, I think I would give most anything to hear my father's talk again, the crash and bang and stop of his language, always hurtling by." Thinking of his father and the hard life he has had, Henry confesses that his whole life has been dedicated to his father's dream: "to enter a place and tender the native language with body and tongue and have no one turn and point to the door."

But the price of such independence, individual identity and belonging is high. Most of these novels end in a minor key, with an uneasy truce between the generations, even as they give loving acknowledgement to all the sacrifices parents have made and all their struggles in a new and scary land to give their children a better future.

* Eva Richter, *International Federation of Business and Professional Women; NGO Committee on Human Rights, Sub-Committee on Immigrants and Refugees; Strong voice in the Field of Migration and its Social Implications*

Kevin Brabazon: I am delighted to introduce the panelists who will talk about their own migration experiences from a multigenerational perspective. They are Talar Iskanian-Hashasian [from Armenia], Irina Makarova [from Kazakhstan], Gabriel Verdaguer [from Argentina] and Mara Medina [from Mexico].

Talar Iskanian-Hashasian

In my presentation, I will talk about some of the multigenerational issues and conflicts which affect migrants and their families as well as how US immigration laws and regulations have an impact on multigenerational relations. I will draw upon my own experience as an immigrant in the US as well as my observations of clients over the years.

I am an Armenian who was born in Istanbul, Turkey. As some of you may know, parts of modern day Turkey were once historic Armenia. Most Armenians, by virtue of their history as victims of the first genocide of the 20th century, have migrated from their native land at least once. Thus, you can find an Armenian pretty much in any corner of the globe, from Europe to the US, from Ethiopia to India. As such Armenians probably provide a good example of how migrants are affected by multigenerational issues and conflicts.

Because of economic reasons, Armenians have been leaving their homeland in great numbers in recent years. An article I came across as I was preparing for this presentation indicated that the majority of men in Armenia have emigrated to outside of Armenia to US or Russia, Ukraine and other former Soviet Republics. Similar to other groups of migrants, spouses and children can only join these men when it is possible economically.

In my presentation, I will focus on how migrants struggle to maintain their identity with respect to child care and child rearing, the effect of multigenerational relations in this context as well as the implications of current US immigration laws on this issue.

Armenians place a great emphasis on the continuation of their language, religion and culture. They take pride in the fact that although small in numbers and having lived without a homeland for part of their history, they were able to maintain their culture, language and religion. Further, Armenians similar to most other immigrant populations place a great emphasis on extended family relations. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins are an important part of the family life and also provide a vital support network in child care and child rearing. Thus having an extended family to take care of children ensures that traditional cultural values are instilled in children.

My own experience as the mother of a toddler has taught me the importance of having a close knit family. I depend one hundred percent on my parents as well as my husband's family for the care of my child. It is also very important to me for my daughter to be able to speak in Armenian and understand Armenian culture and religion. Thus, I understand how not having one's family in the country where one lives can have an effect on an immigrant's life.

To further illustrate the issues and conflicts in multigenerational relationships of migrants especially as it relates to child care and child rearing and the importance of having an extended family support

network in the US as well as the impact of US immigration laws, I will give you the example of an Armenian family that has emigrated to Russia from their homeland. The family in this example consists of a mother, a father, two children and a grandmother. The mother came to the US in search of a better life for her family. She was able to find a position, but one that was part-time which allowed her to get a temporary professional work visa.

However, her salary from this part-time position was not sufficient to support her husband and her two children. As her husband would not have been able to work in the US, the family decided to stay back. While she was in the US, her mother took care of her children. This living arrangement obviously put pressure on her relationship with her husband as well as her children. Her husband and children joined her briefly in the US. However, because it would have been difficult for her husband to be able to legally work in the US, he decided to go back. The children, a college age boy and elementary school age girl also spent some time in the US. The boy took some English classes in order to be able to apply to some universities. Because of the high costs involved with a university education, he also decided to go back and continue his studies. The girl spent around one year in the US. During this time, it was extremely difficult for the mother to balance her work and her responsibilities as a mother as she did not have family members to rely on. She often had to rely on neighbors or her landlord for picking up her daughter from school and spending time with her until she came home. After some time, she asked her mother to come as a visitor to help her with child care. But as the mother's stay as a visitor was limited to six months, at the end of that time, she decided to send her daughter back with her mother. Spending almost six years living apart from her husband and children took a toll on this woman who decided she will go back to her country in order to salvage her family life. Her children could not understand why she was away from them for such a long time, she in turn felt the guilt of not being there for them at a time when they needed their mother the most.

This example also illustrates the inadequacy of current US immigration laws as it relates to multigenerational relations of immigrants. For recent immigrants to the US, it is nearly impossible to have their parents in this country let alone other relatives. Those who have permanent residence status in the US cannot sponsor their parents until they become US citizens. Generally, one is eligible for US citizenship after 5 years of being a permanent resident. Similarly, immigrants who are in the US on temporary professional work visas are not provided with a visa category to bring in their parents. The only way for their parents to come in to US is to obtain a visitor's visa which may sometimes be difficult to obtain and it also limits the stay of visitors to six months.

The example I provided earlier also illustrates how cross generational, i.e., spousal relations are affected. When one spouse is not able to work even though they are dependent of a legal worker in the US, they are forced to put their careers on hold, live in different countries or states putting an undue burden on the relationship. Current U.S. immigration laws are not drafted with the understanding of the importance of nuclear family, let alone the extended family for majority of immigrants. Those who have permanent resident status in the US have to wait well over five years before being able to bring in their spouses. Also, if when a family is eligible to become permanent residents, they have unmarried children who are over the age of 21 those children for the most part are not able to come to the US with their families and are subject to a wait of more than 10 years. Married children can only be sponsored when their parents become US citizens and at that time they will have to wait about eight years. Permanent residents cannot sponsor their siblings until they themselves become US citizens and then the wait for the siblings to immigrate is more than eleven years.

Irina Makarova

My name is Irina Makarova, and I am currently attending E.R. Murrow High School in New York City. I am an immigrant - I emigrated to the U.S. on April 6, 1998 from Karaganda, Kazakhstan. I am not a native of that land, as you can see - meaning I am not a Kazakh. Although my family and I participated in Kazakh culture, we have also been discriminated against. I'm a fluent Russian speaker who attended a German private school, had many Kazakh friends, and who was also disliked by many Kazakh, as well as Russian, figures. I actually barely know the language of the country I was born in, except for a few phrases embedded in my mind, along with the national anthem. I personally have been harassed in school, in the playgrounds, etc. My brother was attacked a few times - he was beaten, his personal things were stolen, and he was humiliated. We'd go away to visit our grandparents, and we'd come back to shattered windows and hate messages. But the term "hate crime" does not exist in that country, simply because people don't care. The police shrugged it all off as insignificant nonsense. I of course was completely unaware of the goings on, because I was a child. That's why I didn't really see the purpose of going to America, and I did not know that it would be eight years until I would have the privilege of thinking that I could actually go back and visit my family.

After a ridiculously difficult, acrimonious, if not even war-like clash with the border police, we managed to escape to America by a train ride to Almaty, a plane to Moscow, and a plane here. How absolutely magical and surreal everything seemed to be to an eight year old child. I was enchanted by everything my eyes came in contact with, and in my mind I had created a scene where my father would come, take us to a big home, and we'd buy a dog, and I'd break the social barrier. Disappointment hit really hard when I entered our cockroach infested abode. We had to sleep on the floor for a couple of days. This really wasn't the America I had in my mind. Compared to our gorgeous apartment in Kazakhstan, our residence seemed more like a third-world country. Immigration really didn't smile upon us; our situation was terrible. True, I was a child, and was free from adults' troubles, but I could still tell that this was not royal living. The first year was just humiliating. We were one of those people on the streets, collecting bottles every night for the 5¢ deposit. Pride and dignity were pushed to the back of the mind, because these were the times of tough life and tough love, where we literally had to scrape. What's really depressing is that my mother was an engineer back in Kazakhstan but, once she came here, became useless because she did not know the language. ***It was really difficult for her because she didn't have her parents or her siblings to rely on.*** It was even harder for my dad because his mother died on the day we came here - sort of an ominous sign. It took her a while before she finally managed to acquire a position as a home attendant, and from then on things gradually began to improve.

School for me was an unpleasant experience because, not only did I have a heavy accent and little to no knowledge of the language, I was also slightly obese. This I guess is sort of irrelevant, but a big part of the reasons for my misery. Although it was an immigrant school, where you'd think all the different cultures would make the whole "melting pot" image come to life, I was once again harassed by other immigrant children. Sociability was not my thing, and it's not like I could actually speak to the others, because all of my escaped words would only encourage their amusement. And such inability to communicate, and poor relationships with people, continued until middle school, where I memorized vocabulary words profusely, and practiced my English, so I could prove everyone wrong - which I did. So in a way I guess I managed to accomplish my purpose. ***However, in all of these years I did not have an extended family to back me up.*** It's really difficult to contact Kazakhstan, so the only forms of communication were once-a month phone calls, and once-a month letters. Now we can send e-mails to each other, and all that, but just the whole not being with family

for a good eight years has really rubbed off on me. A struggle occurs within you, where you do not wish to lose your culture, but you can feel it ebb away because all you do is communicate with teenagers, whose only purpose in life is to fit in. I feel very lucky that I can still read, write, and speak in my language, and that I still carry on a bit of my tradition and culture. I personally feel that not being around people who genuinely care for you makes you more cold-hearted. I've missed out on many things. I was not there for the birth of my baby cousin, and she is four years old now, and I don't know when I will actually meet her. Eight years we waited for our green cards, and because of mere technicalities and the most random rules of that country, we cannot travel to Kazakhstan. People age, so we don't know who's going to pass away next - it's really sad.

I am currently an employee of Prospect Park Care Centers, a long-term care facility. It is hard to find words to describe the definite amount of help that I have rendered, and that I have absorbed from interacting from those who are in severe need. The age difference is blatantly obvious, seeing how the younger persons provide a certain level of support for the aged. There is a not-so-pleasant truth I see there - not every resident is visited by their extended family members. It's a sardonic view, to see human beings simply become exhausted from life to a point of complete apathy. While talking to them, I realize that they realize their situation and they accept it and become docile, or refuse their inevitable fate, and go insane. Sad but true, but those are just my observations. After all, the real reason for the elderly being there is most likely because they were a burden to their families, or they simply don't have anyone left to take care of them. Very rarely are there people who actually choose to be walled in in such a facility. I had an experience that helped me to understand this. I had to lie in Maimonedes hospital for four days, and by the fourth day I thought that I would lose my mind if I had to stay there another day. Inactivity and ineptness are such painful things to bear. I remember having difficulty convincing the doctors there that I was sane, because I was absolutely hysterical from being unable to breathe real air or walk. After I returned I had a completely different perspective on the way those people are. I now understand why some of the residents in the wheelchairs would look at me with envious and beastly, loathing stares, whenever I would walk by. Before I would get irritated, now I am there with them, body and soul. Just looking at them fills you with a paranoiac fear of the future, because you suddenly realize that you will age, and someone will have to take care of you eventually. What if you have to stay in such a facility for years, but you can't even speak the language because you are an immigrant? Basically it's just so painfully dull, to be unable to communicate even with the nurses, and be unable to participate in the therapeutic recreation programs which are the only source of entertainment. That's why it is so pivotal to know that for some reason or another, your age, or culture, or good old plain amiability are helpful in bringing some light to the monotonous existence of the residents.

It would have been extremely helpful for me to encounter these people when I was growing up in another country. But at least now, I can help the immigrants who don't have anyone to depend on. I don't want to be a pretentious ego maniac, and say that my presence there has changed the course of life for those people - not at all. But I can tell that the communication is doing something to them. Many times I get confused with being their granddaughter, and that makes them so happy, because they truly believe that there is someone there with them. That's not deceit, nor is it cruelty. Basic, almost silly things like sitting next to someone and holding their hand, and responding to them in their language can mean so much to a person. I do whatever I can just to get some sort of human response from them, be it participation, or just a smile. I didn't have anyone to help me when I was struggling as an immigrant because my parents had an overwhelming amount of their own problems, and everyone else was an ocean and a continent away. This gives an option, that if I ever reach a point of being unable to help myself, and my children are too busy with their own lives, and they send me to a nursing home, there'll be someone there who'll talk to me and keep me company, and convince me that they are related to me.

Gabriel Verdaguer

Thank you to the NGO Committee on Ageing and the Subcommittee on Multigenerational Relationships for the invitation to join the panel today. I will begin my presentation by offering you some background information and then address the topic of today's panel in the subsequent section. Unlike the previous presentations, I think the story of my family's experience with migration provides an exception to the rule because of the relatively few, though not insignificant, conflicts that we have had to deal with along the way.

Background Information

I immigrated to the United States from Argentina with my immediate family of nine in July of 1990; I was 9 years old at the time. My family has some recent history of immigration with my paternal and maternal great grandparents immigrating to Argentina from Spain and Italy, respectively. Since then, however, my immediate family has been the first and only family unit to migrate to another country among the members of my extended family. About my parents: my father was an oncologist in Argentina and now practices psychiatry in Massachusetts, and my mother was a biochemist and a college professor in Argentina and is now a teacher, also in Massachusetts.

My parents, with the consultation of my siblings and I, decided to move to the U.S. for three reasons: (1) because of the short- and long-term professional development and welfare of my parents; (2) because of the educational welfare of my siblings and I; (3) because of an affinity and admiration for some American ideals and ways of life (e.g., freedom of religion, freedom of speech, et cetera).

In December of 1999, after nine years in the U.S., I returned to Argentina with my immediate family for the first time. Since then, I have returned individually or with other family members an additional 3 times.

Impact of Multigenerational Perspectives on Migrants

As to the issues and conflicts typically associated with the experience of migration - i.e., with particular attention to the role and influence of multiple generational levels within the family system - again, I believe my family may perhaps offer a different version of the prototypical experience. In this section of the presentation, I will talk first about the possible conflicts and challenges faced among the members of my immediate family, and second, about the role of our extended family and of family members from other generations that remained in Argentina.

Like many others, the story of my family's immigrant experience is full of, both, funny and serious anecdotes that, together, reveal the ways in which we all handled adjusting and adapting to our new environment. However, our story includes relatively few instances of conflicts within our family unit as a result of migration. Most of the conflicts and challenges that we faced and, in some cases, continue to face are associated with trying to form, understand, and maintain a comprehensible sense of identity. Some of the reasons why I believe we faced minimal conflicts among us as a result of migration include:

- Two-generational migration: only parents and children
- Progressive and open outlook of parents
- Parents encouraged integration (ex. learning English) AND preservation (ex. speaking Spanish at home, maintaining culinary traditions)
- Country of origin is generally developed; parents raised in a metropolitan area
- Economic status
- Strong family values and relationships

Similarly, multigenerational conflicts did not really occur within my extended family, which includes everyone that continues to live in Argentina. With few exceptions, my extended family has been a significant source of strength. The two areas of conflicts - associated with migration - that exist between my immediate family and my extended family involved religion and cultural dissimilarity.

Like much of the country, the majority of my extended family is Catholic. My parents were raised in traditional Catholic fashion - attending Sunday school, completing the appropriate Sacraments, et cetera. For various reasons, through the years my parents strayed away from the traditional practices of Catholicism. When the time came to address the issue of what to do about their children, they decided they would baptize all of us Catholic and then allow us to explore and chose the religion of our preference with their full support. Their approach to religion is part of the reason why the U.S., with its principle of religious freedom, was an appealing place to which to migrate. However, my parents' decision created some tension between my immediate family and my extended family which, to some extent, is still present.

The other area of conflict - cultural dissimilarity - is not as serious as the aforementioned one, but it occasionally makes for some uncomfortable interaction. Some of the discomfort involves the issue of maintaining a genuine Argentinian identity; for example, through language. Other instances involve their unending curiosity with our love-lives; something that is discussed often among family members over there and not as often here.

This concludes my presentation, offering, perhaps, a different perspective. I thank you for your time and I welcome your questions. Thank you.

Mara Medina

First I will give an account of my immigrating experience from Mexico. Unlike Gabriel and Irina, my extended family, including my grandmother was already in the US, which gives you an additional generation. Following the brief account, I will give you two examples of intergenerational dynamics and of integration/identity issues.

Unlike Gabriel, my extended family immigrated first. My uncle came to the US looking for better opportunities; following him, my grandmother and her youngest daughter were finally able to flee from an abusive marriage. My mother had once spent a year in California in the 1970s, and coming from a small town, found the free love spirit of the '70s too much. She never wanted to come back to the U.S...until her son was born. My little brother was born with Spina Bifida, one of the most common birth defects in industrialized nations, but a devastating one in developing countries. The doctors told my mother it would be a miracle if my brother made it out of the hospital let alone reach his 5th birthday. My mother took my little brother home, and in a country where you had to wait until someone died to get a wheelchair, she knew where to take her son.

With the opportunity, my mother came to the United States...my father was offered a job at an upscale Mexican restaurant in Philadelphia. However, the papers that were given to us were false, and we found ourselves illegal in the U.S. Moving first to NYC and joining my aunt, uncle and grandmother, I found myself living in a windowless basement, with barely no shower (just a hole where water came out and a drain right below it with a small plastic curtain in the middle of the basement we lived at). The heating pipes were exposed, and my mother had to cover them to prevent more burns that we got when we accidentally touched them in our sleep. Soon enough my grandmother, aunt and my mother moved to Philadelphia to join my father who was managing the restaurant. Philadelphia was home to a Children's Hospital, which at the time had one of the best Spina Bifida clinics in the country. My father, used to managing four restaurants in five star hotels in Mexico, found the upscale but little restaurant an insult. The pay was much lower. My mother, knowing better English from her stay, was able to find a job cleaning houses to supplement the income. This was a blow to my father's macho pride, and his stay in the U.S. was rather short. He left my mother shortly after a year of arriving, and we never heard from him again.

While my mother worked as much as she could to pay for the food on the table and the roof over our heads, I didn't see her much when I was a child. It was my grandmother who walked me to school and picked me up. It was her who helped me do most of my schoolwork. My brother was very ill and my mother's spare hours were spent in the hospital. My grandmother is not the typical grandmother. She was an accountant in Mexico, which at her time was unusual. She was a female accountant at a large hotel. As a working woman and defying the norms, she also doesn't know how to cook. She always had a cook helping her with her three children and the house. In the United States, despite being a citizen, she still cleans houses, even today. My aunt, who is now 40 but has never married, still lives with my grandmother, a custom very much practiced in Mexico. My family (my mother, grandmother, aunt and brother) still live together in Philadelphia.

I will share two experiences which made me think a lot about who I am, what was expected of me, and how I am perceived, not only as a woman, but as an immigrant. When Eva recounted the characters in her novels, she asked, "who are we as individuals?"

I was in a relationship for five years to an amazing young Italian man (Stefano). I had met him at college and my family loved him as much as I did. My grandmother is 66, my mother is 45, and being in my early twenties I was already breaking the pattern. Many times they asked when we were to marry and have children. Marriage? Children? I wanted to finish college and go on to graduate school and work before having children. Didn't they want this as well? As the first to go to college, I was going to be breaking more than one pattern. As with any relationships we had our fights, and on a visit to my family, we fought. My mother knew to just leave us alone and that we would resolve things on our own. My grandmother, however, is another story. I don't even recall what the fight was about, but as I cried softly in a room, my grandmother came to bestow some wisdom. She told me not to fight back with Stefano; that men do not like women who raise their voices and differ in opinion. This was ironic coming from a woman who fled from her husband. I understood that she was coming from a different country – and therefore expected this to be perhaps the norm. Angrily, I said that we aren't in Mexico. Stefano is not Mexican, and this is who I am. I fight back and I don't lower my head just because we had disagreements. With that, she never said anything to me again regarding my relationship.

My second instance has more to do with self identity – as an immigrant, than intergenerational relationship with my family. I lived in three different countries in Europe over the span of three years; there I found myself being labeled as an “American.” I was carrying a U.S. passport so I understood the connection...but all my time in the U.S. I was an immigrant – a Mexican immigrant. Unlike the U.S. – the immigrant population in Europe are from other developing countries, such as Turkey, North Africa and the Indian sub-continent. It was with these immigrant children who understood me. I asked them if they had the opportunity to live in the U.S., would they say they were German or British? Or would they say they were Turkish or Pakistani? They understood me instantly.

It is talking with them that I noticed that since our parents/families left our native countries, decades ago, we were being raised with those traditions – the traditions/cultural norms of that time. Our native countries kept evolving, slowly changing cultural norms – but our parents couldn't see that change...and we were growing up with what our parents remembered – not the Mexico (or the Turkey) that would be today. It is as if American parents today were raising their children with the standards of the 1970s or early '80s, meanwhile for the children it is 2006. It is already difficult as an immigrant child being raised with different standards from another country. Making it even more difficult is the fact that those standards are from the past.

I hope this provides a small glimpse of how it is to grow up as an immigrant within a multigenerational family ...and I will be happy to answer any questions.

Kevin Brabazon: The informative, moving and sometimes eloquent comments made by panelists have helped to define the issue of migration as one that is beyond a simplistic individual concept and one that is inherently multigenerational, raising questions on governmental policies and NGO services that fail to address the issue in this way, or which have an overly individualistic focus. I am now honored to introduce Dr. Rosa Perla Resnick, a distinguished professor and advocate in the migration field who will provide a summary of the whole proceedings and how they pertain to the current migration situation

SUMMARY

Rosa Perla Resnick *

The title of today's program "Multigenerational Perspectives on Migration" (1), refers to the goal that the Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships, NGO Committee on Ageing, wanted to achieve: to present the experience of several persons of different ages and genders, who were immigrants to the US coming from various parts of the world, having different national, cultural and educational backgrounds, and still, sharing similar problems related to their migration experiences and yet, having enjoyed much of what they have found in their new country.

This final writing summarizes the highlights of their presentations and concludes with some ideas and suggestions for the future that have emerged from the discussion held with the audience.

In addition, from the outset some clarifications are in order: The Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships is working within the UN framework in the field of Ageing as described in the Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (Madrid, Spain April 2002). It is also working around the UN General Assembly's resolution 4/60/490 that recommended holding a High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development in NYC from 14 to 15 September 2006, (2).

There is a fundamental categorical distinction between immigrants (migrants) and refugees. Immigrants leave their countries voluntarily, usually in search of better economic opportunities, and refugees are forced out of their countries because of human rights violations (discrimination, persecution, genocide) against them; natural disasters and wars.

The more recent theories recognize that migration is a result of factors operating at three levels: the macro or structural level, which entails political economic, cultural, and geographical forces in the international arena, the country of origin, and the country of destination; the meso or relational level, which entails the relationships between potential movers and stayers in both the country of origin and the country of destination; and the micro or individual level, which entails personal characteristics and the individual's freedom to make autonomous decisions about moving or staying.

All the participants' remarks fall, in one way or another, into that scheme, of which highlights follow below:

Eva Richter (German, Chinese, American) in her innovative approach, presented a very interesting and lively collection of illustrations from world literature. Similarities and differences affecting migrants' Multigenerational Relationships in the various countries and cultures described in her novels were striking as they showed that those issues had been around since the beginning of time and are still with us at the beginning of the 21st century.

Talar Ishamian Hashasian, an Armenian lawyer, focused particularly on the legal issues faced by immigrants and refugees in their inalienable right (3) to keep their families together. She referred specifically to the fact that current U.S. legislation is not conducive to that end and claimed for needed reform to be introduced. She mentioned problems of young working mothers, including herself, who are torn between caring for their children and fulfilling their work obligations without having their mothers' and grandmothers' support because they were unable to immigrate here due to legal constraints.

Irina Markova, a Russian young lady, via Kazakhstan, described her issues of discrimination, persecution, abuses, and physical aggression in her native country, as well as her difficulties to integrate into the new American environment, while still making every effort to keep up with her own culture, language and traditions. Out of her own experience she developed an interest in helping aged people with no family connections, and landed a job in a nursing home in New York. There she found that attitudes and services "to care" for the elderly were "terrible", and said that she hoped she would never ever have to end up in such a place in her advanced years.

Gabriel Verdaguer (Argentina) referred to his immigration experience as being "out of the ordinary", coming from a developed country today, whose features are generally similar to the United States. There his family enjoyed a high social, educational, professional and economic status. All of this made his migration experience a very positive one, including the fact that his parents were sensitive enough to help their children exercise the freedom and individuality prevalent in the US. Issues of religion and political preferences were tackled by him with references to visits to the family members left behind and ensuing discussions about their different points of view concerning those issues.

Mara Medina (Mexico) brought up multiple problems affecting her and her family in her native country, later on replicated upon her migration to the US, such as human and social relationships with her parents and grandparents; dating customs; domestic violence; employment and financial strains; health; housing; identity conflicts and legal issues. With much effort, over time, she was able to overcome all those difficulties.

Today she has gained her independence; has traveled to several European countries; is able to enjoy high level educational opportunities, having recently graduated from Boston College and currently, is on her way to Jordan to do research on Iraqi migrants and refugees under the auspices of a Fulbright Fellowship. But her memories of her old country and older relatives left behind, holding fast to their traditions, customs, beliefs and language, are still vividly present in her mind and in her heart.

To summarize:

The empirical material presented today and some comments from the audience can be synthesized as follows

1. The emigration/immigration experience is always very difficult for the entire family in terms of decision making processes to leave and the gradual phases required for resettlement, integration and assimilation into the new country.
2. As a result, conflicts between and among the various generations involved arise, both in the countries of origin and destination, due to differing cultural and value systems prevalent therein.

3. However, relationships and communication between and among those various generations can be helpful in realizing and accepting similarities and differences to facilitate the migration and acculturation processes.
4. Legal issues affect all migrants in all countries. In the US immigration and refugee policies have historically evolved from open admissions to more restricted admissions. Currently, policies are being reexamined and are guided by social, economic, cultural, moral and security goals.
5. Main problem areas included: family dynamics and relationships; health; mental health; language; religion; education; economic well being; housing; politics; interethnic relations and identity formation.
6. Positive views referred to pride in their ancestors, heritage; culture, language, and most importantly to the role of their extended family. The latter was highlighted by all as the most significant influence in their lives.

In addition: the experiences presented today showed that, in the end, most immigrants and refugees are an asset and a net gain for their new countries in terms of their important cultural and economic contributions. Where the unique difficulties faced by those populations require help, a compassionate, effective, values-based, strength-based and empirically-based approach should be used. That help should be the responsibility of mainstream agencies as well as agencies specialized in migration and legal assistance, and refugee resettlement services.

Finally, educating professionals in all fields for sensitive and culturally competent practice, would add a most important dimension to their helping endeavors.

NOTES:

(1) The UN uses the term “migration” as a general umbrella for immigrants, emigrants, asylum seekers, refugees and “irregular” entrants. The term refers to population shifts and the particular problems attendant upon these. However, in this publication we respect the use of the word “immigration” in the panelists’ presentations as well as in following common usage today.

(2) As part of the preparatory activities leading to the event the UN General Assembly held one day of Informal Interactive Hearings with the participation of non-governmental and civil society organizations and the private sector on July 11th and 12th, 2006 at the UN Headquarters, in which have actively participated.

(3) UN (1948), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (articles 13, 14 and 16)

For more information visit www.unmigration.org and www.multigenerational.org.

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Migrants

*Home. Home. A word which calls up images of warmth and comfort.
A place which enfolds us with childhood joy and grown up ease.
Home, where we are strengthened to leave, where we long to return.*

*Immigration, a word standing starkly, a condition which is filled with
anxiety and difficulty.*

*We are mandated to understand the facts of immigration, this
worldwide state of living for millions of people, old and young, of every
color, race and nationality.*

*If we are pledged to repair this world, we must understand the
conditions of life for so many of the human family, hungry, tired,
lonely, ill, far from home.*

*Overarching the understanding of the conditions of immigrants, the
numbers and the need for help, is the relation to this world, our home,
the need to feel at home on this planet earth within the human family.*

*What then are the facts?
And what can we do to help?*

Norma U. Levitt