

Yazbeck 1

George Yazbeck

Professor Jennifer Martin

February 16, 2014

Cause and Effect on Immigration: A Personal Look

Immigration from one part of the world to another is practiced worldwide. Oftentimes, the main catalyst for immigrating relates to problems in the emigrant's country. These problems include but are not limited to war, a weak economy and an overall limiting lifestyle. Facing the possible prospect of living through these problems, some families will flee in search of a better life. As a result, families will experience positive outcomes such as job opportunities, better education and a more engaging lifestyle. Ultimately, detrimental effects will result, concerning the distancing of one's parents heritage. This would lead to one having a language barrier and a reluctance to accept and/or adapt to their parents' society (when needed, i.e. by visiting). By all means, every immigrant family will have similar causes for settling in a new country and endure similar effects by doing so. Some will even build families based on decisions made before arriving to settle abroad. This personal account will look at one family who did just that.

Many years ago, a Lebanese couple by the name of the Yazbecks had wed, not long after a tumultuous civil war ravaged the country. The 15 year war, although over, had completely shattered the safety of certain public locales and had significantly weakened the economy. Bombings were rampant in the country's capital which hindered business growth and development. The country's weak economy directly resulted in minimal job opportunities and a questionable future ahead in terms of living with adequate accommodations. Due to the war's length, as well as some skirmishes and governmental struggles preceding it, Lebanese Christians had engaged in a diaspora. It didn't take long for the newlywed couple to pack

Yazbeck 2

their bags and leave for the West, soon becoming a part of the diaspora. Although certainly not an easy task to leave one's homeland due to established bonds and deep sentiments, this couple knew that there were future opportunities that lie ahead. The plan was simple: to find a job to financially support a family, to look forward to finding a good education for the children and lastly, to engage growth in lifestyle for everyone (parents included).

The number one priority for most immigrants upon living abroad is to seek a well-paying job opportunity. This was indeed the most important task to fulfill and this was certainly what the father had to accomplish first before starting a family. For eight years, he worked in a restaurant business while his wife took care of three kids. However, success in that business wasn't guaranteed to begin with. As with most immigrants, it often takes many tries to get ahold of a job or career opportunity that will deliver moderate to great financial success. This was certainly the case with this immigrant father. Taking into account of the location where his family resided, the father came to conclusion to move elsewhere to seek possible financial success. Thus, the move to the U.S. from Canada was initiated and a new job search commenced thereafter. Although it took another couple of years, success was finally welcomed upon the management of a gas station business/convenience store; it was an outcome that wouldn't have happened had this family stayed in Lebanon.

Aside from the opportunity and future success found career-wise, a new prospect would also open for the family regarding education. Far away from all the riots and insecurities that Lebanon had happening, the West guaranteed a better sense of security and far more structure in its educational institutions. Thus, when it was time for each child to attend kindergarten, a road to learning had been born. In both academic and social senses, having the children of immigrant families grow up in institutions in foreign countries sets up

Yazbeck 3

a lifestyle that caters to each. In the academic sense, the level of rigor and structure an institution has shapes a young individual to become destined for a degree-earned career (an opportunity not always offered in some second- and third-world countries, like Lebanon). And in the social sense, attending school among a numerous and diverse student body furthers one's social skills and sociological development. Contributing to this, school activities ranging from sports to clubs ultimately shape up one's interests in hobbies as well as securing friendships among classmates and peers alike.

One final prospect that immigrants achieve after settling abroad is the welcoming and eventual adaption to a new lifestyle. A new lifestyle can be defined in multiple ways. From a resource standpoint, moving to a Western civilization provides almost unlimited means in shopping. Supermarkets, convenience stores, department stores and malls are some of those means. Adapting to a lifestyle of obtaining goods through shopping enhances basic everyday activities from food consumption to putting on clothes of one's style. Experiencing this certainly changed the Lebanese family's outlook on living. Many materials that were scarce to nonexistent in the homeland could now be bought and certain American (and foreign) cuisines could finally be enjoyed thanks to the family being introduced to them. Even more so, technology has played a more important role in defining an immigrant's lifestyle in the West. Upon the arrival of the family to Canada and the U.S., technology such as cell phones, the personal computer and entertainment systems were on the rise and ultimately made for an easier and more connected lifestyle. Such a lifestyle helped significantly in contacting relatives from a long distance and aided in performing school and business work, a far cry from the technical limitations that Lebanon had.

Yazbeck 4

So far, there have been many positives associated with an immigrant or immigrant family's decision to settle in the West. Indeed do the aforementioned positives make for great opportunities in the job, schooling and lifestyle aspects. However, some negative consequences cannot be overlooked; there are sacrifices for pursuing the American Dream via leaving behind an emigrant's home country. Upon the birth of an immigrant couples' children abroad, one major sacrifice concerns the lost opportunity of having them grow up within their parents' heritage. This sacrifice could lead to two major problems pertaining to the children: overcoming a language barrier and dealing with a reluctance to accept and/or adapt to their parents' society.

Experiencing a language barrier is very common among various immigrant families. It is no less different with the Yazbecks. Due to the family moving to two pre-dominantly English-speaking countries, their sons were heavily influenced by English as it was taught in school. Couple this with the influence of Western music, TV and film, there would be no other reason to not use English unless a specific situation calls for speaking in one's mother tongue. Situations that do require the Yazbeck children to speak or listen to Arabic include speaking to relatives (both living abroad and back home) and immersing into Arabic songs, both of which are practiced. Despite the effort, the English language has more value to the children and since Arabic is used occasionally, a moderate language barrier exists. Without the 100% fluency of the language of their parents', the children cannot primarily use Arabic consistently to communicate with older relatives. Fortunately, their understanding of the language outshines their vocabulary, thanks to courses that teach Arabic abroad and furthermore, Lebanon is a trilingual nation. English as well as French is spoken there of

Yazbeck 5

which the younger generation is more exposed to, making communication with cousins, easier.

From time to time, an immigrant family has to visit their homeland once in a while; but having children born outside the country can make for some conflict regarding acceptance. This acceptance refers to coming to terms with the culture and society of one's parents' upbringing. The Yazbeck family had made a few visits to Lebanon since their immigration to the West. The first visit occurred when the children were very young; at this time of life, no one expects anyone to observe differences in an environment and to choose one over the other (in most cases). The second trip, in contrast, took place years later. The Yazbeck children were older and could now truly compare and contrast their parents' old upbringing vs. their own. Lebanon, as they saw it in their eyes, was a mix between old and new customs. The new customs encompassed adopted offerings such as roads, resorts, parks and international restaurants. However, the old customs remained; these included villages (where both Yazbeck parents grew up in, which encompassed a somewhat rural life) and outdated technology.

It was no easy task for the children to come to terms with their surroundings. Becoming used to a Western lifestyle, where up-to-date technology both supports and defines day-to-day life, living in a rural village was a big jump to endure. Therefore, the children couldn't immediately relate to and appreciate their temporary life overseas. Without a good internet connection, or videogame console, or even quickly cooked meals, the children were at a loss. Furthermore, defiance and reluctance to accept his position readily plagued the oldest child. He complained that the lack of activities in Lebanon (due to safety issues) and subsequent confinement at his parents' home (except for excursions) made him bored and

Yazbeck 6

longing for the Western lifestyle he was used to. Eventually though, he gave in to his situation (as did his younger brothers) after being comforted by relatives, some of whom could relate. This certainly made the rest of the trip bearable and future visits would become tolerable.

In all, immigration is a choice that many foreigners take in order to provide a life filled with safety and prosperity for their children. This is a common motive that yields both positive and negative effects. While the negatives obviously result from having a family live far away from the sphere of influence of one's home culture, the positives nonetheless deliver. A well-paying job, a promising education and a modern and resourceful lifestyle is worthy for an immigrant family to prosper. Despite some setbacks, they can be overcome. If descending from immigrant parents means that there are two paths to follow, one where the descendent can retrace their heritage and maintain their bonds while living abroad, and one where the descendent doesn't, it is their choice. Nevertheless, whatever choice a person makes is a major life effect following a major life decision built around a cause.