



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## International Journal of Intercultural Relations

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/ijintrel](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/ijintrel)

## Acculturation, social exclusion and resistance: Experiences of young Moroccans in Italy



Elvira Cicognani<sup>a,\*</sup>, Christopher C. Sonn<sup>b</sup>, Cinzia Albanesi<sup>a</sup>, Bruna Zani<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy

<sup>b</sup> Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

### ARTICLE INFO

**Keywords:**  
Acculturation  
Citizenship  
Belonging  
Moroccan  
Identity

### ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines how young people of Moroccan descent in Italy construct their social identities and make sense of acculturation experiences. Twenty nine Moroccan young people, fourteen males and fifteen females (16–23 years old) took part in five focus groups. Thematic analyses of data indicated that participants have to navigate different identity categories in the host country, including Muslim, Moroccan, and migrant, which are often used to construct them as not belonging. They use different strategies to negotiate experiences of prejudice and exclusion including; *“Italy is not my home... it is other people’s home”*: Accommodating an outsider status, turning critically towards one’s community, claiming an insider status: *Feeling Italian, Creating activist identities: Becoming bridge builders.*

In the absence of legal status, participants conceived citizenship as respecting Italian laws and norms, accommodating their status and position, but making claims based on being and feeling as belonging – cultural citizenship. By using a liberation orientation, our analysis shows the political nature of acculturative integration in a context that denies citizenship as a legal status. These political aspects include deconstructing exclusionary dominant group narratives and forming identities of resistance that are important to their claims for recognition and belonging. We discuss the findings with reference to ways in which researchers and activists can support the activities of young people of immigrant background.

### Introduction

Italy has traditionally been a migrant sending country, but since 2000 migrants arriving in the country have increased dramatically (from about 1.5 million in 2002 to about 5 million of migrants in 2014)<sup>1</sup>. Similar to international trends, a considerable number of migrants in Italy are second-generation children below 20 years of age (about 25%). This rapid increase in migrant arrivals posed challenges for a country still unprepared to manage and integrate the diversity of cultures and peoples into the society. This lack of readiness has resulted in varied responses to new arrivals at political and institutional level, as well as among the population and in the media. We still know very little about the experiences and perspectives of young migrants about identity and belonging in Italy. While there are numerous incoming communities, Moroccan migrants are one of the largest groups in the EU, as well as in Italy. This group has been constructed as a culturally incompatible community in political discourse as well as in popular media. These broader level responses have implications for acculturation experiences, and how young Moroccans resist oppressive discourses and

\* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of Bologna, Piazza A. Moro, 90, Cesena, Italy.

E-mail address: [elvira.cicognani@unibo.it](mailto:elvira.cicognani@unibo.it) (E. Cicognani).

<sup>1</sup> [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2018.07.002>

Received 12 October 2017; Received in revised form 13 July 2018; Accepted 13 July 2018  
0147-1767/© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

negotiate social identities and belonging in Italy. Drawing on data collected as part of a larger project involving several EU countries,<sup>2</sup> this article examines, from a liberation psychology perspective (e.g., [Montero & Sonn, 2009](#); [Sonn & Fisher, 2003](#); [Sonn & Lewis, 2009](#)), young people's experiences of social exclusion and racism, and how young people respond to such experiences.

### *Acculturation, social exclusion, and identity construction*

In social and cultural psychology there have been significant developments aimed at understanding the complexities of immigration and settlement experiences ([Berry, 2010](#); [Birman, 2011](#); [Deaux, 2000](#); see also [APA, 2012](#)). Migrants face a range of unfamiliar contexts and relationships that demand adaptive responses, which includes achieving a balance between cultural continuity (i.e. retain ideals, values, and beliefs from their original culture) and cultural change (i.e. shed their culture and adopt ideals, values, and beliefs of the receiving society and seek participation with it). Berry and colleagues ([Berry, 2001, 2005](#); [Sam & Berry, 2010](#)) offered a framework for understanding acculturation, which includes four acculturating options, namely assimilation, integration, marginalization, or separation. At an individual level, these acculturative processes are closely associated with social and cultural identity issues ([Bhatia & Ram, 2001](#); [Bhatia, 2011](#)). Migrant adolescents and young adults also face acculturation challenges at a time when they are involved in the typical negotiations associated with the construction of a personal identity that characterize this developmental period ([Berry et al., 2006](#); [Kennedy & MacNeela, 2014](#); [Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006](#)).

Some researchers have highlighted some problematic assumptions underlying the either/or and linear outcomes implicit in Berry's model for how people are absorbed into a nation ([Bhatia, 2002](#); [Chirkov, 2009](#); [Hermans & Kempen, 1998](#)). In community psychology, [Birman and Bray \(2017\)](#) have argued that research and intervention into immigrant experiences should take an ecological perspective in order to understand the range of factors that influence the process. Similarly, from a liberation psychology perspective, [García-Ramírez, de la Mata, Paloma, and Hernández-Plaza \(2011\)](#) and [Luque-Ribelles, Herrera-Sanchez, and García-Ramírez \(2017\)](#), [Martín-Baró \(1994\)](#), [Montero \(2009\)](#), [Sonn and Fisher \(2003\)](#), [Sonn and Lewis \(2009\)](#) have emphasized the social ecology and the interrelatedness of people and social systems along with the dynamics of power and privilege within a society that affects individual and group experiences of settlement and acculturative integration. Such perspectives point to the need to analyse acculturation phenomena as fluid and dynamic processes, by locating them within an ecological context characterized by asymmetrical power relationships between social groups (e.g., natives and migrants) ([Sonn & Fisher, 2003](#)). It draws attention to the structural dynamics of oppression and exclusion which have been so far insufficiently analysed in the context of acculturation processes of migrants, and migrant youth in particular ([Andreouli, 2013](#); [Bhatia, 2002](#); [Chirkov, 2009](#); [Hale & de Abreu, 2010](#); [Kadianaki, 2014](#); [Shweder, 2003](#)). Conditions of oppression (that manifest themselves through negative experiences involving prejudice, racism, discrimination) generate different social and psychological responses as migrants attempt to adapt to them. These different response can include negative ones (e.g., internalization of negative group identities, leading migrants to legitimize their subordinate status) to more positive and active ones (e.g., resisting oppression by protecting cultural values and practices and developing an "identity of resistance"). A liberation perspective, highlights a view of culture and acculturation as a transactional relationship involving complex processes through which individuals negotiate with others and in which power dynamics play an important role ([Luque-Ribelles et al., 2017](#); [Sonn & Lewis, 2009](#)). In order to understand these processes, it is important to investigate how migrants perceive and develop an understanding of their living conditions and how they construct their identity and sense of belonging.

In several countries, authors have reported the different varied ways immigrants experience acculturation, construct identities, and negotiate dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion – often involving cultural racism. Cultural racism entails symbolic practices that construct groups as outsiders, incompatible, and outside the boundaries of a moral community ([Dhmoon, 2009](#)). [Bhatia and Ram \(2001\)](#) have shown in research involving migrants from India to the United States (US) that acculturation experiences were mediated by memories of colonial histories and racialized encounters in everyday social contexts, and reflected in ways in which those migrants construct their identity and a sense of belonging in the US. [Zaal, Salah, and Fine \(2007\)](#) also described how social historical contexts and the rise in anti-Muslim sentiment influence identity negotiations for Muslims in the US. They reported that because of social and political realities many participants identified as Muslim and felt responsible for educating outsiders and challenging stereotypes about Muslim identities. That research also showed that participants used multiple identity categories that are available to them to resist oppression including, ethnic and pan ethnic identities, and hyphenating identities such as Iranian-American. Along similar lines, [Ali and Sonn \(2010\)](#), [Hale and de Abreu \(2010\)](#), [Sonnenschein and van Meijl \(2014\)](#), [Verkuyten \(2005\)](#) (for examples from other backgrounds) examined the complex and competing resources that Cypriot Turkish Australian young people draw upon to construct their social identities and make sense of experiences of social exclusion. These cultural resources include narratives about being moderate Muslims, generational status, physical appearance, ethnicity and language that all inform how people hyphenate their identities, express belonging, and claim a space within a broader context that positions as normative white Australian identity.

Young people of second-generation backgrounds construct their ethnic identities in the context of exclusionary national identities in different countries (e.g., [Ozyurt, 2013](#); [Zaal et al., 2007](#)). For example, [Ozyurt \(2013\)](#) reported that Muslim young women in the US did not emphasize their culture and ethnicity, but embraced American and Muslim identities. In comparison, Muslim women in the Netherlands strongly identified with their ethnic origins and culture because they are viewed as ethnic minorities and experience

<sup>2</sup> Processes Influencing Democratic Ownership and Participation (PIDOP), funded by the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission (2009–2012).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7323598>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7323598>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)