



Adolescents and prejudice: A comparative study of the attitudes of two European adolescent populations regarding the issues that are raised by increasing cultural and religious pluralism[☆]



Alessandro Bergamaschi ^{a,b,c,*}

^a *Université de Nice Sophia Antipolis, LAMHESS, EA 6309, 06205 Nice, France*

^b *Université de Toulon, LAMHESS, EA 6309, 83957 La Garde, France*

^c *Université de Nice Sophia Antipolis, URMIS, UMR 205, 06357 Nice France*

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ABSTRACT

This study illustrates the reaction toward the cultural and religious pluralism of two adolescent populations, from two different European countries. The goal in this study is to relate prejudices regarding immigration to the socio-cultural features that in a given context shape the issues surrounding this subject. The hypotheses proposed indicate that the socio-cultural factors represent interesting examples of variation of the stereotypes and attitudes toward the phenomenon of immigration. A survey has been conducted in Italy and France on 1277 high school students (mean age 17.2) to examine two different contexts concerning the issues that are raised by immigration phenomena. Consideration of the contextual factors will enable us to understand why young Italians express prejudices focused on economical and social issues, whereas young French people have a prejudice driven by identity issues. In order to explain such a typology of prejudice we have turned to the social and cultural characteristics that the question of immigration takes on in these two countries. Let us remember that for a more in-depth explanation of the factors that shape intergroup hostility, variables at the individual level need to be put alongside those at the contextual level. This way of working will lead to a better understanding of the social genesis of prejudices.

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1. Introduction

International immigration is leaving a profound mark on the landscape of Western European countries. Among the problems that are caused by this phenomenon in destination countries, the reactions of host societies that encounter increasing cultural and religious diversity play a fundamental role. Prejudice against migrants constitutes an obstacle to the full integration of these populations because it erects “important barriers to the realization of equal rights” (Koopmans, 2010, p. 4). The issues that have been raised in Europe with regard to immigration refer to a complex concept. In fact, both in countries with a long history of immigration (France, England, Germany, and the Netherlands) and in those with a relatively brief

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* Correspondence address: University of Nice Sophia Antipolis LAMHESS 261, Route de Grenoble BP 3259 06205 - Nice Cedex 03 France.
Tel.: +33 04 89 83 66 12; fax: +33 04 92 29 65 14.

E-mail address: bergamaschi@unice.fr

and recent experience (Italy, Spain, Greece, and Portugal), the current and previous immigration waves overlap with people who have no prior experience with immigration (Martiniello & Simon, 2005). These various groups are unlikely to be clearly differentiated in public discourse, as current rhetoric tends to reflect the broadening use of the generic expression “minority groups” (Brown & Koopmans, 2010; Ivaldi, 2004). This broadening may result from political strategies that have emphasized the difference between “national” or “majority” populations and groups whose direct or indirect origins are located outside national borders (Rea and Jacobs, 2005; Streiff-Fenart, 2009).

Since the Nineties, several studies have aimed to measure the attitudes of European citizens toward immigrant peoples. In addition to periodic findings, such as those promoted by EuroBarometer, several more precise surveys have appeared. This precision is found, for example, in studies that have been conducted by institutions such as the European Social Survey (in particular, the 2002 wave), the European Values Study and the International Social Survey Program. The study that is reported in the current article examines the intergroup attitudes that were expressed by a population of adolescents who were invited to express their opinions regarding the phenomenon of immigration. This expression, namely the phenomenon of immigration, refers to a complex concept that consists of the issues that are raised by the presence of immigrant groups within a host society, the reactions and debates that this phenomenon generates and the responses conceived by institutions that confront the needs that arise from international migration.

The choice to concentrate on an adolescent population stems from several different reasons. Compared with earlier generations, teenagers currently enjoy considerable autonomy in managing relationships, friendships and leisure, and this autonomy has contributed to the formation of a veritable “teenage culture” (Galland, 2010, p. 3). This generation wants to be recognized as a group that is able to express its views on the main issues that populate the social landscape. These changes facilitate the resolution of sociological problems for this population segment.

Second, studies of political socialization have shown that the foundations of political and social attitudes are formed during adolescence (Inglehart, 1997; Reindes, 2003). Moreover, it would be incorrect to think that these attitudes are lacking in consistency and are destined to vanish with entrance into adulthood. By comparing their essential traits even several years later, researchers have revealed the relative stability of the attitudes of teenagers (Hooghe, 2004; Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2008; White et al., 2009).

With regard to the mechanisms by which prejudice and stereotypes toward minority groups are transmitted, numerous studies note that adolescence constitutes the critical period in which intergroup attitudes are developed (Duckitt, 2001; Duriez & Soenens, 2009). Recent researches have shown that it is possible to find clear correlations between the level of ethnocentrism during adolescence and the tendency to avoid contact with people belonging to minority groups (Dejaeghere & Hooghe, 2012). Furthermore, especially in Western European countries, the greatest density of interaction with this phenomenon is being experienced by today’s younger generations. Several studies have revealed that as a result of current demographic trends, 16- to 18-year-olds currently constitute the group that is most closely influenced by ethnic diversity compared with older generations (Ford, 2008; Jakobs & Rea, 2007; Parsons & Smeeding, 2006).

With regard to such evidence, studying the “stances taken” (Montmollin, 2003, p. 89–90) by teenagers on issues raised by immigration is particularly forward thinking. Specifically, this analysis compared a sample of Italian and French teenagers, two countries which differ significantly with regard to the experience of immigration and the characteristics of this phenomenon manifested in public opinion. The objective of this study is to ascertain to what extent the social and cultural contextual factors that shape the issues raised by immigration in the Italian and the French context, influence the attitudes of teenagers toward this phenomenon, while taking into account the influence of various factors at the individual level that are regularly used in studies on intergroup attitudes.

2. Theories and hypotheses

Several studies of intergroup relations are focused on the role of perceived threats in the expression of prejudice toward immigrants or groups of foreign origin. Literature on intergroup attitudes suggests that it is possible to distinguish several types of threats perceived by the majority group (Stephan, Lausanne, Esses, Stephan, & Martin, 2005; Stephan & Stephan, 1996). First, the perception that immigration threatens the economic and social stability of the majority group or its physical well-being is known as a *realistic threat* (Blumer, 1958; Bobo, 1988; Levine & Campbell, 1972; Sherif & Sherif, 1969, 1979). For example, majority group members may fear that minority groups will take their jobs and take advantage of the welfare state and that the presence of such groups increases crime and causes the deterioration of urban spaces.

A second source of hostility is that the presence of groups originating from other cultures could spread their customs, traditions, values and beliefs in opposition to the lifestyle of the majority group. This type of threat is a *symbolic threat*. Unlike *aversive racism* (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986) or *symbolic racism* (Kinder, 1986; Kinder & Sears, 1981), the *symbolic threat* in this study is not confined to the tension between the White Protestant ethic and the Black lifestyle. Rather, this threat extends to the worldview of the majority group to groups with cultural differences in general regardless of their origin or the color of their skin. These two types of threats (i.e., *realistic threats* and *symbolic threats*) represent the two main theoretical frameworks within which to develop the hypotheses of this work.

As regards the literature on intergroup attitudes in adolescence many contributions point out the mechanisms by which prejudice and stereotypes are generated among teenagers. A major line of study is dedicated to the means of acquiring and transmitting intergroup attitudes. The objective is to isolate the main sources of influence on evaluations

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