I, We, They at the time of international terrorism: identity and métissage in immigrant families

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Introduction

The migrant Identity: challenges and vulnerabilities

The risks of radicalisation in the migration experience

The consequences of terrorism: what we know
The research

• Reconstruct the universes of meaning through which Italian Muslims families experience their multiple identities in the various contexts of their daily life in order to:
  • evaluate if and how the current international situation contributes to the organization and re-definition of the meanings themselves;
  • identify areas of vulnerability in order to assess possible risks of radicalization;
  • define appropriate intervention contexts and procedures.
Partecipants: 10 North-African immigrant families (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt), living in North Italy. We interviewed one parent and one teen-age child. The parents, 7 women and 2 men, were 37 to 51 years old; the children, 7 girls and 3 boys, were 12 to 18 years old.

Instrument: semi-structured thematic interview, used according to a flexible and non-standardized survey model (Smith, 2008) aimed at bringing out the significant experiences of each participant, allowing the individual to construct his/her own narrative.

Procedure: after establishing a confidence pact that allowed the participants to feel free telling their stories, the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in private homes or public facilities, mainly in Italian (one exception). The interviews with minors required parental consent.

Data Analysis: the interviews, audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim, were analyzed according to the methodological procedures suggested by the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 2008; Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009): a) identifying the master themes; b) identifying the salient events; c) delineating the emerging meanings
The master themes

Who am I?
Who are we?

Who am I/
Who are we
in the eyes of others?

Terrorism: what’s happening?

The school: possible context of intervention
Conclusions:

• Immigrant families define themselves through a complex, manifold and polyvalent set of attributes and values, which summarise their existential contexts.

• The terrorist events, and the way in which they are conveyed in the public discourse, are building crystallized and all-encompassing representations of the Arab-Muslim community.

• The key factor is the attribution of a negative and threatening social label. This weakens the plan of confrontation and determines the lack of recognition of the métissage at social and institutional level. Participants are forced to redefine themselves according to public discourse.

• This determines a caesura in the affiliation process and, as a consequence, there is further level of caesura in the second and third generation filiation process: parents have difficulty in the confrontation with their children and risk to not recompose the vertical narrative identity.

• These areas of vulnerability determine possible outcomes of polarization and, therefore, radicalisation.
Intervention proposal:

- Participants identify the **school** as the first effective context for **social intervention**, to lower risks connected to the current situation of hostility.

- Results suggest going beyond the simple confrontation between school and family communication, as so far described in the literature (Rousseau, Machouf, 2005). They suggest structuring more **complex and systemic interventions** which use the school as a basis to involve the whole community.

- This indicates the need to:
  - activate **specific professional skills**, such as those of psychologists, sociologists and pedagogists;
  - implement transversal projects not based on intercultural comparison, but promoting **training and education to recognize “multiple ways of being multiple”**.


Thanks for the attention
Introduction

The migrant Identity

- Identity: a multiple, polyvalent and creative construct.

The paradigm of métissage: mestizo thinking and mestizo identity

*Mestizo identity as a plural identity of a subjectivity whose autonomy is based on a series of heteronomies* (Laplantine, Nouss, 1997, 2001)

**Plurality as an existential condition**

- Polyvalence in the migration experience: between identity crises and creative processes (Park, 1992; Sayad, 1999; Anolli, 2004)

*Métissage* in the transcultural perspective:

*The challenge of métissage: insert oneself into the world of here, supporting oneself into the world of origin of one's parents, leads to a dynamic mixture of women and men, of thoughts, of their becoming* (Moro, Baubet, 2004).

**filiation:** verticality of narrative identity

**affiliation:** horizontality of the here and now

Constant intertwinement between:
Migrant identity transforms itself through a long, sometimes difficult process. The comparison between the code of self (and us)-knowledge of the world of origin and the code of daily life of the new world in which they are inscribed can be complex and open spaces of vulnerability. Migration can be configured as a multi-level caesura event:

**Filiation process caesura:**
- 1st generation: moment of interruption and re-definition of biographical continuity
- 2nd and 3th generation: difficulty to connect themself to their vertical dimension, loss of family narrative identity (floating filiation)

**Affiliation process caesura:**
- the confrontation with a hostile social context that rejects, denies, weakens their memberships.

Risks of radicalisation

• An overview of literature on radicalisation among Muslims in Europe finds identity crises to be a key precipitant able to explain the process. Findings from Social Identity Theory suggest that the negotiation and redefinition processes of these identities, in the European Muslim diaspora, may have risky outcomes: the nature of community-level groups and networks may contribute to identity ‘readiness’ for radicalisation. (Al Raffie, 2013).

• The wandering or fluctuating experience of the second generations represents a loss of roots, a perception of being disconnected. For young children of migrants this determines a need to recognize themselves and be recognized for their singularity. One of the risks is precisely the attempt to re-appropriate and re-write their veticality, adhering to pseudo-identity models with extreme religious and cultural connotations (Nathan, 2017).
Psycho-social consequences of terrorism

- Symptoms and psychopathologies (Masten, Osofsky, 2010; Wang et al., 2006; Cohen, Chazan, Lerner, Maimon, 2010).

- Social consequences: 1) discrimination and marginalization (Cainkar, 2009; Jamal, Naber, 2008);
  2) identity negotiation (Sirin, Fine, 2007, Sarroub, 2005);
  3) coping strategies (Ewing, Hoyler, 2008; Peek, 2003).

- Interventions: 1) on children (CATS Consortium, 2007, Brown, Bobrow, 2004);
  2) on communities: moral complexity / moral clarity between school and family (Rousseau, Machouf, 2005; Chanley, 2002; Punamaki, 1996; Apfel, Simon, 2000; Rouhana, Fiske, 1995);
  3) support professionals (Lindy, Lindy, 2004; Tummala, 2005).

Limits of the literature

- Studies rarely link interpretation of terrorist events to an analysis of identity representations and emotional experiences of immigrants in the contexts of daily life.

- There are no studies on families, which evaluate the point of view of parents and children simultaneously.
Multiple ways of being multiple:
- polyvalency
- negotiation
- supranational membership
- demand
- complex management

Who am I? Who are we?

- As individual
  - Family
  - Social relations
  - Religious faith
  - World of origin

- As member of a group
  - Nuclei with variable geometry

Cultural métissage:
- verticality-horizontality
- filiation-affiliation
- morphogenesis-morphostasis

Relational polyvalence:
- autonomy-connection
- cohesion-adaptation

Relational polyvalence:
- simiraty-complementarity
- support-conflict

Religious métissage:
- free and voluntary choice
- respect for other faiths
- to slip between more or less substantial practices
- complex and contradictory representations and values

Connection with roods:
- Coexisting resources
- difficulty in living one's own traditions
- maintain contacts
- family narratives
Who am I/ who are we in the eyes of others?

**Interpersonal level**

Italian people’s **representation** about Arab/muslim people **depends on the individual**: level of contact and knowledge, sharing of experience, access to adequate information, perception of threat, influence of the contexts.

On the interpersonal level, the **families can experience the recognition of their specificity/polyvalence**, alongside discrimination episodes.

**Social and institutional level**

At social and institutional level the **representation** of the foreigner, and specifically of Arab/muslim people, is **negatively affected** by: current international context, economic crisis, mass-media influence, construction of antisocial mentality.

On the socio-institutional level, the **families experience lack of recognition and social stigma**.

The social context can **force them to take side/to choose**.
Public discourse, especially in the mass-media, is explaining terrorism through religious faith (instrumentalization, lack of reliability, stereotypical construction).

**Coincidence between ISIS, Muslim faith and terrorist attacks**

Terrorism: what’s happening?

**Threatening social category**

Arab and muslim people are assigned to a **social category** to which they attribute a high **negative value**. Their faith and culture are **threatening elements which require justification and re-negotiation**.

This **incomplete and unsatisfactory definition** of themselves has several consequences:

- **Expectations about Italian community’s reactions**: increase in prejudice and in discrimination
- **Arab-muslim community’s reactions**: self-blame, shame, fear, social retreat; **Parents**: risks for the second and third generation
- **Inside the families**: difficulties and fear in speaking about these topics; **Parents**: protection of children; **Children**: parents without answers

Results
The school: possible context of intervention

Critic elements
- Problems with teachers (on an educational and relational level);
- Complex social contexts (prejudice, problematic behaviors, bullying);
- Discrimination (teachers, pupils)

Positive elements
- Teenagers Peer relationship: low impact of memberships; mutual ability to recognize similarities and differences in social comparison; protective and supportive relational context
- Parents High value attributed; high partecipation

Tasks for school: building critical and aware consciences, promoting contexts of dialogue and providing adequate information.

In relation to the terrorism
- Risks: increased conflict and fear, unreliable interlocutors, not a school task
- What is actually done: intervention uncertain, with unsteady foundations, entrusted to the common sense of a few teachers
- What should be done: school as a node of socialization; complex planning; involvement of families; use of professionals

Parents
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