WCPCG 2014

# Cultural Integration in The Contemporary World: Using The Cultural Identikit

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## Abstract

Integration has become an extremely important and controversial global issue. Italy is facing a huge increase in the immigrant population which presents a daunting integration challenge in many sectors: economic, social, health and educational (ISTAT 2013). The authors propose the Cultural Identikit as a proven instrument to assist in the integration process. It has been used as a transcultural psychotherapy instrument for more than 30 years in Italy by the Fondazione Cecchini Pace, Milan (Terranova-Cecchini, 1991, 2013). This work reports a recent project in an immigration center sponsored by the Municipal Government of Milan where it was used as a therapeutic tool to assist in the integration process.
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Peer-review under responsibility of the Academic World Education and Research Center.

*Keywords:* Cultural Ego; cultural identikit; transcultural psychotherapy; integration;

## 1. Introduction

Almost every week a new boatload of immigrants lands somewhere in Italy. This phenomenon first started on the island of Lampedusa but is rapidly expanding to many different coastal areas of Sicily. Apart from pushing the overburdened Sicilian social system almost to a breaking point, the plight of these immigrants has raised international concern. Immigration is not just an Italian phenomenon; it is ocurring in many places in Europe; and integration has become a top priority in the European Community. In a recent report the European Community developed and published a set of modules to serve as a model for integration in member states (EC, 2014). The

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three modules provide a structure for assisting in overall integration of immigrants. However, it is not a simple process nor is it always favorable to human rights.   Vuk (UN 2013) commented that efforts of integrating immigrants into the European community    "have proven especially controversial". He pointed out that many are abused and exploited by human traffickers, and also fall victim to discrimination, racism and zenophobia.   The number of immigrants has been increasing rapidly for various reasons,  globalization has created a new "era of mobility" demonstrated by the fact that there has been an increase from 150 to 214 million international migrants in the last ten years (UN, 2013). Immigration is not such a bad thing, according to William Swing, Director General, International Organization for Migration (HLD New York 2013), migration is  "an indispensable engine for human development; a driver of economic growth: and a source of dynamic and innovative cultures …especially in highly industrialized areas with ageing populations."  Italy is facing a significant increase in immigration.  There are now more than 5 million "legal" immigrants in Italy and only 1.3 million of them are EU citizens (Caritas-Migrantes, 2012). Illegal immigrants were estimated a few years ago at more than 450,000. (Fondazione ISMU 2011, http://www.ismu.org/patrimonioeintercultura). According to ISTAT, the Italian State's Official Office for Statistics, there is an increase of approximately 100,000 in legal immigrants over the previous year, up by 8.2% since 2012 (ISTAT: Gli stranieri al 15° Censimento della Popolazione 2013). It is difficult to estimate the number of illegal immigrants but there seems to be a rather high number due to the ongoing boatloads of immigrants landing in Lampedusa in continuation.  Integration is going to be an ongoing challenge well into the future in Italy.

## 2. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this article is to report the use of the Cultural Identikit as a tool for facilitating the integration process.  Integration is an important goal for the European Community, especially Italy.  The sooner immigrants learn the language and culture, are able to communicate and meet their basic needs, the sooner they will be able to find work and participate in the Italian society, both socially and economically, and become that "engine for human development".

## 3. Methods

Refugees were interviewed with the Cultural Identikit, mostly using the French language or with an Italian-Arabic interpreter.  The information obtained from these interviews was used to assist the immigrants themselves in their own integration process.  Immigrants became more aware of strengths they were not aware of, and began to cope more effectively with the changes they were experiencing.  Social workers and other personnel were able to use the data for possible job training and placement.

### 3.1  Explanation of the Cultural Identikit

The underlying theory of the Cultural Identikit is based on the cultural identity of the individual and his orientation towards tradition, modernization or acculturation.  The  Cultural Identikit is based on the work of Sow (1977) in which he identifies the African Ego as relying on the axes  and the 'ancestral substance' of the 'Ancestor'. Terranova (1992) applied Sow's model to a general model of culture within the ego structure, which is specific to every culture. The various axes work together to form the ego of the individual within the structure of the home culture.  For example the **Order Axis** functions to relate tradition with social laws.  The **Existence Axis** brings tradition into the family, defining the line of descent of the individual; it is based on upbringing and family of origin. The **Meaning Axis** is based on the relationships that exist within the culture or community.  It brings the objects and institutions that represent the original culture of the parents into the community (village).  Newly arrived immigrants find themselves completely isolated from the original community.   They have to re-define and develop new communities, whether it be a sort of expatriate community or a newly developed one based on various immigrant populations that are similar in terms of the original culture and the present situation.

The three axes guide behaviour. Cultural behaviour originates from the unconscious, and is carried by the 'culture-type' (member of a particular culture). When immigrants  arrive in the new country, they are cut off from their family and traditional ties. This causes serious problems because problem solving depends on the vital force, which comes from interaction with the physical environment. Cultural values are located in the ancestral substance--

-given by the family, reinforced by the community and loaded into the ancestral substance. (Terranova, Toffle, 2014).

In order to assist  immigrants in the integration process, they must be able to re-connect with the three axes in order to cope with the dramatic changes in their lives.  This re-connection assists in the process of integration.  The strength to face and deal with change (integration) comes from that reconnection.  This fact was observed time and again as various subjects went through the integration process which was started with the Cultural Identikit.   For example, Ahmed (Tunisia) arrived extremely disoriented and fearful.  After participating in the integration process guided by the Cultural Identikit, he was able to project himself back to his childhood village and draw strength from his memories of friends and family.  He used this memory to motivate himself to learn some new job skills and find a job.  Further motivation came from his desire to help his village and family by his presence in Italy.

### 3.2   Application of the Cultural  Identikit

The Cultural Identikit can be used to help the immigrant identify the sort of work adapted to his/her preparation, experience and skills.  After it has been established that the immigrant is healthy enough to work, the challenge is to find a job that is appropriate for his/her skills, training and experience.  For example, it is essential to evaluate the work experience and training of the immigrant.  The Cultural Identikit is useful in identifying the sort of preparation the immigrant has had-traditional or modern.   The ability to speak different languages (Western languages such as French and English)  is an example of modernization, according to the Cultural Identikit.  It is necessary to identify the learning and relational capabilities that the immigrant brings from his original environment to assist in the immigration process in a country like Italy.   A technical instrument like the Cultural Identikit is needed to document the ability of the immigrants to 'westernize' themselves.   The Identikit is an instrument for this purpose: to understand the ability of the immigrant to complete the steps necessary to live and work in western society.

### 3.3  Subjects/description

One hundred and ninety-four (194) immigrants were served in this center.  They had arrived from North Africa due to the recent political uprisings in Tunisia and Libya.  Some of them came from Sub-Saharan Africa, but the majority were of Tunisian, Moroccan, Algerian and Libyan origins. They had escaped from varying degrees of danger and oppression.  Many of them had been forced to escape with only the shirt on their backs and did not know what had happened to various other family members who had tried to escape at the same time.   Most of them had little or no instruction in their own language.   Arabic was their first language, but the main languages utilized were French and English, on a low functional level.  Most of them spoke no Italian.  They had been brought to the Milan refugee center to begin learning the Italian language and culture, and start the long and sometimes painful integration process.  They also went through some beginning job training and placement, but at the initial stages. Many of them had relatives in other parts of Europe, mostly in France.  They were hoping to eventually join these relatives but for the moment had to remain in Italy because of the asylum-seeking process.  Others wanted to stay in Italy, find a job and work until they were able to return to their own countries.  In general they were not very certain about what they wanted to do or where they wanted to be, having passed through unspeakable traumas while arriving on the shores of Italy.  Most of them stayed at least six months in Milan, due to the bureaucratic processes of legalization, etc.  Only a small percentage (18 people) demonstrated any sort of long-term mental illness, and those who did were transferred to an appropriate facility.  Therefore this immigrant population presented a general profile of individuals who had been traumatized and moved from their home environment, but in an acceptable state of mental health.  The goal of the center was not mental health treatment, but to prepare the immigrants to make choices about where they wanted to go, and to expedite the integration process.   This process is quite long in Italy, and many of the refugees found it very difficult to wait.   Some of them found unofficial work within their representative religious communities, whereas others simply disappeared and were never seen again.

## 4.  Results

More than 100 people remained at the center for the duration of the legalization process.  Approximately 75 participated steadily in the Cultural Identikit integration process, identifying their own cultural strengths while developing new skills, both in coping and also in job applications.

At this time tracking is still continuing but the results are encouraging. More than half have kept in touch with the center and are working in some capacity while learning the new language and culture. One would ask if there is a direct link between the use of the Cultural Identikit as an integration tool and the survival and success of the immigrants who passed through the center. It may be said that based on observations and followup the Cultural Identikit was very instrumental in their first step towards integration.

## 5. Recommendations

The Cultural Identikit helps identify the individual's position in the integration process and thus a plan can be developed to assist more effectively in the process. Further research should be conducted in various immigrant centers around Italy and other EU member states followed by tracking the participants over a two-year period. To do this it will be necessary to train personnel in the use of the Cultural Identikit. Although there will be training, screening and tabulating costs, the preliminary results indicate that the gain in integration justifies the cost.

## Appendix

*Table 1. Identikit form with explanation*

*Client information*
*Name:*
*male/female/trans; in a longterm relationship/single; heterosexual/homosexual/transsexual*
*culture of origin*
*interview: 1/2/3/____ /followup*

| Identikit items | Traditional T | Modernized M | Acculturated A | Personal data, explanatory notes, essential life story |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Name | | | | The name can belong to someone important. Heroic, successful etc. |
| Place of birth | | | | Geographic place , characterized by aspirations, objects, legends, etc, |
| Age/ age of marriage /cultural identity | | | | Identity, number of years in home culture, type of marriage form cultural identity. |
| Siblings | | | | Number of siblings, birth order, cultural birth order, names of siblings, |
| Language-dialect | | | | Identification with dialect, persistence in the first language,mixed with the new language, indicates strong connections to the culture of origin. |
| Mobility | | | | How many places lived in, countries visited, more movement, indicates a better possibility of being transcultural. |
| Transcultural process: family mobility | | | | Family transmits the culture; if there has been experience of various cultures the family will transmit transcultural openness. |
| Transcultural process: amount of time living in present country/cultural network | | | | Long time living in the new country favours adaptation, minimizes problems. |
| Relatives living with person: cultural transmission | | | | Extended family favours transmission of the original culture; if subject has received traditional schooling, the culture is strongly embedded. |
| Education: cultural model | | | | The level of education and the place where the most education took place enter into the formation of cultural identity. |
| Work: cultural network | | | | The type of job and the amount of interaction between host country members is significant, as well as the interaction in the workplace with members of the same culture. |
| Health-illness explanations | | | | The way the subject explains causes of illness- more cultural than scientific. |
| Religion | | | | Religion exerts a profound influence on cultural identity, |

|  |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  | even if the subject does not consider him/herself to be a practicing member. |
| Observation of cultural symbols |  |  |  | Hair style, clothes, jewellery, tattoos, makeup, etc. are strong cultural symbols which indicate degree of transculturation. |
| TOTAL |  |  |  | CULTURAL EGO: T,M,A, TR |

*Case characteristics and cultural grid:*
*Notes:*

*Taken from Terranova-Cecchini R., Tognetti Bordogna M., Migrare, Guida per gli operatori dei servizi sociali, sanitari e d'accoglienza, F.Angeli, Milano, 1992, modified by Terranova-Cecchini R., 2010.*

*Table 2. Sample completed Identikit form*

*Name: Ahmed Mohammed bin Al-Jamil*
*male; married; heterosexual*
*culture of origin: Libya*
*interview: first-intake*

|  | Traditional T | Modernized M | Acculturated A | Personal data, explanatory notes, essential life story |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Name | x |  |  | He was named after his father and his grandfather. |
| Place of birth | x |  |  | In his house, attended by a midwife who was a relative |
| Age/ age of marriage /cultural identity | x |  |  | 29 years old, 19 at age of marriage, has 5 children |
| Siblings | x |  |  | 6 brothers and 2 sisters |
| Language-dialect | x |  |  | Speaks Arabic –Libyan dialect |
| Mobility |  | x |  | Left home village at age 20, went to Benghazi, then to Milan by way of Lampedusa |
| Transcultural process: family mobility | x |  |  | His family has always lived in his home village |
| Transcultural process: amount of time living in present country/cultural network |  | x |  | 2 months living in Italy at the time, has learned some very basic Italian. |
| Relatives living with person: cultural transmission | x |  |  | Alone at the moment but grew up in an extended family |
| Education: cultural model |  | x |  | Left school when he was 12, went to Islamic village school, did mechanic training course |
| Work: cultural network |  | x |  | Does sporadic jobs, used to work as mechanic's assistant in Libya |
| Health-illness explanations | x |  |  | He believes that health and illness depend on God's will |
| Religion: strongly configures the cultural identity | x |  |  | He is a Sunni Muslim, he fully participated in Libya but in Milan has reduced his formal practice. |
| Observation of cultural symbols |  | x |  | He has a short beard, no noticeable tattoos, dresses in Western fashion, could be mistaken to be Italian |
| TOTAL        Cultural Ego | T: x | M | A | TR (transcultural) |

*Table 3. Identikit Key*

| Ego type | indicators | comments |  |
|---|---|---|---|
| Traditional Ego | If T> M with no A |  | If T is very high there is risk that the ego will be so attached to tradition that it will not be able to adapt to the new culture. |
| Modernized Ego | If M > T with no A |  | An ego that is well adapted to change must present either T or M: if however M has a much higher score than T ( there are many |

| | | more M than T) there is the risk of social difficulties (social anguish, narcissism,violence). |
|---|---|---|
| Acculturated Ego | If T> M with A<br>If M is > T with A | If an A is present the subject has not adapted but has acculturated. |
| Transcultural Ego | If T= M are equal or very close and there is no A | |

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