This is the final peer-reviewed accepted manuscript of:

Cicognani, E., Sonn, C. C., Albanesi, C., & Zani, B. (2018). Acculturation, social exclusion and resistance: Experiences of young Moroccans in Italy. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *66*, 108–118. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2018.07.002

The final published version is available online at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2018.07.002

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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 of 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.

Keywords: acculturation; citizenship; belonging; Moroccan; identity

Word count: 8841

Acculturation, Social Exclusion and Resistance: Experiences of Young Moroccans in Italy

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)[1]. 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 negotiate social identities and belonging in Italy. Drawing on data collected as part of a larger project involving several EU countries[2], 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

[1] www.istat.it
[2] Anonymized information

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, 2011; Bhatia & Ram, 2001). 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, Phinney, Sam, & Vedden, 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 (2010) and Luque-Ribelles, Herrera-Sanchez, and García-Ramírez (2017, Martin-Baro, 1994; Montero, 2009; Sonn & Fisher, 2003; Sonn & 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, 1993). 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 (Dhamoon, 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 & de Abreu, 2010; Sonnenschein & 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, 2012; Zaal et al., 2009). For example, Ozyurt (2012) 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 discrimination and exclusion. Verkuyten (2005) wrote that some young people of ethnic background in Holland construct their identities by drawing on a discourse of ‘feeling ethnic’, that is, inner knowledge acquired through early socialization. Others construct their identities in terms of ‘doing ethnicity’, that is, they participate in specific practices, habits and rituals that give meaning to ethnic identities.

A related area of research that is relevant to immigrant settlement is citizenship and belonging, which aims to understand the experiences and responses of migrants to their

displacement and broader dynamics of racism and social exclusion in a new context (Bloemraad, Korteweg, & Yurdakal, 2008; Langhout & Fernandez, 2016). Colombo, Domaneschi, and Marchetti (2011) showed how children of migrants in Italy are actively elaborating new multiple and collective identities drawing from the general culture and their parents' culture. These young people demand recognition as formally belonging and as enacting their responsibilities of citizens on a daily basis. Some young people talked about aiming for legal/formal citizenship as a way to avoid complications and annoyances of the Italian administrative system in their search for a job and education. Other migrant youth, particularly those ones who were born in Italy, talked about citizenship as an element for a full participation in social and civic life, a "natural" component of their story and their self-perception, and some even emphasized stable and personalized aspects of their self when talking about Italian citizenship. Colombo et al.'s (2011) findings show how youth are actively attempting to make their opinions and preferences heard, to exercise their voice and power, in everyday relationships and contexts thus contributing to shape their future and social reality, despite the absence of formal recognition.

In view of the studies reviewed so far, people construct social identities through symbolic means, and, in any given context of power relations, they do not have equal access to the resources required for identity-making, citizenship, and belonging (Montero, 2009; Sonn & Lewis, 2009). Given this, we were specifically interested in how migrants who suffer social exclusions and racism construct identities of resistance that are important for their belonging in Italy.

Research Context: Moroccan Migrants in Italy

According to ISTAT (2017), Moroccan migrants are one of the largest groups of non E.U. immigrants in Italy (420.650; 8,3% of the general population). Emilia Romagna Region has seen an increase in the migrant population in recent years now reaching around 11,7% of the general population. Unlike in countries like France, Germany and Holland, it was only in the 1980s that Moroccan migration to Italy became visible. Many of these migrants were initially 'undocumented' and required a resident permit. During the last decades in Italy, similar to other European countries, the percentage of children of first wave migrants has increased. Despite the recent economic crises, Italy is still considered a desirable place to migrate to because of work opportunities (Ambrosini, 2013).

Even though Italy is a desirable destination, several researchers have highlighted that it has been an unreceptive environment for many migrant groups (Colombo, 2013). For example, King and Mai (2009) have discussed the complex ways in which Albanian immigrants' settlement in Italy made difficult by racist discourses that positioned them in a negative way -- as criminals, prostitutes and uncivilized people (see also Mai, 2010). Riccio and Russo (2011) also described the public discourse in which migrants are vilified often positioned as other and their cultures demeaned as incompatible with Italian ways of living. In addition to the media and political discourse, Pastore (2004) highlighted that migrants cannot become full formal citizens and that Italy's laws about access to nationality are still highly restrictive. For example, children born of foreign parents can request Italian citizenship when they turn 18 years old only if they remain continually resident in Italy and by going through a complicated bureaucratic process (Colombo et al., 2011). Moreover, Italy scores lower than many EU countries in several indicators of social policy integration of migrants (cf., MIPEX)[3].

[3] www.mipex.eu

Among the few studies on Moroccan migrants in Italy, Menin (2011) explores how Muslim women brought up in Italy negotiate competing public and religious discourses, gender scripts, and future aspirations as Muslims in a non-Muslim country. She highlights how women's embodied practices such as veiling are negotiated in everyday life, and how skin colour, and bodily behaviour can influence the process of drawing of boundaries between self and other. Some girls used discursive strategies to defend their religion, which include distinguishing "the true Islam", defining an untouched space of religious "authenticity" (including wearing the veil); others believe that it is important above all to preserve the depth of their personal faith, a personal choice not to be openly manifested, and that the use of the veil in Italy emphasizes differences among people (see also Skandrani, Taïeb, & Moro, 2012 for examples in the French context).

In this article, we seek to contribute to the work on acculturation, identity construction, and resistance by exploring the experiences of young people of Moroccan background in Italy. Our article is specifically interested in the different ways young people experience and contest racism and exclusion and how they claim belonging and citizenship in the Italian context. We examined the data to address the questions: What are young people's experiences of social exclusion and racism, and how do young people respond to experiences of social exclusion and racism?

Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative approach to gain insight into the experiences and meanings of civic and political engagement of young people, in particular migrant youth in Italy. As critical community psychology researchers, we view people as embedded in social ecologies, and as active in making meaning of their experiences through language and action (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). We are also guided by a liberation psychology approach which gives specific

attention to examining power dynamics that are reflected in different social and cultural resources, such as ideologies and social representations, that people have access to in any given community context to construct meaningful social identities, relationships, and experience belonging (Montero, 2009; Sonn & Fisher, 2003; Sonn & Lewis, 2009). A liberation perspective also privileges the voices of those who are excluded to provide insight into dynamics of exclusion, resistance and liberation and how these are achieved through symbolic means in everyday contexts (Montero, 2009). Along with this orientation, we adopted generic interpretivist qualitative approach that is driven by a constructionist epistemology to examine young migrants' experiences of social exclusion and resistance in Italy (Caelli, et al., 2003).

Participants

The study was approved by the Ethics board of the University of Bologna. The total sample included 29 Moroccan youth, 14 males and 15 females, living in the region Emilia Romagna (North Italy), where Moroccans are amongst the largest groups of migrants. Five focus groups were conducted: two involved young adults (19-23 years old; n = 11; mixed by gender) and three involved adolescents (16-18 years old; n = 18; one mixed by gender, one male only, one female only). Young adults were recruited among university students. Adolescents were mostly high school students (vocational school; 3 from lyceum and 2 from technical school) and two listed that they were unemployed[4]. Twenty seven participants self-identified as Muslim, and the remaining two as not religious. Among young adults, three were formally members of organisations (including a migrant youth association active in the promotion of migrant integration at national level). The remaining participants did not report formal experiences of participation as members of organisations. Adolescents report low levels of formal involvement

[4] Vocational schools are the most typical educational choice for migrants interested in finding a job. Only a minority of Moroccan youth attend University in Italy, and especially among this minority it is possible to find youth actively involved in associations. This makes the young adult group somehow "biased" in favour of more active participants.

in organisations. All the participants come from intact families who work in lowly paid occupations; more specifically, 5 fathers have an autonomous job (entrepreneurs), 1 is employee and the remaining are workmen; 15 mothers are housewives, 2 mothers have an autonomous job (entrepreneurs), 2 are employees and the remaining are female workers. All participants were born in Italy from migrant parents of Moroccan background and all were able to understand and speak the Italian language. Two of the younger participants had Italian citizenship.

Data collection

Data for this study were collected in Spring 2010 as part of a larger project on civic and political engagement and participation of Italian and migrant adolescents and young adults. At that time Italy had a Government holding political positions explicitly against a multi-ethnic society (Colombo, 2013). Data was collected using focus groups which were chosen to maximize participation by people from diverse cultural backgrounds and to gain insight into the different and similar lenses the young people use give meaning to their experiences (Hughes & DuMont, 1993).

Participants to the current study were recruited using purposive sampling in order to include individuals of Moroccan background living in Italy with varying degrees of civic and political involvement, including less active or inactive ones (Patton, 2015). This was deemed important so as to cover a variety of experiences and allow, through the focus group discussion, the detection of facilitating or hindering factors for youth engagement. To recruit more active Moroccan youth, leaders of cultural, religious, civic and youth/students groups and associations of migrants active in the local community, were contacted and sent detailed information about the project, along with a request for support in the organization of the focus groups. Focus groups took place mainly at groups' and associations' venues in order to facilitate participation. When venues were not available, university meeting rooms were used. Participants were

submitted detailed information about the study, the reassurances about anonymity of their responses and were asked to read and sign a consent form; for minors also parents' consent was preliminarily collected, through the collaboration of the schools and leaders of organisations. Participation was voluntary.

The focus groups followed a standard procedure used in the larger study and started using a photo elicitation technique (Harper, 2002) as a means to start conversations with young people about various social issues; the stimulus materials was selected by the research team among publicly available images (e.g., representing social issues of general interest, such as racism and discrimination, women's rights, right to vote, the impact of the web, citizenship). As an ice-breaking exercise, participants were asked to choose the images they considered most relevant for themselves and their experience, and to explain why they chose particular images. Following the discussion elicited by the images, participants were asked the key questions of the study, concerning: personal and group experiences of participation in relation to different issues; relevance of participation and citizenship for young people; perceived opportunities/resources to participate; perceptions of social exclusion and feelings of belonging. Each participant also completed a questionnaire including socio-demographic information (religion, parents' education and occupation). The focus groups were conducted in Italian by two members of the research team (one moderator and one observer) and lasted one-two hours. Each focus group session was audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

The process of analysis was inductive and the initial steps involved several readings of the transcripts and highlighting text such as words, phrases, references to people and places relevant to the research questions. As phase two, the coding process it became clear, from the number and length of responses elicited by the different questions and the richness and depth of

the contributions, that the key concerns for participants, when talking about their engagement and participation, revolved around feelings and experiences of social exclusion and discrimination against Moroccans, their responses to such experiences and the implications of these experiences for identity and belonging. These 'key concerns' became the focus for coding and the foundation for a coding scheme that included categories for othering, types and places where people felt excluded, and list of ways in which people responded. Phase three and four involved two of the authors used this initial coding scheme based on the key concerns to code passages in the transcripts independently and after this process offering initial themes. Phase five involved a process of discussing the initial themes, which were then consolidated into two main themes and subthemes As an additional step taken to check the credibility of our themes, we engaged member checking (Harper & Cole, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2017). This process entailed sharing the results with and receiving feedback from a group of 10 youth of Moroccan background (seven male and three female) who attended a youth center during a public seminar. All participants agreed with the themes that were generated, yet we recognize that under these circumstances people may not have necessarily challenged or contested the themes.

Results

Based on our analysis we found that many of young people's stories conveyed examples of perceived discrimination based on their ethnic and religious group membership and associated cultural and religious practices and responses to social exclusion. The findings are organized into two main themes (See Table 1). The first theme, "Being Constructed as Muslim, Moroccan and Migrant in Italy" captures the ways in which young people perceived that they are positioned as outsiders in Italy, and includes three subthemes: (a) *policy level exclusion*, (b) *ideological level exclusion*, and (c) *exclusion in everyday practices and behaviors*. Such positioning of young

people as outsiders and not belonging in Italy invokes various responses. The second theme "Negotiating and Contesting Social Exclusion" captures various strategies used by young people to actively negotiate and contest social exclusion experiences and racism. These strategies vary and include: a) *"Italy is not my home… it is other people's home": Accommodating an outsider status,* b) *Turning critically towards one's community,* (c) *Claiming an insider status: Feeling Italian*, and (d) *Creating activist identities: Becoming bridge builders.*

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Being Constructed as Muslim, Moroccan and Migrant in Italy

Irrespective of how long participants had lived in Italy, they defined themselves as members of the Moroccan community, reflected in the use of "them" when referring to Italians and "we" when talking about themselves. Participants typically referred to their identity using symbols and practices of their ethnic community and religion, such as eating particular foods, veiling, speaking their home language, and following particular traditions as well as gender-appropriate scripts and life-styles. While participants highlighted these symbols and practices that differentiated them and that provided cultural continuity, they also pointed out that these are negatively evaluated in relation to Italian culture – 'you are treated as an idiot'.

> KHALID[5] …here (in Italy) for breakfast you eat brioche with chocolate and coffee or cappuccino; people living in Morocco eat crèpes with tea… cooking traditions are different, as well as ways of talking, way of dressing … it is a poor country and people wear simple dresses. Here if you don't dress in a certain way, you are treated as an idiot… you cannot come here with the dresses you use there.

Cultural dress and other symbols signified difference and formed the basis for stereotyping and exclusion in Italy. For Khalid, there is a tension between the cultural practices of the country

[5] We used pseudonyms in order to protect participants' anonymity

of origin of his family, which come to mean inferiority, and those of the new context that signify superiority. It was not only cultural dress that signified difference; symbols of religious identity also provided the basis for discrimination. For example, Moroccan girls described how they were discriminated in school, peer and work contexts in relation to veiling. The following transcripts from the all-female focus group illustrates this point:

> AMINA: Muslim girls...who...wear the veil, or follow strictly their religion and have an opportunity to find a job, it may happen that a girl wearing the veil asks for a job and they impose her: “No! If you want to work in this place you should take it off!”.

Participants highlighted examples of exclusion, at different levels and in different settings. The participants commented on *policy level exclusion* meaning the Italian law on citizenship and its impact. According to participants, this law hinders the possibility of gaining legal citizenship status, and this generates further forms of social exclusion in different life domains such as education and employment.

> KABIR: Not having the Italian citizenship is a limit for us since, for example, you now study, get a degree, and what happens then? […] Discrimination exists. Not only at physical level, but at institutional levels, in connection with citizenship. In order to access to public calls for positions, you need citizenship.

Older participants have a different stake in citizenship. Not being allowed the legal citizenship is considered a great injustice (a denial of a right) and a bureaucratic absurdity, which threatens their efforts to build a career and a meaningful social role for themselves in Italy.

The *ideological* level of exclusion, as defined by participants, refers to the racist ideological position of the majority political parties at the government at the time of the focus

group interview (Ambrosini, 2013; Colombo, 2013[6]). Participants used the metaphor of apartheid when describing the system. In participants' views, such ideology is spread and fueled by the media with the purpose of influencing the public opinion, for the social control/regulation of migrants, and for economic reasons.

YOUSSEF: I could even say that there is a sort of apartheid. You can feel Italian, be born here or grown up here; but you do not hold the same rights of the 'indigenous' Italians, you do not have the same rights of your deskmate.

YAMINA: In Italy migration is a new phenomenon, it has always been a country of out-migration, in America, Belgium ... they have suffered from it, and when they saw a new population entering their territory, they found themselves unprepared. Moreover … the government pushes for rejecting migrants, for finding always something wrong, even a tiny thing, that becomes great.

As a consequence of such structural and symbolic conditions, participants perceived social exclusion also at the *level of everyday practices and behaviors,* such as, for example, when traveling on public transport or when attending other public places. Visible religious symbols, such as wearing a veil for women and having beard for men, are central to racialized experiences. In the excerpts below participants point to the power of a 'gaze' in regulating belonging by making people feel unwelcome in a public space.

SAMAR: 'Discrimination', you often see it, especially when you travel in public transport.

MALEK: I agree that there is a lot of racism. Especially on Muslim women, wearing the veil. I noticed, when I use the bus that people stare at women wearing veil.

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[6] In 2008, under the centre-right coalition guided by Silvio Berlusconi, Italy's upper house of parliament passed a controversial security bill which made illegal immigration a punishable offence. The so-called "security package" (L.94/2009) was intended to reinforce the regulatory framework, and clearly criminalised irregular immigration. The law also allowed citizen anti-crime patrols in towns and cities, and tripled the amount of time that illegal immigrants could be detained in holding centres. The measures have drawn criticism from civil rights organizations including Amnesty international, as well as Italy's centre-left opposition and the Catholic Church.

SALIMA: They stare at you to say ‘you are different’.

The comments conveyed by participants show the tensions that arise for them as they translate different cultural symbols from their families’ cultural background into the Italian context. The cultural practices and religious symbols are used to define them as outsiders, as not belonging in Italy. The young people are also positioned as migrant/ethnic others despite the fact that they were born in Italy. They are acutely aware of their conditional status and that of their community of origin is demonized in mainstream media and in everyday settings.

Negotiating and Contesting Social Exclusion

The previous section outline the different ways in which and levels of exclusion and othering that Moroccan youth experience. These multiple level processes of exclusion also demand responses which were evident in participant comments.

“Italy is not my home… it is other people’s home”: Accommodating an outsider status

A general strategy used by some participants to negotiate their experiences of othering is to recognise their status as outsiders. The participants recognise that they do not have legal citizenship rights, but that they can appeal for mutual respect and civility in their interactions with their host. This is illustrated in the following excerpt

HAMID: My opinion is that they have hosted us. We need to stay calm and respect their laws.

CHAKBIB: Italy is not my home… it is other people’s home and I am entering into other people’s home. So I respect others and others should respect me: because no one pays my bills for electricity, gas, nothing.

The metaphor captures the power relations between migrants and host. Participants highlight the notion of respect in the hosting relationship. Such a relationship means that the guests need to show appropriate citizenship behavior and not violate the rules and laws in their everyday life. It also means expectation of conditional acceptance by the host, who presumably can withhold hospitality. Thus, the young people seemingly accommodate their outsider status in relation to Italians.

The collective strategy of being 'good' guests that the young people adopt, may explain why violations of 'good guest' behaviors by members of their own Moroccan ethnic group are seen as threatening the collective efforts at integration (cf. Sonnenschein & van Meijl, 2014). Such violations may threaten possibilities to social and economic participation, and ultimately acceptance by the host nation.

HAZIM: [about Moroccans who do not search for a job] My idea is that these persons should go home, because if I were to wait for the job I wanted and do nothing in the meanwhile… this thing is wrong, because we can find work everywhere.

CHAKBIB: Now there are also immigrants who do damage, so everybody looks at these few and say 'they are all alike'.

Being 'good' guests has implications for young people's participation in social activism. The conditional nature of their belonging discourages oppositional forms of participation (e.g., demonstrations). Avoiding demonstration of direct action seems somehow consistent with their self-definition as 'guests', being respectful to the host society, and the need to 'stay calm'. Participants mentioned legal citizenship as an important right, but seem to value it especially in practical terms, for its usefulness in allowing work opportunities and avoiding the risks of being forced to go back to Morocco. Being good guests is a strategy of accommodation in the context of no formal citizenship and thus conditional and precarious belonging.

Turning critically towards one's community

The strategy of being a good guest entails not rocking the boat 'playing' by the rules of the host society. Another strategy that may result from experiences of exclusion is to turn to their primary community to get a deeper understanding of cultural and religious practices and values that inform their Muslim identity (Bulhan, 1985; Sonn & Fisher, 2003). For participants there were clear tensions in what it meant to hold a Muslim identity in Italy, as reflected in the strategy they used to critically evaluate taken for granted religious practices while also accommodating the norms of youth subcultures and being Italian. For example, participants commented:

> FATIMA: In fact people say: 'Look, if you eat pork and you drink, this means that you are no more Muslim'.
>
> AMINA: It is true, because our religion tells just that.
>
> AMRANE: It says that you are unfaithful, but it is not really like that… speaking clearly, I drink and smoke, and I am Muslim. And then? They say that I cannot drink, I cannot do this or that… so, when will I be allowed to start drinking? I prefer much more to be unfaithful now that I am 17 than getting drunk and beating my wife at 30 because I never drank beer in my life…

Amrane's strategy involves setting aside a more assiduous practice of Islam to the future, at least concerning habits (such as drinking alcohol) that would seemingly mean enacting normative cultural practices in relation to Italian peers. These adolescent participants feel that they can transgress some rules while they are young because when they are older they will be more 'faithful' Muslims' with different social responsibilities. Another male noted attempts to re-signify markers and practices, suggesting a third strategy, "searching for their original meanings" in Koran (cf. Menin, 2011; Skandrani et al., 2012).

The search for unadulterated understandings of religious practices is an important part of the process of redefining those practices in a different cultural context. Yet, for some participants, practices are not important, as they see religion as a "matter of believing", or that faith is personal (Skandrani et al., 2012).

> CHAKBIB*:* It is not true that, if you pray every day you are more faithful! They have captured one man that used to go to the Mosque and they discovered that he was a cocaine pusher. It is a matter of believing, if you believe you do it for yourself, you do not need to show others that you believe.

Claiming insider status: Feeling Italian and Knowing Culture

The first two strategies focus on accommodation and acceptance and finding positive resources within in one's primary community. Claiming insider status is different in that it challenges the idea of citizenship as a formal status instead highlighting a form of affective belonging acquired through socialization and process of enculturation (Langhout & Hernandez, 2016). These participants feel that they belong and they 'feel' Italian; they claim belonging because they were born and raised in Italy, and established their consolidated network of relationships with Italians. Their claim of belonging not only to an ethnic group but also the dominant cultural groups is premised on socialised and internalised knowledge of socially available repertoires on cultures and cultural norms (Verkuyten, 2005). Membership and sense of belonging to the 'Italian' community appear to them as self-evident, to the point that questioning it by the interviewer is challenged:

> Interviewer. What you just said, for example being interviewed, does it increase your feeling of belonging to this community?

KARIM: I already feel part of this community, we are already members, it is not that someone else should entitle me. The problem is when someone asks me 'are you member or not?, this is disappointing, asking me something that I…

YAMINA: There are many girls wearing veil but they feel Italian anyway, because they live in Italy… but it wouldn't be necessary to say 'they feel' Italian!

These excerpts further illustrate that there are implicit taken for granted meanings about who is Italian and who is not.

Related to the affective bases for belonging, some participants claim an insider status on the grounds of their *insider cultural capital*. For example, a young adult member of a migrant association reports "astonishment" by Italian peers upon discovering his ability to speak using Italian dialect, and the public recognition of his capacities and authoritativeness through his participation in a TV interview with the President of the Republic, an experience that is perceived as inaccessible by his Italian peers. In so doing, he is also showing that he has acquired cultural capital reflective of 'Italianness' (i.e., language fluency, knowledge about local politics, and educational achievement), while at the same time undermining stereotypes about migrant lack of skills, competencies, and incompatibility.

KARIM: When president Napolitano came to [name of city], RAI3 TV interviewed me, asking my opinion. When they [Italian peers] saw me they asked 'But how can you talk to the President of the Italian Republic?' and I thought that I knew the political situation in Italy. […]

Many people feel disappointed, they say 'but how can a migrant…'. For example, I have a technical diploma: other people see me and think 'but what is he doing there?'. If you have the competencies and you are there, you can do it!

Creating activist identities: Becoming bridge builders

It is clear from the previous examples that participants (particularly the older ones) see (and construct) themselves as competent, and even more culturally competent than Italian peers in some domains, such as political knowledge. They do not see themselves as marginal or as being incorporated into a static Italian national identity. Claiming belonging to Italy based on it being their country of birth is important to how some understand their roles as cultural bridge builders. These participants do not accept the status of being outsiders or guests, they actively construct themselves as ‘new’ Italians with the goal of building bridges between the home of their parents and their new home. This is a similar process to hyphenating or using pan ethnic identities as reported in previous research (e.g., Ali & Sonn, 2010; Zaal et al., 2007). Participants anticipate a bridging role for themselves in constructing a ‘new’ and broader Italian identity, which they imagine as necessary to bridge the different cultures in preparation for a more inclusive “future multi-ethnic Italian society”, as the excerpts below illustrate:

> ZAID: We are in a special position in which our role is that of holding the balance of power, because most migrants are not capable of approaching the Italian society in a strong way as we do, so we need to be those ones who stay in-between because we know both our context of origin and the context where we live … we can be a sort of bridge ... we can understand from where we come, who we are, why our parents are doing these things, and we also need to go in society. This will be our battle, together with other young people, we can hope that with time, citizenship will be recognized.

Participants advocate dialogue and involvement in everyday contexts with diverse groups of people (Italian and other migrants). They advocate discussions about common issues with an appreciation with diverse histories and social locations, and as ‘citizens, persons’.

> ZAID: To talk, to dialogue, to know… […] You can do it in everyday life, in social centers, with associations … in political parties. New faces are needed, new people, and I am

> worrying about environmental issues like Italians, because the political idea of the migrant that should worry about unemployment, women's problems, new technologies, welfare, this is the real path toward a full citizenship. But migrants also should talk about their country of origin, create an interaction between their country of origin and host country. It is not that one has to be Italian or Moroccan, it would be too stupid… you simply need to be citizens, persons.

Dialogue appears strongly rooted in a clear and articulated sociopolitical understanding of social problems in Italy and in the perception of a strong personal and collective agency that helps them imagine, construct, and actively pursue through everyday actions, a vision of the future for themselves and other youths (both migrants and Italians).

Discussion

In this article, to explored how young people Moroccan descent in Italy experience and make sense of their experiences of social exclusion and racism. We used a liberation psychology approach (Sonn & Fisher, 2003; Sonn & Lewis, 2009), which differs from traditional, typological approaches to acculturation processes and migrant settlement (e.g. Berry, 2001, 2005; Sam & Berry, 2010) because of its focus on power and on the psychological impact of the dynamics of oppression and exclusion in a context characterized by structural inequalities in power, resources and opportunities between majorities and migrants (i.e., excluded from legal citizenship). By conceiving acculturation processes as a complex transactional relationship through which individuals actively negotiate their identity and adaptation with others (Luque Ribelles et al., 2017) this approach allowed us to identify different strategies through which young Moroccans – instead of passively internalizing negative group identities, and accommodating their subordinate status - are actually contesting exclusionary dominant group

narratives and form identities of resistance that are important to their claims for recognition and belonging.

Even if some participants appear to accept their exclusionary status in a country which they perceive as oppressive, we did not find evidence of internalization, described as the passive acceptance of the dominant culture as well as relinquishing practices and systems of meaning that inform their identities, leading to typically negative group identities and lower self-esteem (cf. Sonn & Fisher, 2003). In fact, our findings support a more situated and fluid understanding of identity negotiation and responding to social exclusion in which young people do not simply either assimilate or integrate, instead they actively draw from available cultural resources in order to make sense of their experiences of exclusion and construct a valued social identity (e.g. Ali & Sonn 2010, Hale & de Abreu, 2010; Sonnenschein & van Meijl, 2014; Verkuyten, 2005). For example, the young people recognized their conditional status in Italy and positioned themselves as *guests* (Lynch et al., 2011). By positioning themselves as *guests* they concede to being visitors, subject to the hospitality of a host, which influences their acculturative integration (Berry, 2005, 2010; Garcia-Ramirez et al., 2011). The host is implicitly considered to hold power and decisions about conditions of hospitality. However, the role of guest means that the young people expected a respectful and reciprocal relationship with their host, and there is an expectation that the host will respect their distinct culture. Thus, by self-defining as “guests” participants attempt to construct for themselves a positive identity allowing to claim the respect of their own culture in a structural condition of unequal power relations.

A further negotiation strategy, “*turning critically towards one’s community*”, shows how resistance can actively operate under the surface or away from dominant community settings (Sonn & Fisher, 2003) by stimulating participants to turn to their in-group, to gain a deeper and critical understanding of their own cultural values and practices and attempt to renew and

reframe them in the new context. That is, in the process of acculturation young people critically reflect on their own cultural and religious practices and identities, redefining them to be meaningful in the new context, while at the same time they are negotiating norms and practices associated with becoming Italian, even if not in a legal sense.

Many young people, and particularly in the older group, are actively and openly claiming an insider status. In terms expressed by Langhout and Fernandez (2016), young people are expressing a form of cultural citizenship, where they feel a sense of belonging based on cultural familiarity, affective belonging, and calling to be treated with respect. The claims to cultural citizenship are important for acculturative integration because it is premised on demands to be recognized and respected, and to be treated with dignity (see Verkuyten, 2005). Among the more active young people (e.g., members of organisations) such claims are also based on their acquired cultural capital, thus displaying how they are concretely enacting their participatory citizenship in Italy even in the absence of legal recognition similar to Colombo et al.'s (2011) participants.

Some older participants used a different metaphor to represent their identity, that of "new Italians" "*bridging*" between two different cultures and countries, despite the fact that they are constructed in negative terms in mainstream media. This term, used by ZAID, is instructive as it shows how young people are creatively constructing identities of resistance and roles for bridging and go beyond boundaries of us and them, host and guest. These participants are future oriented and imagine a more inclusive and diverse Italian national identity, one that values and is formed out of diverse ethnic histories and lived realities in Italy (see Andreouli, 2013). This strategy resembles the concept of citizenship as "identification" (Colombo et al., 2011). Lack of legal recognition of citizenship status for some participants is an absurd bureaucratic incongruence that becomes salient in some circumstances, even though it has potentially limiting

consequences. Consistently, young people highlighted involvement in civil society activities and associations, which are viewed by them as an effective vehicle for making one's opinions and preferences heard, exercising one's voice and power, and contributing to the shaping society (Colombo et al., 2011; Montero, 2009). Participation in activities makes people part of their local communities and institutions and allows "immigrants to make citizenship-like claims on the state and others, even in the absence of legal citizenship status" (Bloemraad et al., 2008, p. 162).

This study has some limitations. A first one is that focus group interviews were conducted by moderators of Italian background. Even if care was devoted to explaining the aims of the study and making participants comfortable, the potential influence of the dominant role of the interviewer in participants' willingness to disclose specific culturally sensitive content should be acknowledged. It should also be highlighted that participants, older participants, are well educated migrants, including some socially active. Therefore this is a purposive sample, not representative of the population of Moroccan migrants in Italy as far as their experience of discrimination and strategies of resistance.

In conclusion, a focus on acculturation as meaning making (Andreouli, 2013; Bhatia, 2002; Hermans & Kempen, 1998) within a broader social ecology and relations of power reveals the complexity of dynamics of power and resistance (Luque-Ribelles et al., 2017; Garcia et al., 2011) and contributes to a more "empowering" representation of young migrants and of their competences than traditional theoretical perspectives on psychological acculturation, with implications for community psychology approaches to interventions. The study shows that young people are active, flexible and creative (Sonnenshein & van Meijl, 2014) in negotiating the challenges and tensions they face in constructing lives as migrants in difficult contexts and in elaborating their strategies to resist and claim belonging. Importantly, these processes intersect with life stage, gender, and other social dimensions, thus reflecting the importance of considering

social positions within communities in making sense of the ongoing process of identity construction and negotiation. Future research is required to explore how such negotiation processes occur for other migrant groups, from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in countries such as Italy that has typically been a migrant sending country, as well as in other contexts, characterized by different structural opportunities for migrants (e.g. recognition of citizenship rights, immigration policies).

The study has also useful implications and recommendations for policies and practices aimed at promoting inclusive citizenship. In particular, it clearly shows the importance of legal citizenship as a precondition for a full recognition of a range of rights in order to overcome the structural inequalities generating oppressions. Further, they show the importance of education in order to create an inclusive multicultural society. To this purpose, it is imperative to create settings for youth participation and support the development of spaces, such as grassroots and youth-led organizations, including migrant organisations. In such settings people can come together across gender, ethnicity, generation to contest, challenge, and share in the process of constructing narratives and identities and to feel that they belong in multicultural societies.

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