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IDENTITY AND INGROUP/OUTGROUP RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

The Sicilian cultural context is characterized by a millenary history of multicultural relationships, which have profoundly affected the life of the island and its population.

For some decades, Sicily has been an important destination for immigrants seeking to improve their quality of life. Specifically, in the south-eastern part of the island the largest immigrant group comprises people from Maghreb who work in farms (especially greenhouses).

The coexistence of people with different cultural backgrounds poses the question related to the quality of their relationships.

The present study was carried out to explore the representational framework expressed by a sample of immigrants from Maghreb living in the south-eastern Sicily about the Ingroup/Outgroup relationships and the 'place' where they are settled. Rating Scales and Semantic Differentials were used. The data showed complex and nonlinear attitudes towards ingroup/outgroup relationships and the Institutions and indicated the pressing need to realize integration projects.

INTRODUCTION

Sicily, in the middle of the Mediterranean sea, has always been a place of encounters and clashes between people, some with very different cultural backgrounds, which have contributed, together, to define its history, culture and traditions. It is a complex reality made up of hybrids, crosses and identities, that has been a melting pot for a long time. (Consolo & Cassano, 2000). An identity arising from generations of migrants and sailors who went across different lands and over the sea that joins rather than separates (ÇiÇeko lu & Eldem, 2001).

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For many years this island has experienced the migration phenomenon in first person, that is in terms of a social mobility that has involved its inhabitants. For some decades, it has been the destination of a migration flow for which it is not only a main thoroughfare to reach Europe, but also a place to work, study or join family. In fact, in Sicily, there are immigrants of 103 different nationalities spread out in an heterogeneous way over the nine provinces (Dioguardi, 2006).

Specifically, on the south-eastern coast of the island there is a significant number of immigrants from Maghreb, especially Tunisians, who have settled here since the 1960s and '70s, getting jobs mainly in agriculture. In recent years, some members of the Tunisian community have become greenhouse owners, highlighting stabilization and planning processes in the immigration territory (Caritas, 2009).

Certainly, the coexistence of people with different culture and religion does not necessarily mean a civil co-existence between them, in terms of living together in mutual respect and recognition of differences as potential resources. It is rather a challenge of our times that requires an effective management both of cultural and social change processes and of conflict negotiation.

The functional conditions for a 'successful' contact outlined by Allport (1954), namely equal status, possibility of knowledge, cooperation, and institutional support, are requirements that are difficult to find in normal everyday life contexts. The same author, however, notes that the simple sharing of a physical space is not sufficient to make harmonious relationships; indeed it may exacerbate them. This would seem all the more true if their social identity is defined in terms of ingroup identification, leading to the phenomenon known as intergroup bias, that is the tendency to value the ingroup in a more positive light than the outgroup, perceived to be minus on some dimensions of value, in order to enjoy the reflected glory (Tajfel, 1981).

Therefore, in multicultural contexts it seems desirable to contribute to creating real integration processes that are based on the enhancement of mutual belonging (Brown & Hewstone, 2005), preventing identification from leading to leveling and ingroup closing, or conversely, disregard from becoming self denial. Concerning this, the results of a study conducted with immigrants who have settled in Sicily has highlighted the fact that processes of social identity recognition, openness and mutual respect are the basis of integration (Licciardello & Damigella, *in press*).

METHOD

The aim of the present research was to verify the following hypotheses:

1). contact without conditions set by Allport (1954) does not reduce prejudices, that is, in ordinary contexts of everyday life, it does not improve (or not necessarily improve) the quality of ingroup/outgroup relationships;

2). ingroup/outgroup bias (Tajfel, 1981) occurs in the case of ingroup identification and, therefore, of a Self image closely related to the value assigned to it;

3). ingroup positive estimation, without identification, allows for a better quality of relationships with the outgroup (Brown & Hewstone, 2005).

Sample

The research was conducted with a sample of immigrants, 158 altogether, 158, coming from North African Countries and living and working in south-eastern Sicily. The participants (120 males and 38 females) were aged between 14 and 63 (M=33.58), come mostly from Tunisia (73.4%), have an average level of education (post elementary school 37.3% and junior high school 49.4 %) and almost all are Muslim (98.7%).

Materials

The data was collected through a questionnaire consisting of:

- background questions (Licciardello, 1994), aimed at collecting specific data in order to draw an appropriate profile of the socio/cultural characteristics of the individuals, useful for the construction of possible research variables;

- a group of items (range 1-7 with "indifference point"=4) in order to measure the representational

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framework related to:

a). ingroup/outgroup relationships, in terms of relationships that characterize immigrants living in south-eastern Sicily either with their own countrymen and with other immigrants, as well as local attitudes towards immigrants;

b). relationships with the 'place' where immigrants are settled, with reference to their attitudes towards Italian Laws and Institutions, to the possibility of settling in south-eastern Sicily and to the usefulness of further institutional intervention regarding integration;

- *three Semantic Differentials* (Di Nuovo & Licciardello, 1997) concerning the representation about *Actual Self* ("*As I am*"), *Outgroup* ("*Sicilian people are ...*") and *Ingroup* ("*My countrymen are ...*").

Procedure

The data analysis was carried out through the support of the statistical package SPSS 15 for Windows, using MANOVA, Linear Regression Analysis and *One test.*

Specifically: *a)* we calculated the mean values of each item; *b)* in relation to Semantic Differentials, after the verification of the reliability by Cronbach's alpha: "*Actual Self*" (=.835), "*Sicilian people*" (*Outgroup*) (=.892), "*The Countrymen*" (*Ingroup*) (=.877), considering each S. D. as a Likert scale (with 1-7 score and "indifferent point"=4) we calculated the average sum of each pair of opposite adjectives. Also we calculated the Euclidean Distances between S. D. considered in pairs[1].

RESULTS

A).Overview

Ingroup/outgroup relationships

Ingroup relationships are on average characterized by *membership* (M=5.54) and in a moderate way by *solidarity* (M=4.51).

The relationships with the Sicilian outgroup do not seem to be particularly defined. In fact, though with limited scoring, but still statistically higher than the indifference point, *superficiality* (M=4.38, *One Test: p*=. 001), *indifference* (M= 4.36, *One Test: p* =. 009), and *belonging* (M=2.75, *One Test: p* <.001) all have negative scores; the scant regard for *rejection* can be interpreted in a positive sense (M=2.68, *One Test: p* <.001).

The representation of the attitudes of the Sicilian population towards immigrants seems rather vague: the scant consideration for *solidarity* (M=3.63, *One Test: p* =. 007) and the score, above the "indifference point*"* (*One Test: p* =. 027), attributed to *hypocrisy* (M=4.31) are negative; however, the low value assigned to *rejection* (M=2.82, *One Test: p*<.001) and the scores, overlapping with the indifferent point, attached to *superficiality* (M=4.11), *indifference* (M=4.14), *respect* (M=4.23) and *friendliness* (M=4.19) are positive.

Attitudes to Italian Law and Institutions

With regard to attitudes to Italian Laws, *sharing and respect for Laws* (M=5.64) was given an average score, and *non-sharing but, equally, respect* (M=5.29) was given a middle/low score; the negative guidelines (*violation due to ignorance* and *not sharing and consequent violation, because they are considered unfair and discriminatory*) were widely rejected.

The situation regarding the relationships with Institutions seems less defined and more complex. In fact, the statements that define the Institution are approved with limited positive scores - *good in general* (M=4.86) and, even less, *characterized by the request of help and support* (M=4.39). The score related to the concept which views them as *negative for the excess of obligations* (M=4.49) is similar with a middle-low score; the score concerning the idea that they are *negative because Institutions have discriminatory attitudes towards immigrants* overlaps with the indifference point (M=4.02) .

Interventions functional to integration and possibility of settling in the territory

The orientation towards possible institutional interventions to promote integration is interesting. The possibility of *Laws that protect the migrant's rights better* (M=6.28) is approved with extremely high scores, with medium-high scores for *greater involvement in community life* (M=5.71) and with

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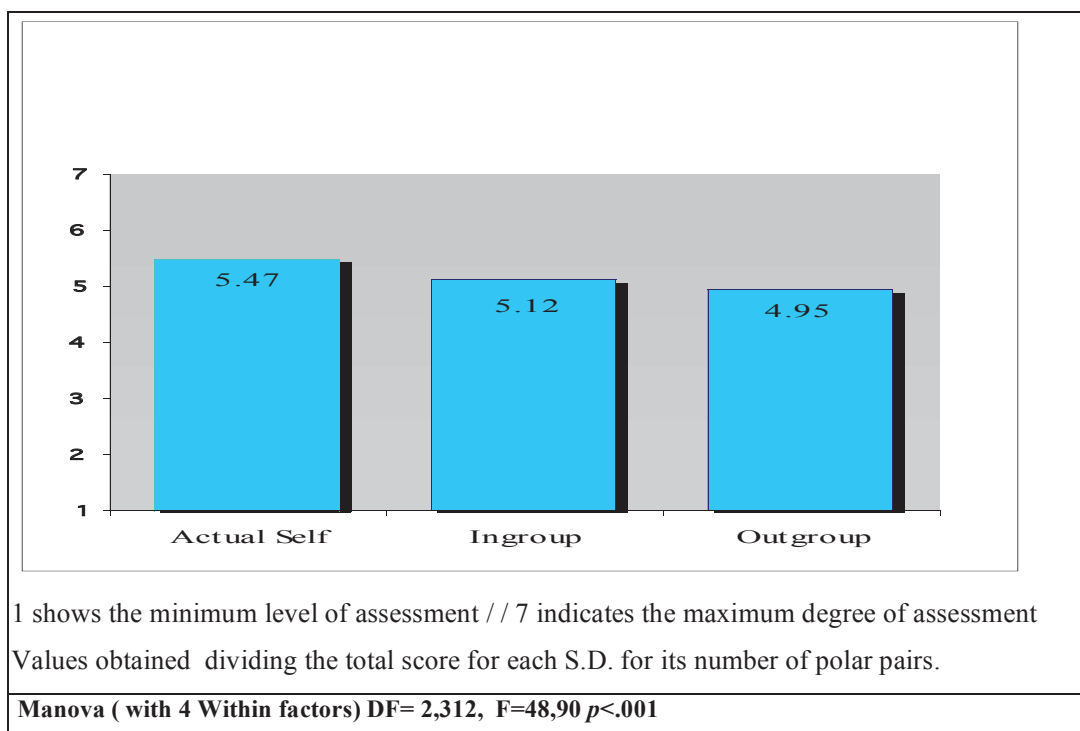ISSN 0214-9877

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middle-low scores for *educational processes for a better understanding of other cultures* (M=5.23). In confirmation of the framework related to relations with Institutions, the hypothesis that they *already operate positively* (M=3.24) was rejected and, highlighting some planning, the idea that *integration is an unrealistic issue* (M=2.62) was also rejected.

The possibility of settling in Sicily is seen to be unlikely. In fact, the idea of *returning to their country as soon as there will be economic, political, cultural and family conditions even if life conditions are positive* (M=5.96) was approved with medium-high scores and the idea of settling was not appreciated, *because even if it is not exactly the ideal place to plan your own future, there is the possibility of a better quality of life compared to other Italian provinces* (M=4.25). Also it seems that the options related to *favorable economic and cultural conditions* do not play an important role in this regard (M=4.05 and M=3.76). However, the idea of returning to their country because they *are victims of intolerance and racism* (M=3.55) is rejected.

Semantic Differentials

In general (Fig. 1), the *Actual Self* was evaluated with a mean score (M=5.47), while the *ingroup* (M=5.12) and *outgroup* (M=4.95) values, although differences are statistically significant (p=.001), stand both on medium and medium-low levels.

Figure 1. Comparing average values S.D. considered

1 shows the minimum level of assessment / / 7 indicates the maximum degree of assessment

Values obtained dividing the total score for each S.D. for its number of polar pairs.

Manova (with 4 Within factors) DF= 2,312, F=48,90 p<.001

B) Effects of the correlation between variables

The development of the analysis by linear regression highlighted significant effects related to *Self*, *Ingroup* and *Outgroup* representations.

Self valuation seems to produce closing *ingroup* effects and distance from the *outgroup.* In detail, the higher the value attributed to *Actual Self* : the more the *Ingroup* is considered in terms of <u>a</u>) *Ingroup* evaluation in terms of *solidarity* (= .241, t = 3.090, p = .002) and *belonging* (=. 309, t = 4331, p <.001) and less in terms of *superficiality* (= -. 220, t = -2812, p = .006), *distance* (= -. 302, t =- 3941, p <.001) and *rejection* (= -. 242, t = -3109, p = .002); <u>b</u>) the less the relationships with the *Outgroup* are con-

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sidered in terms of *belonging* (= -. 249, *t* = -3202, *p* = .002), the less Sicilian people were attributed attitudes to the Ingroup characterised by *affiliation* (= -. 213, *t* = -2178, *p* = .007); *c)* the less was the consideration of ingroup relationships with the Institution *good in general* (= -. 196, *t* = -2489, *p* = .014) and of the idea that *the institutions already operate positively* (=-. 226, *t* = -2884, *p* = .004), *d)* the higher was the evaluation of the fact *that integration is an unrealistic goal* (= -. 233, *t* = -2982, *p* = .003).

Ingroup assessment seems to produce positive effects on relationships with the *outgroup.* More specifically, the higher the *ingroup* is valued: *a)* the less relationships with the *outgroup* are considered in terms of *distance* (= -. 416, *t* = -5696, *p* <.001) and *rejection* (= -. 504, *t* = -7273, *p* <.001), and, conversely, the less it was considered that Sicilian people had attitudes toward the *ingroup* characterized by *distance* (= -. 383, *t* = -5165, *p* <.001) and *denial* (= -. 504, *t* = -7273, *p* <.001); *b)* the more it had toward Italian Laws *sharing and respect attitudes* (= .162, *t* = 2045, *p* = .043), and less of *not-sharing and consequent violation, because they are considered unfair and discriminatory* (= -. 307, *t* = -4019, *p*<.001); less was the agreement with the idea that the *ingroup* relationships with Institutions were *negative, because they have discriminatory attitudes towards immigrants* (= -. 218, *t* = -2775, *p* = .006).

Outgroup assessment seems to have effects on Institutions, *ingroup* and relations with the territory representations. In detail, the better the *outgroup* was assessed: *a)* the greater the emphasis on the fact that Institutions should have a *greater involvement in community life* (= .222, *t* = 2829, *p* = .005) and on the need for *more laws to protect immigrants rights* (= .295, *t* = 3842, *p* <.001), *b)* the less it was considered that the *outgroup* had attitudes towards the *ingroup* characterized by *denial* (= -. 559, *t* = -8391, *p* <.001) and *hypocrisy* (= -. 163, *t* = -2508, *p* = .041) and more, instead, by *respect* (= .269, *t* = 3477, *p* = .001), *friendliness* (= .161, *t* = 2033, *p* = .044) and *hospitality* (= .258, *t* = 3331, *p* =. 001), *c)* the less they agreed with the idea of *returning as soon as possible to the country of origin because of intolerance and racism of which they are often victims* (= -. 293, *t* = -3189, *p* <.001).

Consistent with what was previously highlighted, the greater distance between *Actual Self* and *ingroup* seems to produce effects on the quality of *ingroup* relationships with the *outgroup* and with Institutions. In particular, the greater distance between *Actual Self* and *ingroup* correlates in a positive way with the idea that: *a)* ingroup/outgroup relationships are characterized by *solidarity* (= .317, *t* = 4159, *p*= .004) and *belonging* (= .228, *t* = 2918, *p* <.001), *b)ingroup* relations with Institutions are *good in general* (= .199, *t* = 2528, *p* = .012) and *characterized by the request of help and support* (= .164, *t* = 2065, *p* = .041); *c)* both *it would be useful to foster a better understanding of different cultures through educational processes* (= .328, *t* = 4319, *p* <.001) and that *the institutions already operate positively* (= .321, *t* = 4224, *p* <.001) .

DISCUSSION

The results seem to outline a comprehensive framework characterized by a certain level of complexity.

In general, the subjects of our sample show a fairly good sense of belonging with the ingroup and an ill-defined orientation towards the outgroup, with whom relationships are not considered in-depth (little *belonging* and substantial *indifference* and *superficiality),* but not markedly characterized with negative connotations (minimum agreement assigned to *refusal).* The representation of the attitudes attributed to Sicilian people towards immigrants (low *solidarity* and *friendliness,* but not *refusal*) is equally undetermined.

These subjects, however, claim to respect Italian Laws (formal sharing) and show a critical yet proactive attitude, toward Institutions. To this regard, they highlight the need for a better protection of their rights, for greater involvement in community life and, to a lesser extent, for educational processes functional to knowledge of cultures. Furthermore, their life plans seem based on the idea of returning to their country because the economic and cultural conditions (openness, integration, respect for

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differences etc.) of the place of immigration would not be very favorable, though they are not charac-terized by intolerance and racism.

On the whole, this data seems to verify our first hypothesis, namely that simple contact is not suf-ficient to improve intergroup relationships. Although the subjects of our sample have been settled in Sicily for a long time and they have mastered the Italian language very well, without the conditions spec-ified by Allport (1954), often improbable in normal everyday contexts, contact does not seem to improve intergroup relationships.

An in-depth analysis reveals that a positive self-image assessment correlates with substantial iden-tification with the ingroup, with whom there is a greater sense of *solidarity* and *belonging,* as well with an *outgroup* evaluation characterized in negative terms and with the idea that integration is an unreal-istic issue. These results seem to confirm the second hypothesis, that is *intergroup bias* paradigm (Tajfel, 1981): an identity dimension based on *ingroup* identification leads to *outgroup* rejection and closing dynamics towards it and what it can represent.

However, when the *ingroup* is evaluated in a positive way, without any identification, the situation changes: the representation of outgroup relationships and those assigned to the latter toward the ingroup appears, in fact, improved. In addition, there are positive attitudes toward Italian Laws and Institutions.

Similar results are obtained in the case of a positive outgroup assessment: this evaluation, in fact, is accompanied by a favorable image both of the attitudes assigned to Sicilian people toward the ingroup and of the role of Institutions in the processes that promote integration. This data seems to support the third hypothesis and, therefore, the model of Brown and Hewstone (2005), according to which better intergroup relationships have a background of positive processes of affiliations and mutual recognition which seem to imply openness, respect and cooperation. Conversely, the dynamics of identification, resulting in a kind of ingroup 'standardization', seem to support *intergroup bias* processes*.*

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study seem to confirm our hypothesis.

Specifically, simple contact does not in itself entail an improvement of intergroup relationships. With regard to this fact, however, it is important to highlight the sociological connotation of the condi-tions specified by Allport (1954) that are functional to overcoming prejudicial thought. In other words, these requirements are difficult to achieve in real settings. Consider, for example, equal status that, though it may be formally recognized, will exist only if it is psychologically perceived as such: equality should not be simply ascribed as a notion, but actually shared and experienced by the individuals in question. Otherwise, if the intergroup relationships are asymmetric, the stereotype, based on an alleged inferiority of the other, will increase rather than decrease.

In a social context where the 'foreign' is often seen as the outgroup that is negatively evaluated and compared with which a positive self-image can be derived, social identity seems to play a key role. That part of self that comes from the awareness of belonging to a social group, together with the value and emotional significance associated with that membership (Tajfel, 1981), seems to support the phenom-enon of intergroup bias when it means a mere identification. However, when there are ingroup positive assessment processes in the background it seems that there are the conditions for a better quality of relationships with the outgroup. To confirm the model of Brown & Hewstone (2005), it is as if better intergroup relationships are based on mutual recognition, supported by an awareness of the meaning and value of individual belonging.

On the basis of the framework outlined, it would seem reasonable to think that the reduction of a thought based on prejudices is related to psycho-social variables and that, in this sense, contact would be useful to civil co-existence where the group is appreciated (or at least not diminished). This condi-tion (that appropriate interventions can help to create) is relevant because it can avoid non-recognition phenomena, which represent a real distortion of reality and which result in a form of oppression that

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imprisons people in a false, distorted and impoverished way of life (Taylor, 1992). In this way, we would avoid the risk of a reaction that leads to ingroup closing and opening the way to the recognition of the outgroup, no longer seen as 'the other' and 'the enemy', but as partners to build real (however complex) integration, civil and peaceful coexistence processes.

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[1]To calculate the Euclidean Distances we used the following formula: e.g. for *Actual Self* and *Ingroup*: , $\sqrt{\sum (AS_i - ING_i)^2}$ AS=*Actual Self*, ING=*Ingroup*, i= each pair of opposite adjectives in both S.D.

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