Research Article

The Developmental Factors of Identity Strategies Variation among Schooled Central African Adolescent Refugees in the East-Region of Cameroon

TAMO FOGUÉ Yannick [1,*], NKELZOK KOMTSINDI Valère[2], MAYI MARC Bruno [3]

[1] Department of Psychology, University of Yaoundé 1, Cameroon

[2] Department of Psychology, University of Douala, Cameroon

[3] Department of Specialized Education, University of Yaoundé 1, Cameroon

*Correspondence: yannicktam@yahoo.fr

Abstract: The present study poses the problem of the variations observed in the construction of identity strategies among schooled adolescent refugees. It starts from the observation that the latter express serious difficulties to be integrated into their host socio-cultural environments. Yet proximity to their original culture should guarantee continuity in the emergence of developmental skills initiated in their basic anthropomorphic universe. Paradoxically, they become dysfunctional in face of the demands of the host environment, and require the construction of identity strategies to adapt. Data collected from one hundred and eighty-four (184) central African refugee adolescents in the Lom-and-Djérem Division (Cameroon's East-Region), show that in a situation of socio-emotional adaptation, age and sex are among the main factors of variation in the construction of these identity strategies.

Keywords: Socio-emotional challenges, Adolescent refugees, Identity strategies, Cross-cultural/transcultural environment

1. Introduction

In Cameroon, there are approximately two hundred and twelve thousand (212,000) Central Africans settled in the North, East and Adamaoua regions [1], since 2013 with the socio-political crisis in the Central African Republic. This poses a humanitarian and educational problem because many adolescent refugees live and school in socio-cultural realities that are relatively different from their culture of origin. They are in a cross-cultural/transcultural situation where in order to become oneself; one sometimes opposes others who are not similar [2], whereas even if they were not refugees, they would have had identity problems. This seems to be paradoxical in their identity construction, because some are opposed to other adolescents who are in the host environment, while they interact every day. These refugees who seem to be ''cultural marginalized'' [3], live in a situation of double cultural reference and have a much more difficult, ambivalent and divided identity construction. Especially when they identify themselves only to their culture of origin. However, the identity being determined in each African personality by his society, a cultural interdependence should animate its construction and influence. This depends on the cases and experiences according to which the various psychosocial functions of the individual develop, whether he is in his culture of origin or in a cross-cultural context.

2. Problematic

By posing the issue of cultural interdependence in the process of self building Markus and Kitayama demonstrate that geographic proximity should lead to similarity in the expression of the cognitive, emotional, motivational and socio-adaptive skills of individuals [4]. In addition, several studies emphasize that these skills are also linked to geophysical variables such as climate, socioeconomic, demographic and cultural factors of the subject's past and present living environment [5]. This lends itself in the psychology of cultural contacts, to the phenomenon of "interculturality" [6], that facilitate migrations due to situations of discomfort and insecurity. By forcing refugee adolescents to re-socialize and school in a relatively transcultural environment, this should highlight the continuity between what the subject was in the past, what he is now and what he will be in the future, and which govern his own self-representations.

Paradoxically, it emerges from a preliminary study carried out with the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire of Jermann, Van der Linden, Acremont and Zermatten [7], and the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale of Dan-Glauser and Sherer [8] (α = .87 ; α = .76), that 50.89% of Central African refugee adolescents in the East-Region of Cameroon develop non-adaptive cognitive regulation of emotions in the school milieu. Therefore 70.80% experience very high difficulties to regulate. This is because, when they change socio-cultural environment, they drag with oneself a basic identity felt/desired/committed, composed by the individual, social identity and self-concept, built from the low ages. This identity, which emerges from the anthropomorphic milieu and the subject's developmental niches, shapes his first cognitive-behavioral patterns [9, 10].

But faced with the expectations/requirements of the host environment, an identity assigned to the migrant emerges and creates socio-emotional discomfort [11]. Here, the desired identity refers to what the individual would like to be, the committed identity refers to what he is and was in the culture of origin, and the assigned identity refers to his beliefs about what others in the host culture would like him to be. However, the effort that the individual makes to reconcile these three identities is part of what this author calls "relationship management of the self." For adolescent refugees, it consists of reconciling their committed identity constructed while living in their culture of origin, and their identity assigned by members of their host culture. Faced with this intra and inter-oriented identity conflict, Melleni underlines that in order to adapt, one must build identity such as, camouflage, clandestinity, redefinition, arrangement, display, avoidance, repair, denial, cancellation of self/others [12].

3. The Current Study

From the above, we note that theorists who have worked on adolescence recognize that the emergence of developmental tasks specific to this period of development coincides with the structuring of identity [13]. Insofar as the bodily changes inaugurated by puberty are accompanied on the psychic level, fundamental questions [14, 15]. The scientific literature has very little or almost no emphasis on age and gender in the construction of identity strategies in a situation of socio-cultural change. Therefore, this research poses the problem of the variations observed in the construction of the identity strategies of adolescent refugees schooled in a cross-cultural/transcultural context, by questioning gender and age as potential explanatory developmental factors.

4. Hypothesis of the Study

This research is based on the assumption that: In a cross-cultural/transcultural situation/context, the construction of identity strategies among schooled refugee adolescents varies according to their ages (12-14 years and 15-18 years) and their sexes.

5. Method

5.1. Participants

One hundred and eighty-four (184) adolescent refugees participated in this study. They are all from the Central African Republic, living in the Mandjou, Bétaré-Oya and Garoua-Boulaï Sub-division, in the Lom-and-Djérem Division, East-Region of Cameroon. Aged 12 to 18, of both sexes, they have attended school at least until the end of lower secondary school, with no psychiatric or medical history. They have never presented symptoms of nutritional deficiency, given their psychological repercussions [16]. In addition, the absence/mildness of the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was an inclusion criterion, as they constitute an obstacle to socio-emotional development [17].

They live in Mbororo, Foulbé and Hausa communities, which although they are non-native, have become the majority in the three districts concerned. Indeed, the original culture of these different sites is Baya, divided into 02 Townships (Gbaguinda and Bodomo), paradoxically became a minority and med by a socioeconomic life imposed by these communities. This means that the Central African refugees, who also have a culture near to the Baya culture, find themselves in a cross-cultural/transcultural situation.

5.2. Material and procedure

This study is based on a quantitative estimate. The data collection instrument used consists of four scales/questionnaires.

In fact, to select the participants, an identification questionnaire was first administered. Followed by the tests of selection and stabilization/homogenization of participants. In doing so, Weiss and Marmar translated version of the Impact of Event Scale helped to diagnose post-traumatic stress disorder [18]. Composed of fifteen (15) items, it is calibrated with a Cronbach alpha (α) = .91. Composed of ten (10) items, its calibration gave α = .71.

The identity strategies were then evaluated via the Identity Strategies Inventory Questionnaire, designed for the specific needs of this research, drawing on the identity strategies model of Bajoit and Mellini [11, 12], with an acceptable overall internal consistency (α = .71). It is made up of twelve (12) items organized around four (4) main facets or identity strategies namely: Camouflage/Clandestinity/Self-redefinition (α = .63); Arrangement/Self-Display (α = .60); Avoidance/Self-repair (α = .75); Denial/Cancellation of self or others (α = 0.87).

Finally, the Socio-emotional Adjustment Measurement Scale was administered to those selected. It is made up of two subscales namely: the French version of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) by Gross and John [19], made up of ten (10) items reflecting the predominance of either the re-evaluation (α = .85), or suppression (α = .90) in emotional regulation strategies; the validated French version of the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) by Garnefsky et al. [20], with thirty-six (36) items indicating whether the subject's capacities to cope with events unpleasant (cognitive coping) are adaptive (α = .89) or non-adaptive (α = .73).

6. Result

Table 1 shows that for the identity strategies, boys construct more camouflage or clandestinity/self-redefinition and the arrangement or self-display then more avoidance or self-repair and denial or self/others-cancellation, than girls. This result is surely linked to the fact that among the Central African refugee adolescents in the East-Region of Cameroon, there are more boys in school who are in a parenting situation than girls. Depending on their daily socio-emotional experiences, they construct different identity strategies which also seem to be linked to the nature of the socio-economic activities they carry out. Indeed, these girls mainly carry out gainful activities such as domestic jobs, but most of

the boys trade or work as laborers in various structures, or are ''mototaxi'' drivers, or are conveyors in transport buses. These activities induce multiple and varied emotions.

Table 1. Gender in the construction of identity strategies among Central African refugee adolescents and their socio-emotional adaptation

Indicators	Average/Standard deviation		*z-test*	Probability
	Girl refugees (*n* = 77)	Boy refugees (*n* = 107)		(*p*)
Identity strategies				
Self redefinition	7.10/3.33	9.47/3.51	-4.606	.008
Self-display	6.75/3.25	8.96/3.37	-4.464	.000
Self repair	6.05/2.87	7.76/3.68	-3.390	.000
Self/other cancellation	4.69/2.20	5.99/4.94	-2.167	.01
Emotion Regulatory strategies				
Revaluation	28.68/7.67	27.99/7.90	0.587	.032
Deletion	17.04/5.89	17.36/6.13	-0.361	.017
Cognitive Coping of Emotions				
Adaptive	64.77/5.39	65.60/5.29	-0.318	.001
Not adaptive	45.10/5.05	43.17/5.64	0.883	.0379

To adapt to their socio-emotional situations, we note that girls have more ability to regulate their emotions by resorting to reassessment of the situation than boys, while boys have more inhibitory tendencies or suppression that they develop as regulatory strategies. On the other hand, in the face of unpleasant events, these girls show less adaptive cognitive coping than boys, but we rather see the reverse for non-adaptive cognitive coping. This result therefore implies that the adolescent Central African refugee girls, who school in the East-region of Cameroon, have more difficulty in the socio-emotional adaptation than boys, although they resort to re-evaluation more than the latter.

It is noted in the Table 2 that the adolescent Central African refugees in East-region of Cameroon are for the vast majority aged between fifteen (15) to eighteen (18) years old.

Table 2: Age in the construction of identity strategies among Central African refugee adolescents and their socio-emotional adaptation

Indicators	Average/Standard deviation		z-test	Probability
	12 to 14 years old (*n* = 17)	15 to 18 years old (*n* = 167)		(*p*)
Identity Strategies				
Self redefinition	8.35/3.28	8.49/3.66	-0.149	.002
Self-display	9.12/3.87	7.92/3.43	1.346	.041
Self repair	6.88/3.67	7.06/3.45	-0.201	.043
Self/other cancellation	6.18/3.18	5.37/4.16	0.777	.002
Emotion Regulatory Strategies				
Revaluation	29.53/8.34	28.14/7.75	0.695	.003
Deletion	16.82/6.42	17.27/5.99	-0.291	.010
Cognitive Coping of Emotuion				
Adaptive	63.13/4.97	65.47/5.37	-0.515	.001
Not adaptive	35.44/6	44.85/5.25	-2.605	.031

It emerges from this table that for identity strategies, the youngest (12 to 14 years old) build less camouflage or clandestinity/self-redefinition and avoidance or self-repair, than their elders (15 to 18 years old). Indeed, we observe that many older refugees from fifteen (15) to eighteen (18) years old speak "Fulfulde" which is the most common in host communities, whereas they do not accept these realities.

However, others avoid contact with their peers from the host environment, seeking more, either to regroup with each other all the time or to return to their country/culture of origin. Conversely, those aged from twelve (12) to fourteen (14) years old build more self-display, and denial or self/others-cancellation than their elders. Thus, while some of these younger people define themselves deeply as being from the host environment, others paradoxically refuse completely that they are in another environment and become violent, aggressive, with suicidal ideation and homicide. These younger refugee teens appear to have a better ability to regulate their emotions through reassessment than their elders, who do so more through suppression. But we also find that they show less adaptive cognitive coping than the latter, despite the fact that they also have more difficulty in the socio-emotional adaptation than their younger siblings.

7. Discussion

These results highlight the fact that in order to manage the anxiety generated by their host environments, the development strategies mobilized by adolescent refugees depend not only on specificities linked to their socio-cultural origins, but also on their ages and sexes. This shows that these adolescents encounter the same difficulties in all cultural contexts, but which vary depending on whether the host culture remains strongly or slightly removed from their basic cultural habits [13]. In this logic, we corroborate with Bajoit who assigns identity to a social and psychic construction [11], part of a long process during which rearrangements must be made in terms of (re) identity reconciliation between different components, namely: the desired identity which refers to what the individual would like to be; the committed identity which refers to what he is and has been; and the assigned identity which refers to what he believes others would want him to be. These are the realities linked to cultural interference which Paduart claims to be dispensers of an identity that is both individual and group [21]. Therefore, that identity becomes permanently conflictual when they migrate in a transcutural context. Because, according to Rizzi, "the individual internalizes the cultural models that are imposed on him so that he will identify with his group of origin from birth [22] (p. 33).

The construction of the identity strategies identified during this research refers to what the literature attributes to the image that the individual has of himself, according to his beliefs, the representations of himself, which constitute a psychological structure allowing him to select his actions and his social relations, in his new living environment [23]. Thus, instead of the host cultural context, through its anthropomorphic beliefs and ethnotheories, being suicidogenic for these refugee adolescents, who are nevertheless daily confronted with relatively difficult socio-emotional situations, it seems in this research to be rather a protection factor against the risk of suicide. It promotes acceptance of oneself and one's actions, a sense of comfort associated with self-image, and a general sense of psychological well-being.

8. Conclusion

This research posed the problem of variations observed in the construction of identity strategies among schooled adolescent refugees. Based on the identity strategies model of

Bajoit and Mellin, they assumed that in a cross-cultural/transcultural situation/context these strategies vary according to their sexes and ages [11, 12]. To verify this hypothesis, data has been collected from one hundred and eighty-four (184) central African refugee adolescents schooled in the Lom-and-Djérem Division (Cameroon's East-Region). According to the result, the boys construct more camouflage or clandestinity/self-redefinition and the arrangement or self-display, then more avoidance or self-repair and denial or self/others-cancellation, than girls. However, the youngest (12 to 14 years old) build less camouflage or clandestinity/self-redefinition and avoidance or self-repair, but more self-display and denial or self/others-cancellation than their elders (15 to 18 years old). Moreover, these girls and these younger schooled adolescent refugees have more ability to regulate their emotions through reassessment of the situation. This implicate in theory that, when one changes socio-cultural school environment, he carries with oneself a basic felt/desired/committed identity built from his anthropomorphic environment of the origin. But faced with the expectations/demands of the host environment school, an assigned identity emerges and creates conflicts, inducing emotional discomfort. Practically the educational/reinsertion strategies of the host country for adolescent refugees have to take in to consideration the influence of their sexes and ages in the construction of the identity strategies. This will help them to better manage and adapt to the intra and inter-oriented identity conflict faced every day in their school.

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