

A Liberation Psychology Approach to Acculturative Integration of Migrant Populations

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Abstract This paper describes an acculturative integration approach that stresses the contribution of liberation psychology. Immigrant integration is a challenge for receiving countries in the Western world due to the frequent asymmetrical and oppressive conditions suffered by newcomers in their new settlements. The cross-cultural perspective connects integration with psychological acculturation, emphasizing harmony between acquisitions of the new culture while maintaining cultural heritage, and creating opportunities for intergroup relationships. In turn, liberation psychology permits an understanding of the acculturative transition as an empowerment and self-construction process by which immigrants acquire a new vision of the world and of themselves, transforming both structural conditions and themselves. From this perspective we conceptualize acculturative integration as the process by which newcomers become an accepted part of the new society through a reflexive and evaluative process, changing their social references and position, rebuilding their social and personal resources, and achieving a new agency in coherence with their new challenges and goals. In this process, they acquire critical thinking about unequal conditions, gain capacities to respond to the inequalities, and

take effective actions to confront them. We illustrate this process using the narratives of nine Moroccan women who are living in asymmetrical and oppressive local contexts in Andalusia, the southern-most region of Spain.

Keywords Acculturation · Integration · Oppression · Empowerment · Critical thinking · Liberation psychology · Self-construction · Immigrants · Moroccan

Migration from the poorest to the most prosperous regions of the world is rising. Systematic exploitation of natural and human resources, the current world economic crisis, global warming and pandemics will likely worsen this situation in the near future. These migratory flows are turning ethno-cultural minorities into an important part of the social fabric in receiving countries and their communities. Due to the search for social legitimacy of the newcomers and the fear of losing social status within the local population, it becomes crucial to understand processes associated with inter-cultural contact, and to look for strategies oriented to promote social cohesion in culturally plural societies.

Using the liberation psychology lens (Montero and Sonn 2009; Nelson and Prilleltensky 2005) the central goal of this paper is to present an approach to the study of acculturative integration in migrant populations, as a basis for the transformation of oppressive contexts into fair multi-cultural ones. Our approach expands acculturative integration to include a self construction process that implies psychopolitical empowerment. We use the term *acculturative integration* as belonging in the new society and having full citizenship rights. In this paper, *culture* refers to the activities or practices that people perform in everyday life—real activities (e.g., going to school or working)

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mediated by cultural tools (e.g., languages, symbolism, stories, scientific theories) (De la Mata and Cubero 2003). *Integration* is conceptualized as a complex process of transformation of the self, with capacity to transform oppressive settings into empowering contexts. It is an active, multidimensional and ecological process, by which immigrants acquire a new vision of themselves and gain new capacities and opportunities to influence collective decisions and to produce transformations, enabling them to succeed in the new society. In the words of Bhatia and Ram (2001), the self is “closely mediated, structured and organized through our participation in everyday sociocultural practices and the social relations that are embedded within these practices” (p. 6). Therefore, we stress a vision of immigrant selfhood firmly intertwined with sociocultural factors such as colonialism, language, and immigration laws (Bhatia and Ram 2001; Hernández-Plaza et al. 2010; Prilleltensky 2008).

The Challenge of Acculturative Integration

Since the classic work developed by Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) in their landmark work “*The Polish peasant in Europe and America*”, much has been investigated and theorized about the process of incorporation of immigrants into receiving societies. They are considered the authors of the first psychological theory on acculturation, a term that was coined at the end of the nineteenth century by American social anthropologists, referring to changes in Native American languages and the psychological changes induced by cross-cultural imitation (Rudmin 2003). In the early 1970s, John Berry and his colleagues (Berry 1976; Berry and Annis 1974; Sam and Berry 2006; Sommerlad and Berry 1970) developed a prolific research program on the complex patterns associated with inter-cultural behaviors, attitudes and changes. According to this approach,

...acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. At the societal level, it involves changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural practices. At the individual level, it involves changes in a person’s behavioral repertoire (Berry 2005, p. 698–699).

In this highly influential model (Berry 1997, 2005, 2006a, 2008) integration is seen as one of the four acculturative strategies which are based on two independent dimensions: (1) orientation towards one’s own group, and relative preference for maintaining one’s cultural heritage and identity; and (2) orientation towards other groups, and

relative preference for contact and participation in the larger society, along with other ethno-cultural groups. If the perspective of immigrants is taken, four possible acculturative strategies are possible: assimilation “when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures”, (Berry 2005, p. 705); separation “when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others”, (p. 705); marginalization “when there is little possibility or interest in heritage cultural maintenance, and little interest in having relations with others”, (p. 705); and finally, integration, which refers to “an interest in both maintaining one’s heritage culture while in daily interactions with other groups” and “to participate as an integral part of the larger social network” (Berry 2005, p. 705).

The decision adopted by immigrants is influenced by the ideology and attitudes of the larger society and its citizens (Berry 2006a, b). Therefore, other terms are proposed to describe acculturation strategies from the point of view of receiving groups: melting pot, when assimilation is the preferred option for newcomers; segregation, when separation is forced by the dominant group; exclusion, when marginalization is imposed by the dominant group; and multiculturalism, when cultural diversity is an accepted and valued feature of the society (Berry 2006a, b, 2008).

In accordance with this, the integration strategy is more likely to be achieved in host contexts characterized by the presence of a positive multicultural ideology, low levels of prejudice, positive mutual attitudes among ethno-cultural groups, and a sense of identification with the larger society by all individuals and groups (Berry 2005, 2006a, 2008). However, in societies characterized by negative attitudes towards immigration, high levels of ethnic prejudice and discrimination, spatial segregation of immigrants and economic exclusion, integration may be extremely difficult and highly stressful to achieve (Rudmin 2006). This is the situation for many immigrant groups living in European cities with precarious working conditions, lack of access to proper housing, effective education and health care.

In order to cope with these challenges, the European Council has encouraged an in-depth examination of oppressive forces involved in the marginalization and exclusion of migrant populations in receiving contexts, as a necessary basis for the promotion of fair multicultural societies (Oliveri 2008). The main aim is to move from a focus on immigration and cultural diversity as obstacles for social cohesion, to a focus on the individual and collective wellbeing of immigrants and the receiving society. From this point of view, the integration of immigrants and their families is considered one of the main challenges for

societies characterized by inequalities among the weakest members of the social fabric.

These European Council goals are congruent with the main concerns addressed by the Berry paradigm regarding the role of receiving societies in the promotion of social cohesion. This point has been emphasized in the literature, assuming that a positive orientation towards immigration and cultural diversity in the receiving society is a key requirement for immigrants to achieve successful acculturative integration (Bourhis et al. 1997; Navas et al. 2007; Piontkowski et al. 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Rudmin (2006) goes beyond this position, advocating that research in this field should emphasize the identification and transformation of the attitudes, behaviors, policies and laws of the majority that violate the acculturative rights of minority individuals or cause them harm. Earlier, Giza and Gallegos (1985) pointed out that acculturation research should address the identification of multidimensional and multilevel factors which could empower immigrant groups and their individual members in order to achieve integration in the new society. Similar recommendations have been stressed by many researchers from different perspectives concerning the role of the context and power dynamics in acculturative integration processes and immigrant wellbeing (Chirkov 2009; García-Ramírez 2008; Paloma et al. 2010; Prilleltensky 2008; Tseng and Yoshikawa 2008). This orientation acknowledges that psychological processes are embedded and co-constructed in sociocultural contexts, and that individuals make sense of themselves and their world in these contexts. Thus, the context of the human mind is cultural (O'Donnell 2006; Trickett 1996).

Hence, we define acculturative integration as the process by which immigrants become an accepted part of the receiving society, intertwined with other actors involved in social life (Asselin et al. 2006). It is an ecological and multidimensional process that involves: (a) acquisition, development and mutual transmission of knowledge and abilities for the adjustment to new situations and environments; (b) access to the resources needed to achieve wellbeing; (c) development of diverse and solid social networks; and (d) acquisition of feelings and behaviors of belonging to the new society (Asselin et al. 2006; Lindo 2005; Oliveri 2008; Reinsch 2001). This ecological and self-construction perspective is consistent with liberation psychology, which aims at developing an understanding of the role of psychology in social transformation. Bridging the personal and the political dimensions, liberation psychology stresses the importance of focusing on returning the voice and power to silenced immigrant groups so that they can gain a new vision of the world, themselves, and their social activity (Hernández-Plaza et al. 2010; Martín-Baró 1996; Moane 2003).

Liberation Psychology and Acculturative Integration

Liberation psychology incorporates into models of acculturation: (a) a dimension of vulnerability and risk of immigrant social exclusion in oppressive contexts; and (b) how oppressed immigrants develop a critical vision of injustices, build up niches and generate practices to protect themselves, and resist and overcome oppression according to their values and culture (Sonn and Lewis 2009).

From the liberation psychology point of view, we conceive oppression in receiving societies as the process of domination by which native groups gain and maintain privileges over newcomers, restricting their access to resources and limiting their capacity to respond (Fanon 1963; Freire 1972; Nelson and Prilleltensky 2005). It is ruled by a hegemonic ideology and institutionalized by mechanisms of control such as violence—exercised through restrictions to move and to settle in a free way; economic exploitation—exercised through the imposition of an unjust labor market; sexual control—denying the right of family regrouping; cultural control—degradation of their values and cultural traditions; political control—preventing participation and voting rights; and social fragmentation—feeding xenophobic and racist attitudes against and between immigrant groups (Moane 2003). This addresses the understanding that the dynamics of cultural differences—such as language, religion, and customs—are not sufficient for developing respectful and fair immigrant policies, which require further inclusion of the socio-economic-political conditions. Oppression reveals that despite the explicit acknowledgment of multiculturalism in the political statements of most Western nations, segregation and exclusion are—in fact—acculturative strategies adopted by the larger society trying to cope with non-Western immigrants (Oliveri 2008). Living under oppressive conditions creates daily experiences of violence, poverty and fear which are naturalized and internalized by members of dominated groups (Moane 2003; Nafstad et al. 2009). The psychologically oppressed person internalizes a contemptuous vision of him/herself without having the right to participate in the society or feeling deserving of resources for his/her wellbeing. This leads to increased difficulties in establishing social relations, as a result of mistrust and hostility (Fanon 1963; Hooks 1994; Martín-Baró 1996), and may explain why societies which legitimize segregation and exclusion of ethno-cultural groups, favor acculturative strategies such as assimilation, separation and marginalization among newcomers.

At the same time, liberation psychology explains how immigrants resist the adversities of oppression, and develop strengths and resources to cope with and overcome them (Watts and Serrano-García 2003). Liberation

psychology posits that every human group has the capacity to resist and repel the asymmetries of power. Behaviors and niches of resistance confronting oppressive socio-political structures explain acculturative strategies such as separation or marginalization as responses to unfair conditions. This represents the capacity of newcomers to reconstruct themselves in new contexts according to their interests, values and needs. Consequently, acculturative integration implies a self-construction process linked to the capacity of human beings to (a) create meaning and sense, and to act with intentionality; (b) show reflexivity, or the capacity of thinking of oneself and society as a whole; and (c) maintain one’s culture, which provides a symbolic system necessary to make sense of new encounters (De la Mata and Cubero 2003).

From the liberation psychology perspective, we view acculturative integration as a *liberating journey to citizenship*, an empowerment process based on the acquisition of rights and responsibilities to be politically active members contributing to the development of the new society (Montero 2009). It is the emergence of *multicultural people*, who are “characterized by a view of the world as a dynamically moving process and remain constantly open to the myriad of stimuli encountered...[and are] fluid in their conceptualizations and free to react in whatever manner is deemed most productive in a particular situation” (Gaza and Gallegos 1985, p. 377). Collectively, these actions transform the existing society. This new society should embrace a *fair multicultural ideology* which implies the recognition of the importance of cultural belonging, whereby all social groups are strengthened, creating conditions of political participation and gaining complete citizenship, repelling social injustice and cultural disqualification (Oliveri 2008). This process will be described in the following paragraphs, and then illustrated with the narratives of Andalusian Moroccan women.

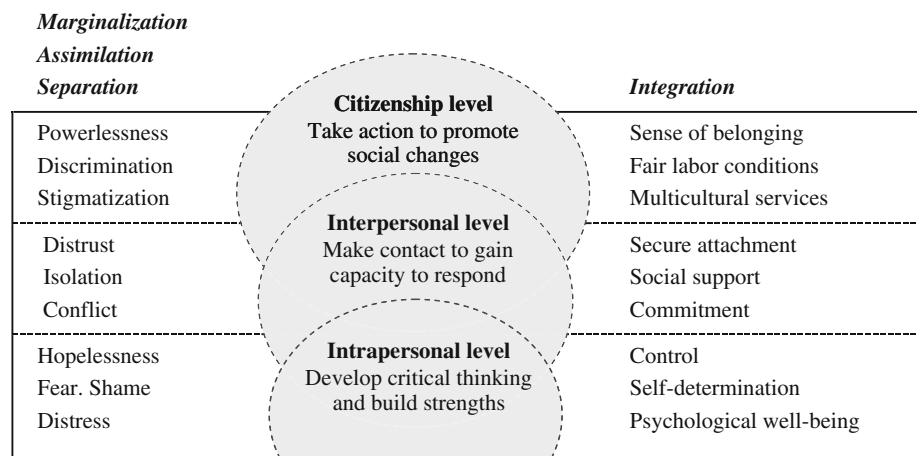
A Framework of Acculturative Integration and Psychopolitical Empowerment

In accord with the previous theoretical guidelines, Fig. 1 represents the empowering psychopolitical acculturation process experienced by immigrants. It illustrates movement from marginalization, assimilation and/or separation (left) to integration (right), on the three human ecological levels (i.e. citizenship, interpersonal and intrapersonal) through the process represented in the three central overlapping circular areas.

These three circles depict the psychopolitical processes of empowerment and liberation involved in immigrants’ self reconstruction. At the intrapersonal level, this process is related to the development of *critical thinking* through reflection and evaluation. This critical thinking leads individuals to *build strengths* and believe that conditions can change because they are not—by nature—as they appear in a specific historical context. At the interpersonal level, the liberating acculturation process is associated with new social ties, organizations and social networks that develop new social references, increase immigrants’ resources and *capacities to respond* to injustice. Finally, this process leads to involvement in *civic actions* oriented to the construction of fair social contexts. As a whole, this complex process involves the dialogical and dual reconstruction of selfhood and settings: at the citizenship level, from exclusion to belonging; at the interpersonal level, from isolation to participation; and at the intrapersonal level, from hopelessness to psychological wellbeing.

The boxes in the left column show the self as a result of experiences of oppression in segregating or marginalizing receiving contexts. At the citizenship level, for example, oppression is based on experiences of frustration due to labor exploitation and economic insecurity, the powerlessness of legal exclusion, indignity resulting from living in substandard housing conditions, and stigmatization for

Fig. 1 Acculturative integration as a psychopolitical liberation process



not being accepted into community services. At the interpersonal level, experiences of oppression are associated with isolation, conflict and distrust. At the intrapersonal level, oppression generates experiences of fear, distress, shame and hopelessness.

Acculturative integration is power to gain wellbeing, as represented in the column on the right. At the citizenship level, integration is based on equal access and acceptance in multicultural services, enjoyment of fair labor conditions, access to standard housing in community enclaves. At the interpersonal level, integration is associated with positive social support and opportunities for participation, commitment and mutual responsibility. At the intrapersonal level, integration is related to psychological wellbeing, control, competence and autonomy. In the following sub-section we will describe this process through the narratives of nine Andalusian Moroccan women.

The Experience of Andalusian Moroccan Women

The narratives included in this study belong to a larger study about the acculturative integration of Andalusian Moroccans. Participants were selected through a feature-sampling process, combining location (urban or rural), legal status on arrival (documented or undocumented), and current labor situation (employed or unemployed). Brief profiles of interviewed women appear below.

Mariam, 22 years old, university education, lives with her parents and brothers in a rural area, arrived in Spain when she was a child, unemployed. *Iksan*, 54 years old, primary education, lives in an urban house shared with some Moroccan friends, 2 years in Spain, arrived with work permit, worked less than 9 months last year in agriculture and hotel industry. *Ouzziyala*, 49 years old, lives with her family in an urban area, 10 years in Spain, migrated to join her husband; currently owns a hardware store. *Touria*, 28 years old, lives with her husband and brother in an urban area, 5 years in Spain, arrived for family reunification, works in an immigrant association. *Daouya*, 40 years old, high school education, lives with her husband and son in an urban area, 13 years in Spain, arrived through a friend's invitation, works in an immigrant association. *Kaltoum*, 38 years old, lives with her husband and 2 children in an urban area, 14 years in Spain, arrived without papers, works in an immigrant association. *Milouda*, 33 years old, university education, lives alone in an urban area, 16 years in Spain, arrived with some friends as a tourist, unemployed. *Nadia*, primary education, lives with her husband and her two children in an urban area, migrated with her children for family reunification, works in external domestic service. *Malika*, 45 years old, primary education, lives in a rural area, 3 years in Spain, arrived with her children with a tourist permit, worked less than 9 months last year in greenhouses.

A semi-structured interview was developed in order to explore the main predictors of acculturative integration. The interview outline included questions about discrimination (e.g., Do you consider that Spaniards reject Moroccans? Have you experienced rejection at any time?); satisfaction with the decision to migrate to Andalusia (e.g., Why did you decide to come to [locality] and to live in this neighborhood? Do you consider this was a correct decision?); cultural adaptation efforts (e.g., Please tell us if it is important for you to keep your Moroccan customs and to learn about Spanish ones; Why?). The final Arabic and Spanish form of this outline was the result of discussions between university researchers and Moroccan community collaborators, starting with a pilot format from previous interviews. Bilingual Spanish and Moroccan interviewers, male and female, were recruited and received specific training to assure homogeneity in interview conditions.

Interviews were analyzed based on Bruner's (1997) indicators to illustrate articulation of the acculturative process, emphasizing both the changes immigrants made in themselves and in their settings. These indicators are the following: (a) *agency*—acts of free choice, initiatives freely undertaken to pursue a goal; (b) *commitment*—adherence to an intended or actual line of action; (c) *resources*—goods that an agent brings to bear on his commitments; (d) *qualia*—signs of the “feel” of a life-mood; (e) *social references*—where and to whom an agent looks in legitimizing goals, commitments, and resource allocation; (f) *evaluation*—signs of how we or others value the prospects, outcomes, or progress; (g) *reflexivity*—activity invested in self-examination and self-evaluation; (h) *position*—how an individual locates him/herself in time, space, or the social order of the real world; and (i) *coherence*—the apparent integrity of one's acts. We have used these indicators both in “positive” and “negative” terms (Sala 2008). In the positive use, the indicator denotes the presence of a quality or feature of self (e.g., agency or commitment). In negative cases, the indicators are signaling the absence of these qualities (e.g., the lack of social or personal resources). Through these indicators, the women's narratives show how they discover their own stories, often drawn from a history of oppression, to modify them and to develop new ones.

Citizenship Level: From Exclusion to Belonging

Moroccans in Andalusia work in jobs that are rejected by the native population, such as intensive agriculture, construction laborers, and domestic service. Such precarious working conditions usually force them to concentrate in segregated areas (García-Ramírez et al. 2005; Hernández-Plaza et al. 2004). Moroccan immigrants in Andalusia often live without access to basic standards of housing,

such as water, sewers or electricity. In rural areas, they live in greenhouses, and in urban zones, in marginalized neighborhoods with a high level of physical and social disorder (Hernández-Plaza et al. 2004). Spatial segregation also implies disadvantage in social-community resources. Some risk factors suffered by immigrants are related to precarious social conditions, such as problems of socio-economic disadvantage, poor access to culturally appropriate services and facilities, and problems linked to discrimination and strained ethnic relations (Ingleby et al. 2005). The following excerpts from our interviews illustrate these circumstances.

I never liked a neighborhood with only immigrants or Spaniards; I don't like it, because nothing goes right. Because even though in the beginning, if you bring an immigrant among Spaniards, or two or three among Spaniards, this is the way to blend!

And it is a good life! But when you tell me that is an immigrant neighborhood or a neighborhood that... it is going to be like what happened in France! ...that people feel like... marginalized! ...like an immigrant is something bad, like, well, despised, and that's very bad, because if they despise you... it is very bad! (Excerpt 1, *evaluation*)

First the language, to speak a language you study for two or three months. And without the language you cannot ... work; if you don't work you can't live. You have to work. Since the very moment you are here you have to work! And take any job. And with one salary you can't get an apartment, you can't buy an apartment. You have to work very hard. (Excerpt 2, *[lack of] resources*)

I really don't feel satisfied to live in this neighborhood because it doesn't give opportunities to improve. Especially for my family, as they are all unemployed. (Excerpt 3, *evaluation*)

The realities lived by Moroccans in Andalusia are far from the expectations they had before coming, as they experience spatial segregation (excerpt 1) and a lack of resources (excerpt 2). Becoming conscious of this position makes them evaluate the neighborhood and their lives as a hard initial sacrifice (excerpt 3). In the cases of our study, the evaluation of social structures as unjust led them to establish links with other people in order to transform their settlements.

We understand that to overcome these conditions, it is necessary to transform segregated areas into diverse community enclaves where self-defined members and groups congregate as a means of protecting and enhancing their economic, social, political and/or cultural development

(Marcuse 2001). This requires the active participation of immigrants, assuming “the ‘construction of place’ encompassing physical production, social practices and relations, identities and symbolic meanings” (Asselin et al. 2006, p. 159). Ethnic businesses, religious services, meeting points, cultural expressions, all contribute to the construction of culture in these ethnic enclaves (Asselin et al. 2006). Therefore, an acculturative sense of place is crucial in the reconstruction of self-integration. The following excerpts illustrate the liberation process at this level:

...there is not the true integration that is said, integration that everybody wishes. [Lack] of full equality as a woman and an immigrant. That! ...to treat someone like a person, not for being a Moroccan, Rumanian, Spaniard or French. (Excerpt 4, *reflexivity, evaluation*)

When I found out that everybody was called [for work] except me, that many people were fired after me (...) and what I did was to bring a complaint form ...I said, I am not here to fight, neither to say that or the other... I brought my complaint form like any other citizen. (Excerpt 5, *agency*)

Excerpt 4 illustrates the high degree of critical thinking developed by some participants. In this excerpt, local conditions are evaluated as unfair and are criticized for this. The critical analysis of reality evidenced in this excerpt conveys a process of self-reconstruction which produces innovative goals. But in excerpt 5 we demonstrate that merely to gain ability is not enough, and it is necessary to take actions against specific oppressive situations for true empowerment to occur. In this example, the action of filing an official complaint enables the participant to position her/himself, as a real citizen. To summarize, by reflecting on and evaluating their situations in a critical way, immigrants gain a new capacity for agency that allows them to acquire a new position, beyond segregation, not only as member of an ethnic group, but as a citizen.

Interpersonal Level: From Isolation to Participation

Different studies have revealed that native Andalusians exhibit negative attitudes towards Moroccans; some harboring hidden and subtle ethnic prejudices, while others express open and explicit rejection; both justifying the perception of Moroccans as a threat to community life (García-Ramírez and Camacho 2005; Hernández-Plaza et al. 2004). The fragmentation of inter-group relations prevents the development of personal interethnic networks, which leads to negative effects in both the short and long term (e.g., non-acquisition of language skills or insertion into a wider labor market, etc.) (Martínez et al. 2001). At

the same time, risks of conflict in family relationships rise due to the strain on family matters resulting from social isolation, involving both relatives and social institutions, and impairing the viability of familial links (García-Ramírez et al. 2002). Some examples follow:

The most difficult was to get used to living alone, without my family. (Excerpt 6, *evaluation*)

And if we talk about the relation with my neighbors, we can say that I have a great relationship with Moroccans, we invite each other, we come together sometimes, but we don't have any relations with Spaniards. (Excerpt 7, [*lack of*] *social reference*)

We can see that the main barriers come from a nostalgic evaluation of the family links left in Morocco (excerpt 6) and that the conflicts come from the asymmetrical power position between Moroccans and Spaniards (excerpt 7).

Acculturative integration requires rebuilding a social network composed of close ties (links with mutual obligation), exchange ties (where there is an expectation of mutual benefits) and weak ties (such as acquaintances) (Dominguez and Maya-Jariego 2008; García-Ramírez et al. 2005). In addition, immigrants and their organizations and networks play an active role in access to community resources. They enable the development of a new vision of themselves as citizens respectful of their human and social capital. The struggle for fair labor, community services, and positive conditions is a network-driven process, being evident in the prominent role played by ethnic communities (Bommes and Kolb 2006). These ethnic—resistances—niches underline the importance of social references such as social resources, position, and agency in acculturative integration. Therefore, integration can be seen as the relational context in which immigrants—creating networks, empowering interactions, and making contacts—strive for the achievement of fair living conditions. The following examples allow us to see the liberation process undergone by the participants in our study at the interpersonal level:

Moroccans must help each other because we, as foreigners, are not in our country and everyone needs each other more than in our country (Excerpt 8, *social reference, commitment*)

I asked my friends why we don't set up an association to defend our rights as women, our rights in our country of origin and here (Excerpt 9, *agency*)

In excerpt 8, the participant refers to her first contact with other Moroccan women in the same situation. This contact is characterized as an example of social reference, as it becomes a model, providing a fundamental step in the liberation process. Relating to other people in the same

situation was an incentive to reflect on the injustices suffered as a collective, and to feel a sense of commitment with other Moroccans. Peer contact encouraged the creation of active agents who fight for gaining individual and collective rights (excerpt 9). Thus, association becomes one of the best tools to develop capacities for social change.

These capacities to respond allow them to gain control over their own lives, achieving wellbeing, through participation and commitment. In the following excerpts, the interviewed women express their new capacity to make connection, and how this led them to gain control over their lives, as a sign of wellbeing:

I feel integrated. I have no problems with my neighbors. Sometimes I even forget I am an immigrant. (Excerpt 10, *qualia*)

I've got Spanish and Moroccan friends. Me, total integration. (Excerpt 11, *resources*)

These participants have been able to rebuild their social network and develop new personal and collective resources.

Intrapersonal Level: From Hopelessness to Psychological Well-Being

Immigrants who are suffering experiences of oppression usually generate a psychological dynamic of submission that leads to a loss of control and personal power, accentuating attitudes of conformity, fear, and tolerance of indiscriminate violence (Martín-Baró 1996). All these processes are indicative of hopelessness, which explains how, confronted with a permanent situation of perceived inferiority, individuals and groups assume a situation of disadvantage and interiorize it as part of their “self” (Moane 2003; Nelson and Prilleltensky 2005). In this way they are blocked from taking action to overcome oppressive relations, contributing to the perpetuation of their lack of opportunities. These circumstances are common among Moroccans in Andalusia, where we have observed high levels of depression, low professional self-esteem and difficulties with social interaction (García-Ramírez et al. 2005), and extremely low levels of wellbeing (Hernández-Plaza et al. 2004). The following excerpts of Andalusian Moroccan narratives exemplify these assessments:

My first job was in *el barrio de la Alfalfa*, a ‘señorito’ [very parochial rich bourgeois] neighborhood in Seville. It was a domestic service job, without power, internal domestic service, where I worked like a mule. And no human rights at all. No extra salary, no holiday month. As I had no papers, they took advantage. (Excerpt 12, *evaluation*)

I don't feel okay, I am depressed because I have no job, no house, because it's rented and my children are not working. I'm wishing, if I can't work, that at least my children will get a job. Imagine, I have no washing-machine, but I've got one in Morocco and my husband keeps sending money to us. (Excerpt 13, *qualia*, [lack of] resources)

These excerpts illustrate the feelings of hopelessness which are characteristic of oppression. In their narratives the participants express negative evaluations of their situation (excerpt 12) and describe negative feelings and lack of social and personal resources (excerpt 13).

Being able to evaluate their oppressive living conditions as negative—at least, in an implicit way—can be considered a first step towards critical thinking, but integration requires overcoming these oppressive experiences and developing psychological wellbeing, i.e., satisfaction, self-confidence, optimism for the future, and the perception of socio-political control (Prilleltensky 2008; Thirion 2008). This process requires taking advantage of the multiple influences emerging from other domains which compose the self, such as gender, religion, social class, political position, etc. (Bastos et al. 2006). The following excerpts show how the process of liberation involves acquisition of new resources (excerpt 14) and a rebuilt agency, associated with a high level of reflection about oppressive conditions (excerpt 15), referring to self-reliance in order to push forward to their goals.

...and yes, to tell you the truth, AMAL [a Moroccan association] gave me the strength, you know? With this, listening to people, I go to places with Touria [a friend] and many things. It helped me to succeed. (Excerpt 14, *resources*)

I realized that it is not necessary to work in domestic service, you can change your work!...you can! You don't have to be there! ...shut up in a house without meeting anybody. (Excerpt 15, *reflexivity*, *agency*)

Now, I can do many things, speak, I feel more confident speaking and then it cheered me up! (Excerpt 16, *qualia*, *resources*)

For these women, being active agents involved changing their mind about the *status quo*, and together they became skilled in the new cultural context. The creation of an association is one example of how these women confronted the oppressive context: taking action through a process of mutual learning that required them to master relational skills and social visualization. This active participatory behavior enhanced their personal wellbeing, helping them to acquire new personal resources and enjoy positive feelings (excerpt 16).

Conclusions and Implications

We have presented an acculturative integration model that introduces insights from liberation psychology, conceptualizing it as an ongoing ecological process of self-construction and psychopolitical empowerment, which includes the acquisition of critical thinking, the gaining of capacity to respond and involvement in transformative civic actions. Immigrants are constantly challenged by new requirements to change, recreate—deconstruct and reconstruct—their vision of the world and of themselves (Sonn and Lewis 2009). Acculturative integration leads immigrants to discover their own history, often stories of oppression; to modify them, create new ones, and shape new multicultural contexts. Through this liberation journey, immigrants become an accepted part of the receiving society.

To lay the foundation for this framework we have adopted a view of culture in which immigrants create the core elements during their transitions, stressing a view of self that goes “beyond the skin” (Wertsch 1991)—culture as an evolving consciousness. This perspective allows us to see acculturative integration as an individual-in-context process of self-reconstruction emphasizing the active role played by newcomers in the transformation of oppressive settings into culturally sensitive contexts.

This proposal comes from our experience in Andalusia, the southern-most region of Spain, and one of the main gates to Europe for Moroccan immigrants. It is not necessarily applicable to all migrant situations around the world, but may be particularly relevant for refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants and displaced persons who suffer disadvantageous conditions in receiving countries. While it is limited to specific conditions, general implications may be drawn regarding: (1) current theoretical challenges in Berry-based acculturation research; (2) contributions to liberation psychology; (3) the European Council's social policy agenda on multicultural societies; and (4) the roles of community psychologists working with immigrants under oppressive conditions.

Current acculturation research and models have largely focused on cultural change defined as behavioral participation in language, customs, life-styles, cultural values and traditions. Nevertheless, relatively little psychological research on acculturation has examined the immigrant experience of poverty and asymmetrical circumstances; or how this research can explore these issues and empower people and communities (Prilleltensky 2008; Rudmin 2006; Tseng and Yoshikawa 2008; Ward 2008; Ward and Kagitcibasi 2010). Taking into account these findings, we have observed marginalization as a situation in which the minority suffers discrimination from the receiving society (Rudmin and Ahmadzadeh 2001). Moreover, acculturative integration and wellbeing may have to be achieved in

oppressive contexts, through a process of empowerment which leads the involved population to transform those contexts into just, multicultural ones (Maton 2008; Paloma et al. 2010).

Another contribution to the mainstream debate is the self-construction perspective in which identity and culture are merged in the acculturation process. This perspective links our framework with an emerging view of culture in the debate about acculturation, providing us with conceptual tools to account for the way in which individuals, participating in everyday settings, become agents of cultural production and change (Chirkov 2009). Traditionally, acculturative integration has been seen as something that “happens” to cultural groups and individuals, instead of something that individuals do in collaboration with others—creating, deciding, and struggling—in their daily practices, for wellbeing and legitimacy. Acculturative integration is a process of self-in-context transformation.

Our work contributes to liberation psychology on international immigration issues and further develops previous proposals (Bhatia and Ram 2001; Sonn and Lewis 2009). From this perspective, immigration and acculturation are not regarded as “culture shedding” processes (Bhatia and Ram 2001). By contrast, immigration provides new opportunities for identity construction, for self-determination and realizing aspirations (Sonn and Lewis 2009). In this process of identity (re)construction, issues of agency and appropriation of symbolic and cultural resources are central. In this context, Bruner’s (1997, 2003) indicators have permitted us to systematize this transformation process, allowing us to make an explicit analysis of individuals as co-constructors—not only users—of the social structure. Immigrants are seen as intentional and reflective individuals, with a capacity to think about themselves, and about society as a whole. According to the nature of psychopolitical empowerment processes described above, critical thinking and taking actions to make social changes are steps in the same ecological process. As Bhatia and Ram (2001, pp. 5–6) highlights,

...our meaning about self/other relationships is closely mediated, structured, and organized through our participation in everyday sociocultural practices and the social relations that are embedded within these practices.

This notion allows us to analyze the dynamics of the various identities assumed by acculturating individuals, and to go in depth into the changes that take place in these identities during the acculturation processes.

Furthermore, we have considered immigrants’ narratives as a key resource for identity construction in the acculturation processes. Community narratives are shared stories that people tell about themselves—who they are, who they

have been, and who they could become. These are tools for personal and social transformation (Luque-Ribelles et al. 2009; Rappaport 1995). The migratory transition offers new opportunities to redefine immigrants’ own stories, as a base for the development of agency, identity reconstruction and acquisition of new symbolic and cultural resources. We have attempted to capture the symbolic and cultural meanings involved in mechanisms of control in receiving contexts, how they are produced and how they give rise to new identities (Sonn and Lewis 2009). Bruner’s indicators stress the fruitfulness of using narrative analyses to account for the dynamics of immigrants’ lives, with special attention paid to the changes undergone in their selves.

In line with the European Council’s social policy agenda for fair multicultural societies (Oliveri 2008), we encourage an in-depth examination of oppressive forces involved in the marginalization of migrant populations in receiving societies. The integration of immigrants and their families is not viewed as a problem of foreign citizens, but primarily as a challenge for societies that may have created inequalities. Therefore, acculturation should be treated as a key topic in social policy agendas oriented to assure cohesion in culturally plural societies. Our model emphasizes that empowerment actions acknowledge the capacities of immigrants—their values, their competence and their potential to contribute to collective wellbeing—while preventing initiatives that exclude other disadvantaged groups. Integration is attained through citizenship, encouraging an active role for immigrants, through community participation (Paloma et al. 2010). This approach also supports the role of immigrants as a force for political transformation through influential community members in institutions and lobbies, capable of contributing to the design of culturally sensitive services and fair laws (Sudbury 1998).

An example can be seen in the practice of immigrant health care which should necessarily be linked to issues of social justice and citizenship rights, guaranteeing equal access and acceptance (García-Ramírez and Hatzidimitriadou 2009). Potential impediments are lack of entitlement, poor quality services oriented to a homogeneous population, mistrust, language barriers, fear of being deported, and perceptions of prejudice in health providers (Ingleby et al. 2005). Our proposal encourages health literacy among immigrants to develop their critical view, competences and involvement in eliminating these barriers, assuming innovative roles such as cultural mediators, volunteers, spiritual services providers, etc. (Fong Chiu 2009; García-Ramírez and Hatzidimitriadou 2009; García-Ramírez et al. 2009; Ingleby et al. 2005).

Such new vision demands new roles for psychologists in order to facilitate changes in “the relationship between the individual and the world, which implies a personal change as well as a social change” (Martín-Baro 1987, p. 156). To

work with immigrants in this context requires (a) the acknowledgement of diversity as a resource, and the fair allocation of burden and benefits; (b) the celebration of singularity, and favoring the affirmation of identity; and (c) the promotion of equal participation in the process of decision making (Nelson and Prilleltensky 2005). Because multiethnic diversity is an intrinsic feature of our settings, collaborative work is a crucial requirement (García-Ramírez et al. 2009).

As suggested by Balcázar et al. (2004), community psychologists can play a key role: (1) as *facilitators and instigators of change*, based on the development of critical thinking and awareness about opportunities, rights and resources available for resisting oppression and achieving wellbeing; (2) as *mediators*, through the promotion of social participation and positive relations between immigrant populations and other community groups, allowing them to gain capacities to respond; and (3) as *advocates*, supporting immigrants in their collective actions oriented to gain citizenship rights and encourage social justice. Collaborative work between community psychologists and grassroots immigrant associations is strongly suggested. We encourage researchers not to concentrate their efforts on obtaining findings or designing practices in the name of others. Rather, they should force themselves to collaborate with those others in the development of gaining understanding and influence over decisions that affect their lives.

The approach described in this paper illustrates the potential of liberation psychology to offer a new perspective in acculturation study. Theoretical models, perspectives and social policy agendas oriented to promote the wellbeing of all citizens, independent of their origin, are required in order to assure cohesion in diverse, global, multicultural and multiethnic societies. These models should promote patterns of self or identity which can integrate cultural heritage, values of social justice, tolerance and respect for human rights. With this mission, models and approaches should take into account the world vision of all the individuals and groups involved, especially the most vulnerable, who are usually also the most silenced and forgotten.

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