

"I feel Swedish, but my parents are from there..."

Crossing of identity borders among Assyrian youth in a multicultural context

ÖNVER A. ÇETREZ

Abstract

This article approaches the topic of identity boundaries through the experiences of Assyrian youth in Sweden. Using object relation theories in psychology it analyses empirical interview material demonstrating the criss-crossing boundaries that run through the individual psychological development among these young people. A characteristic is to feel the necessity of switching and negotiating between or among several cultural identity positions. However, our psychological models are developed in the context of a more mono-cultural environment, thus not paying attention to the multicultural complexity found among immigrant youth. This context is frequently characterized by experiences of perceived discrimination in society, such as objectification, which has psychological consequences for the youths' self image.

Introduction

Throughout history migration has been a major source of human survival, adaptation, and growth (Marsella et al., 2003). Today, as a result of migration, identity is a central concern for many people, on both the individual and the collective level. One starting point of this article is that identity needs to be related to culture, whether the culture is homogeneous and dominant or heterogeneous and non-dominant, as culture provides the context in which our practices and values are embedded and negotiated (ibid.). In a dominant culture, because of its given-ness, identity strategies are taken for granted and seem invisible, while in a non-dominant culture, the strategies are much more visible, and the positions of individuals within this become an arena for the demonstration of power relations. The psychologist Erik Erikson (1975) contrasts the two forms of identity, pointing out that for some young people, at some periods in history, the personal identity crisis is contained within the rites of passage, while, for other people and periods, the crisis is clearly distinguished.

The young people interviewed in this study belong to the latter group, whose identity and culture are in a constant state of change, representing efforts following adjustment, adaptation, growth, and development.

This article places the task of identity formation in the context of a multicultural environment in which the particularities of culture make the task much more complex and a positive outcome less certain. There are layer upon layer of cultural messages to which the young persons in this study must respond, within the boundaries that are established between “Swedish” and “there.” As will be seen, there are boundaries within boundaries, some fortified, others welcoming, and yet others fluid. The objective of the article is to illustrate the importance of a cultural analysis for understanding identity, using the case study of the acculturation of Assyrian youth in Swedish society. The theoretical model of human development by the clinical psychologist W. Pruyser is used in order to describe some of the criss-crossing boundaries that run through the individual psychological development of these young people. Based on the empirical results, Pruyser’s model is critically discussed. The question directing the article is: What is characteristic for identification among Assyrian youth in contemporary Swedish society, through their individual development and through the process of acculturation from a cultural psychological perspective?

To start with, some central concepts need to be defined, namely knowledge, culture, acculturation, and power. One way to approach the understanding of knowledge is from a constructivist perspective, that human behaviour is meaningful only within the context of the relationships within which it occurs, that human behaviour is contextual, and that all meaning is a result of the relationship between individuals and their world, culture, language, and each other (Richards & Bergin, 1997).

A useful definition of *culture*, emphasizing its internal, external, behavioural as well as mental dimensions, is presented by Marsella (2005: 657). Culture is shared learned behavior and meanings that are socially transferred in various life-activity settings for purposes of individual and collective adjustment and adaptation. Cultures can be (1) transitory (i.e. situational even for a few minutes), (2) enduring (e.g., ethnocultural life styles), and in all instances are (3) dynamic (i.e., constantly subject to change and modification). Cultures are represented (4) internally (i.e., values, beliefs, attitudes, axioms, orientations, epistemologies, consciousness levels, perceptions, expectations, personhood) and (5) externally (i.e., artifacts, roles, institutions, social structures). Cultures (6) shape and construct our realities (i.e., they contribute to our world views, perceptions, orientations) and with this, our concepts of normality/abnormality, morality, aesthetics, and a number of arbiters of life.

Acculturation, according to Pedersen et al., (1989), refers to the phenomena occurring when individuals from different cultures come into first-hand contact. Literally, acculturation has been described as moving towards a culture. This definition specifies acculturation as a change occurring not only within one group, i.e., the minority, but also within all the cultures involved in the encounter. Yet, in practice, more change takes place in the non-dominant group than in the dominant one (Organista et al., 1998), depending on the power relationships between them (Çetrez, 2011; DeMarinis et al., 2002). To the above definition it is also important to add what Oppedal, Røysamb, and Sam (2004)

point out: namely, that acculturation is a "developmental process towards adaptation and gaining competence within more than one cultural setting" (ibid: 482).

The concept of *power* is approached through Foucault's understanding, in which he discusses relationships of power rather than power as such. Foucault defines relationships of power as a mode of action acting directly on other actions, instead of directly on persons (Bell, 1992). Thus, the exercise of power means directing the activity of others or structuring their field of action. This constitutes power as a cluster of social relations, basic to any society (ibid.).

The Swedish societal context

Before continuing, a brief background to the recent immigration processes in Sweden is needed. It was primarily after the Second World War that immigration to Sweden increased, and in this two clearly differentiated periods can be delineated; one dominated by labour immigrants from 1947 to 1972 and the other dominated by political or refugee immigrants from the mid-1970s onwards. The Assyrians, as the population in this study, belong to the latter immigrant group. The ethnologist Å. Daun wrote in 1996 that, despite the historical presence of many ethnic groups, or the increased internalization, as well as membership of the European Union, Sweden can still be characterized as having a homogenous culture in terms of a dominant religion, language, and ethnicity. Historically immigrants have been gradually assimilated, and their influence has not led to cultural diversification or divisions. This still seems to be the case.

There is in Swedish society a general tendency to categorize immigrants as a homogenous group, despite the significant heterogeneity among them. This categorization includes not only the persons who have immigrated themselves, but also many of those who are born and raised in Sweden (Parszyk, 1999). These people are given the type of immigrant-identity that is difficult for them to identify with (ibid.). Studies by the National Integration Office in Sweden (KortNytt, 2002/2003), as well as by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) (2003), point out that there is systematic special treatment of and discrimination against both those who have immigrated and their children.

One example of the lack of cultural diversification in Sweden is the topic of identification, which is still approached from a static and monocultural perspective. The label *Swedish* is formally very broad, as it encompasses all those having Swedish citizenship, but at the same time narrow, as it is implicitly related to appearance and also limited to those with a historical ethnic background in Sweden, though it is never specified for how many generations. The label *Swedish* is often used in opposition to the label *invandrare* (in Swedish referring to an immigrant), implying non-Swedish, but rarely used in a double mode, such as Swedish-Assyrian, for instance. The label *invandrare* has often been linked to other terms, such as language (*invandrarspråk*, in Swedish referring to immigrant language), media (*invandrarradio*, in Swedish referring to immigrant radio), and sports (*invandrarlag*, in Swedish referring to an immigrant team), which are

given specific meaning in binary contrast to other categories of identities. The use of these identity labels and their meanings in Swedish society are not non-normative. Rather, they reflect power relations (see also the article by Carlson in this volume), used not only to describe a context but their meanings also position and regulate people's place in such a context, and dominate relations among them (Çetrez, 2005).

A historical look at some of these labels is needed here. In the 1950s the label *utlänning* (in Swedish referring to a foreigner) was used for a person who was not born in Sweden, in contrast to a Swede, who was born and raised in Sweden. But in the 1960s an intentional switch was made to the label *invandrare*, to indicate a person who had chosen to come in, in contrast to being an outsider. However, despite the positive intention, the concept *invandrare* has come to define a category of people who *are not*, implying not Swedes; i.e., still being outsiders. As Svanberg and Tydén (1999) point out, society had now created a new collective group and a new identity category, with specific characteristics like other collectives, such as women, youth, or retired people. Instead, within the concept that politicians and researchers had constructed, there was a vast variety of people, with differences in terms of geography, language, religion, education, and social background. Today, the label *invandrare* has become so broad that it passes on from one generation to another. A person, born and raised in Sweden, but with at least one immigrant parent, is labelled as a person with *invandrarbakgrund* (meaning a person with an immigrant background) (Hermanson & Friberg, 2000), sometimes even wrongly labelled as second- or third-generation *invandrare*. The label implies, among other meanings, a person who is still not rooted in society and who remains at a distance (Svanberg & Tydén, 1999). Apart from the time dimension, there are also geographical and biological dimensions, showing that the more the person differs in appearance, colour, and cultural traditions from the majority, the longer s/he will be regarded as an *invandrare* (Allwood & Franzén, 2000).

Yet another example to describe the societal context and use of identity constructions comes from the religious institutional level. Despite the high degree of secularization in Sweden during the 20th century, and continuing after the separation of state and church in 2000, the *Evangelical Lutheran Church*, that being its official name, still stands as the norm for Christianity in Sweden, broadly called the *Swedish Church*. Since it is the church of the majority ethnic group and in a dominant position, other Christian denominations are either referred to as *invandrar kyrkor* (in Swedish referring to immigrant churches) or as free churches. Thus, the once-powerful Lutheran church still seems to shape individuals' positions within Swedish society. Immigrants entering into the 'host' culture of Sweden are entering also into a highly secular and at the same time Lutheran heritage that informs the cultural context shaping values, attitudes, and practices.

Assyrian community background and context

The Assyrians have their origin in Mesopotamia and count their heritage back to the ancient Assyrians who ruled here from 1100 B.C to 612 B.C. They converted

to Christianity in the 1st century A.D. and played a central role in the formation of Christian theology from the 4th to the 12th centuries (Çetrez, 1998). Today this community, which is primarily in Europe, is divided between those adhering to Assyrian ideology and those adhering to a *Syrianer* (which is a specific neologism used in Sweden, derived from and in opposition to Assyrian ideology and identity). Most Assyrians speak a version of Syriac together with the languages of their country of origin as well of the new country, thus being multilingual. In ethnic language the following emic terms are used: *Athuroyo* (Assyrian), *Suroyo*, or *Suryoyo*. In the Turkish language the term *Süryani* is used, while in Arabic the term *Suryan* is used. For practical reasons, I shall use here the Assyrian label as a general reference, and the specific labels when referring to a particular group.

Because of massacres during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the Middle East, and the increased violence from the 1980s onwards, as well as the search for labour opportunities, the migration among the Assyrians has been ongoing for a long time and has increased extremely, both within the countries in the Middle East and to the countries in the West. The Assyrian immigration to Sweden started in the 1970s and still continues. Though the precise number of Assyrians in Sweden is difficult to calculate, internal figures point to 70-80,000 people. Their total number in 2004 in the city of Södertälje, where the majority of Assyrians live, amounted to 14,311, which is 17.9% of the total population in the city (Çetrez, 2005). The majority of the Assyrians living in Sweden have their origin in the villages of south-east Turkey.

For an analysis in a community context, we can turn to a dissertation by the sociologist Deniz (1999), who by means of interviews has focused on two adult Assyrian generations from Turkey and Syria ($n = 63$, 40 males, 23 females, ranging in age from 35 to 90). Deniz points out that in the country of origin Assyrian culture has historically shown a close link between religion and ethnicity, which is also indicated by the use of the ethnic labelling *Suryoyo*, encompassing both a religious and an ethnic cultural identification. However, the 20th century and the migration process have resulted in a transformation from an ethno-religious identity to an ethno-national one, resulting in consequences for intra-ethnic groupings, antagonism, and conflicts (Deniz, 1999). As a consequence, cultural rituals and symbols start to lose their strength and ability to contribute to personal meaning and to express group identification, according to Deniz. Religion, having been the basis of collective identity, also loses its social importance. The essence of this process of change in Assyrian identity and culture, Deniz points out, is taking place in relation to Western secularization. Furthermore, the stateless condition creates among the Assyrians feelings of insecurity and uncertainty about the future; and a feeling of not having anywhere to go in the event of future persecutions (ibid.). One main concern among adult Assyrians, according to Deniz, is the threat of assimilation for their children, in terms of losing their cultural identity, language, and rituals, and a weakened sense of community, together with increased feelings of alienation.

Theory

The Dutch-born clinical psychologist Paul W. Pruyser's (1916-1987) approach to human development will be used as a theoretical perspective in this article. Pruyser derives his theory from object-relation theory and the child psychologist D. W. Winnicott's definition "transitional experience," or "transitional space", in which subject/object perspectives interpenetrate and the subject/object positions are temporarily suspended as happens during children's play or other similar imaginative activities. Pruyser's (1974) starting point is that a child slowly actualizes him/herself as a self, distinct from others. In doing so the child experiences him/herself sometimes as a subject and sometimes as an object, with a dialectical relation between the self and others. Other persons introduce and interpret the world to the child and mediate the child's contact with reality. More than this, they act as models for the child; regulating, guiding, and suggesting the child's behaviour in age-appropriate steps. Like other organisms, the human infant also avoids pain and seeks pleasure, later in development connoted with the terms bad and good. The important contribution of Pruyser is his theoretical concept of the *illusionistic world*, a liminal space between subjectivity and objectivity or an intermediate area of experience. Psychoanalysis, not least the theories of Freud, has thoroughly elaborated the concept of illusion and also related terms such as autism, fantasy, reality, and primary and secondary processes. However, for the purposes of this article, the theoretical framework of Pruyser will be limited to the three worlds he identifies in human development: autistic, illusionistic, and realistic worlds. Pruyser develops his three-world model to take account of the multiplicity of influences, both conscious and unconscious, that produce as well as transmit culture.

First, there is the autistic world, namely, the inner world of dreams and hallucinatory wish fulfilment (Pruyser, 1983). Pruyser suggests some characteristic features of the autistic world, for example untutored fantasy, omnipotent thinking, hallucinatory entities or events, private needs, symptoms, sterility, and internal objects. The realistic world, on the other hand, is a public one, open to inspection and verification. This is a world of sensory data, facts, denotable entities, events, natural objects, artefacts, and of people. Our language is more suited to the content of this world, full of look-and-see referents, Pruyser points out in his theoretical model.

Psychological literature has stressed, Pruyser writes, that the goal of growth is to move from autistic to realistic activity, or that primary process is to be given up for secondary process (Pruyser, 1983). This wrongly implies, he continues, that when reason has triumphed over disorganizing effect, or order has replaced disorder, the individual becomes civilized. But Pruyser regards this two-world option for growth and development as limited and false. Instead, he places the illusionistic world between the other two, with the purpose of indicating that the autistic and realistic worlds are not the only ones worth considering. Illusion is beyond the merely subjective and the merely objective (Pruyser, 1974). For Pruyser it is the illusionistic world that generates culture and makes possible the transmission of cultural goods and traditions from an older generation to a younger one. The tutored fantasy of the illusionistic world denotes, for example, the fairy tales, myths, religious stories, and works of art shared in a collective

form of imagining, which have a formal status and are communicable among people who share a culture. A closer look at the word *illusion* undertaken by Pruyser helps us to understand the illusionistic world better. The word stems from the Latin verb *ludere* (to play) and the noun *lusus*, (play, game). Supplemented by the prefix *in* it denotes intensiveness; i.e., "intense or serious play," [or] "playing hard at" (Pruyser, 1983: 68). Pruyser therefore prefers the root-meaning of illusion to be playing rather than deception, which is often used and is connected to the unreal.

According to Pruyser (1983) it is important to know about all three worlds but not to mix them up, that the products of the primary process are to be kept private, or illusionistic objects not to be displaced into the realistic sphere, nor the realistic world to be held up as a model for illusionistic objects.

Method

The empirical data in this article consists of material from earlier studies (Çetrez, 2005, 2011) as well as new data from new and ongoing projects with a similar research focus. These studies are characterized by their mixed-method approach, using quantitative and qualitative techniques, among Assyrians of different age groups in the city of Södertälje, Sweden. However, here only the qualitative material is presented and this is approached from a different research question and analyzed differently from the previous studies. The sample design chosen for interviews was a sampling procedure for heterogeneity, in which cases were selected so that their combination would provide maximum heterogeneity regarding the attributes of religion and ethno-national belonging. The interviews ($n = 12$, equally divided by gender and ranging in age from 19 to 23) were conducted primarily in the Swedish language, and each took about 90-110 minutes, all of them being tape-recorded. At times the persons being interviewed used Syriac words or sentences. The interviews were transcribed into Swedish, except for the Syriac words or sentences, while the quotations presented here have been translated into English.

For analysis of the qualitative data, a template analysis style has been used. This is guided by previously elaborated themes or categories taken from an established theoretical model.

Results

Ten of the young people in this study were born in Sweden, one in Turkey and one in Lebanon. With regard to church membership, eleven belong to the Syriac Orthodox Church and one to the Methodist Church. All of the respondents are bi- or multilingual. At the time of the study all the participants were at the Gymnasium (high school) level, the majority majoring in social studies, followed by economics, business studies, cosmetology, and media studies.

The interviews reveal a strong affiliation with ethnic minority identity and religion. They also demonstrate the complexity of identification, highlighting that changes in relation to ethnic affiliation and self-image take place along

interdependent developmental lines. Furthermore, self-identity in childhood is expressed in inner qualities as well as in outwardly differentiating terms, with the former increasing in the period of early adulthood. The experience of being different in childhood is associated with weaker self-confidence, feelings of exclusion, and problems with kinship and religion.

There are also respondents who describe themselves as different, such as *invandrare*. A young Assyrian describes the difficulty as a young child of attending a school with many ethnic Swedes: *They [ethnic Swedes] saw me as different (...) it was 'us' and 'them' (...) I was the only immigrant.* (Male participant, aged 19) Similar experiences were also expressed regarding the period of adolescence: *Even teachers I have had have recommended that I change my name if I want to become something in society. But why should I change my name, I'm who I am.* (Male participant, aged 20) For the young Assyrian above this would result in feelings of exclusion, making kinship and religion problematic.

The interviews showed that development of personal identity is closely related to religious affiliation, but is also affected by experiences of ethnic division in the Assyrian community and of exclusion in the Swedish host society. In general the results showed that a diverse set of kinship labelling is used from childhood onwards:

I'm both an Assyrian and a Swede. I feel a bit split on this question (...) I was born in Sweden and this is a part of who I am. If someone asks me who I am I would primarily say I was born in Sweden. I feel Swedish, but my parents are from there [the Middle East]. (R6, pp. 7: 26-33)

Labels such as “I am Assyrian”, “I am Syrianer”, “I was born in Sweden”, “I am a Swedish citizen”, “My parents are from Turkey”, or “I am an *invandrare*” are used in different situations and for different purposes, and are loaded with both positive and negative feelings. The use of these labels is also dependent on who is being addressed and what the aim of the interaction is. To complicate the matter further, a person with Assyrian ideology may use a label with *Syrianer* connotations when referring to the use of language, such as “Jag talar *syrianska*” (I speak *Syrianska*), instead of saying “I speak Assyrian”, which would be more subsequential. Thus the person is not being subsequential between her/his ideology of kinship belonging and the practice of identification, but rather is adapting to the demanding situational practices of identity politics.

Finally, an example of ethnic identity being an issue and often imposed upon one is given by a female participant:

If someone asks me where I was born or where I come from I think that isn't important for my personality. If you want to get to know me it is my personality and what kind of person I am to be with [that is important], not that I'm Assyrian or that I've been born here. I hate it when people ask me where I come from. (Female participant, aged 19)

Theoretical analysis

In this section I shall approach the above results on identity by using Pruyser's cultural psychological model.

From the perspective of Pruyser's three worlds, the different identifications have different connotations. "I'm Assyrian" or "I'm Suroyo" (the emic term) as a self-image functions in the illusionistic world, connecting the person with a community of Assyrians as well as to a historical heritage and a religio-cultural group. The latter also brings the different ethno-national ideologies of Assyrian and *Syrianer* together and provides a solution to the division within the ethnic group. "I was born in Sweden" or "I'm a Swedish citizen" is a necessary identification for adapting to the realistic world in mainstream society. They become resources for testing reality, not necessarily with a symbolic or creative connotation. "I'm an *invandrare*" points to a self-image of alienation or loss of identity in the autistic world, caused by the experience of exclusion in the external world, and resulting in negative and weak self-confidence from childhood onwards.

The ethnic labels are not limited to only one way of interpretation. As a result of experiences of exclusion in the external world and negative and weak self-confidence from childhood onwards, the same labels as above, Assyrian or *Syrianer*, can also become signs of omnipotent thinking, symptoms, and dreaming, detached from the collective form of imagining within a culture. Such examples are found in linkages to ancient Assyrian civilization, with an inflated self-image, far from the fragile reality of everyday experience.

However, there is also another perspective to ethnic labelling, which is more negative, as when a person is asked about her/his ethnic heritage. For the Assyrian individual who was born in Sweden, being repeatedly asked by other people about his/her ethnic heritage seems odd and is at times interpreted as a negative question; i.e., a practice within the realistic world indicating an impersonal attitude and having an alienating effect, caused by another person, intentionally or unintentionally, of differentiating the Assyrian individual. The term "misrecognition" (see Bell, 1992) is useful here, indicating that the practice is embedded in *misrecognition* of what is in fact being done; a misrecognition of its limits and constraints, its ends and its means.

In theoretical terms, the description of self-image and the use of labelling among the young people point to a movement and negotiation within the three worlds, for the purpose of endurance in the multicultural context. Or, in line with the focus of this book, crossing identity borders is among the Assyrian youth in Sweden an everyday experience. To take this discussion further, the issue of identification among Assyrian young people, whether it be in terms of ethnicity, religion, country of origin, or the Assyrian/*Syrianer* division, becomes a "social body" (a term used by Foucault and Bourdieu; see Bell, 1992), upon which power relations are demonstrated. It is by directing and structuring this field of action that power is exercised.

Engagement in all three worlds, as referred to in the theoretical description of Pruyser's Three-World Model, entails an (Pruyser, 1983: 94):

elegant moving back and forth between one world and another, at the right time, for the proper purpose, and with legitimate pleasure. It is appropriate to have loyalty to all three worlds, for we need and thrive on all three.

What Pruyser underscores is the fact that it is the essence of the development of human beings to cross borders and to be engaged in all three worlds, and that each of them has its own sincerity, autonomy, and “reality” (Pruyser, 1983, p. 94). However, the crossing of borders, or the *elegant moving* and engagement in the three worlds that Pruyser refers to, is based on the experiences of certain individuals, whose development is to be found within one main cultural system, the mainstream one, where one does not need to struggle constantly with identity labels in the same complicated way as the Assyrian young people studied here. The elegant moving and engagement in the three worlds for individuals growing up in relation to several cultural systems, and not by choice, are, however, more complicated and associated with the confrontation of different value systems, or, for the purposes of this book, a construction and transgression of boundaries of knowledge, as each world represents different life perspectives. Pruyser’s model, though helpful, is insufficient to capture the complexity of individuals in this study. There are far too many boundaries to be negotiated – many with distinctly negative valence – than Pruyser’s model can accommodate. As has been shown in this study, internal contents that might be “played with” and integrated gradually and comfortably into the realistic world remain instead in the autistic world as rejection and exclusion that resists symbolization in the illusionistic world but may act on its subject in unconscious and possibly destructive ways. The reality for many of the respondents in this investigation into their process of acculturation, involves the necessity of switching and negotiating between or among several cultural systems, the two ethnic community systems (Assyrian and *Syrianer*) and the mainstream majority one. Thus, the functioning theoretical model of the autistic, illusionistic, and realistic worlds is insufficient for ethnic minority persons within the process of acculturation if consideration is not paid to the multicultural complexity this process brings with it, characterized by a psychological negotiation of identity. However, such a model also needs to pay attention to the experiences of discrimination.

Perceived discrimination is an experience on the social level that also has a marked effect on the psychological level. Experiences of oppression, lack of respect, prejudice, bullying, among others, that the young people in this study recount, can be understood as creating a self-image that is differentiated from the mainstream society. From Pruyser’s understanding of the self, actualized in a dialectical relationship between self and others and experienced sometimes as a subject and sometimes as an object, the experience of discrimination in mainstream society, already in childhood, points to the problems and psychological costs of identifying with such a society. Objectifying people from a power position is to see them as an object of use or exploitation rather than as a person in their own right (see also Carlson, 2006, 2002). What has become clear in this study is the difficulty of forming a positive identity when the culture in which one is formed labels some residents as *invandrare*. Being called *invandrare* or *svartskalle* (black-head/skull, see also Pred A. R., 2000) throughout life has a negative and destructive effect on one’s self-image, resulting in reactions of either

quietness or aggression, or repression of one's feelings. Humans try to avoid experiences related to pain and seek instead those of pleasure. The experiences of discrimination and of those who discriminate are therefore associated with terms such as *bad* and *negative*, and they become internalized and associated with negative objects in the external reality.

In this respect Sweden is a unique case. Without any form of intra-group differentiation, such as the hyphenated identities *Arab-American* or *Italian-American* in the United States, there is only the broad-brush portrayal of migrants in Sweden, as either "Swedish" or "from there"; i.e., assimilated or separated. The strong implication is that a distinction exists that separates "True Ethnic Swedes" from all other minorities currently in residence. Or, as one of the persons interviewed put it, "it was 'us' and 'them' (...) I was the only *invandrare*." However, a healthy resistance to such objectification is also seen in one female participant who values her status as a subject, "my personality and how I am as a person," more than her status as an object, e.g., when she is asked "where I was born" or "where I come from" for the purpose of labelling her. Further research in the area of resilience, based on cultural resources, is needed.

Conclusion

This article has been an initial attempt to investigate briefly the complexity of culture and identification among a religio-cultural group of young people in Swedish society. Specifically one concluding remark is to be highlighted. Building on the definition of culture by Marsella, the results of this specific study of Assyrian young people necessitate identifying a dimension of culture, not limited to, but very often familiar to, minority groups, namely, that of cultural artefacts, among them identity, as a practice of negotiation and transmission. These practices are set within an experience of acculturation, where issues of religion and ethnicity become especially challenging in negotiating personal and collective identities.

Thus, our approach to identity needs not only to place culture in the very centre of the investigation, but also to start with the confirmation that the context is a multi-cultural one, rather than mono-cultural. As Oppedal et al. (2004) point out in their research on acculturation, specifically for immigrants and their children, an awareness of the complexity of several cultural systems functioning simultaneously is needed.¹

References

- Allwood, C. M., & Franzén, E. C. (Eds.). (2000). *Tvärkulturella möten: Grundbok för psykologer och socialarbetare* [Cross-cultural meetings: Textbook for psychologists and social workers]. Stockholm: Natur och Kultur.
- Bell, C. (1992). *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹ Many thanks to the reviewer of this article for vital comments, as well as to the conference participants and co-editors.

- Carlson, M. (2006). Immigrant Women within Swedish Language Instruction: Contradictions and Transgressions. In J. Sempruch, K. Willems, & L. Shook (Eds.) *Multiple Marginalities: An Intercultural Dialogue on Gender in Education*. Königstein: Helmer Verlag.
- Carlson, M. (2002). *Svenska för invandrare – brygga eller gräns? Syn på kunskap och lärande inom SFI-undervisningen*. Gothenburg: Department of Sociology, University of Gothenburg.
- Çetrez, Ö. (1998). *Syrisk-ortodoxa kyrkan – en religiös och kulturell symbol* [The Syriac Orthodox Church – a religious and cultural symbol]. Jönköping, Sweden: Assurbanipals bokförlag.
- Çetrez, Ö. (2005). *Meaning-Making Variations in Acculturation and Ritualization: A multi-generational study of Suroyo migrants in Sweden*. (Doctoral dissertation, Uppsala University). Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Psychologia et Sociologia Religionum 17. Uppsala: Uppsala University.
- Çetrez, Ö. (2011). The Next Generation Assyrians in Sweden: Religiosity as a functioning system of meaning within the process of acculturation. In *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*. 14: 5, 473 – 487. (32 pp).
- Daun, Å. (1996). *Swedish Mentality*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- DeMarinis, V., Grzymala-Moszczyńska, H., & Jablonski, P. (2002). Polish Children and Refugees: The role of religious culture and gender in the host community acculturation process. In D. Moberg & R. Piedmont (Eds.), *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, 12 (pp. 23-52). Leiden: Brill.
- Deniz, F. (1999). *En minoritets odyssey: Upprätthållande och transformation av etnisk identitet i förhållande till moderniseringsprocesser. Det assyriska exemplet* [An odyssey of a minority: Maintenance and transformation of ethnic identity in relation to processes of modernization – The Assyrian example] (Doctoral dissertation, Uppsala University). Uppsala: Uppsala universitet.
- Erikson, E. (1975). *Life History and the Historical Moment*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Limited.
- Erikson, E.H. 1982. *The Life Cycle Completed*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2003). *Second report on Sweden*. Adopted on 28 June, 2002. Strasbourg.
- Freyne-Lindhagen, M. (1997). *Identitet och kulturmöte – syrianska kvinnors exempel. En diskussion om grounded theory* [Identity and culture encounter – the case of Suryoyo (Syrian-Orthodox) women. A discussion on grounded theory] (Doctoral dissertation, Lund University). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Hermanson, G. & Friberg, A. (2000). *Begreppet invandrare – användningen i myndigheters verksamhet* [The term immigrants – the use in governmental practices] DS 2000:43 Regeringskansliet, Kulturdepartementet. Stockholm: Fritzes.
- KortNytt. (2002, December/2003, January). *Vardagsdiskriminering och rasism i Sverige – en kunskapsöversikt* [Daily discrimination and racism in Sweden – a knowledge outline] (Integrationsverket). [On-line]. Available: <http://www.integrationsverket.se/upload/Publikationer/vardagsdiskriminering.pdf>
- Malterud, K. (1996). *Kvalitative metoder i medicinsk forskning: en innföring* [Qualitative methods in medical research: an introduction]. Oslo: Tano Aschehoug.
- Marsella, A. J. (2005). Culture and Conflict: Understanding, negotiating and reconciling conflicting constructions of reality. *International Journal of Intercultural Research*, 29, 651-673.
- Marsella, A. J., Christoper, M. A., & Ring, E. (2003). *Identity, Migration, and Adjustment in a Global Community: Concepts, Issues, and Directions*. A paper presented at the Workshop on Immigration: The Development of Psychosocial Conflicts and Their Prevention. University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- Oppedal, B, Røysamb, E., & Sam, D. L. (2004). The effect of acculturation and social support on change in mental health among young immigrants. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 28 (6), 481-494.
- Organista P. B., Chun K. M., & Marín G. (1998). *Readings in Ethnic Psychology*. New York: Routledge.
- Parszyk, I. -M. (1999). *En skola för andra. Minoritetslevers upplevelser av arbets- och livsvillkor I grundskolan* [A school for others. Minority pupils' experiences of work- and living conditions at primary school] (Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm University, Institute of pedagogics). Stockholm: HLS Förlag.
- Pedersen, P. B., Draguns, J. G., Lonner, W. J., & Trimble, J. E. (1989). *Counseling Across Cultures*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.
- Pred, A. R. (2000). *Even in Sweden. Racism, Racialized spaces, and the popular geographical imagination*. Berkley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.

- Pruyser, P. W. (1974). *Between Belief and Unbelief*. London: Sheldon Press.
- Pruyser, P. W. (1983). *The Play of the Imagination. Towards a Psychoanalysis of Culture*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Richards, P. S., & Bergin, A. E. (1997). *A Spiritual Strategy for Counseling and Psychotherapy*. Baltimore, MD: Port City Press.
- Ruesch, J., Jacobsen, A., & Loeb, M. B. (1948). Acculturation and illness. *Psychological Monographs*, 62(5), 1–40.
- Rudmin, F. (2009). 'Constructs, measurements and models of acculturation and acculturative stress', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 33 (2009): 106–123.
- Svanberg, I., & Tydén, M. (1999). *I nationalismens bakvatten. Om minoritet, etnicitet och rasism* [In the backwaters of nationalism. On minority, ethnicity, and racism]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.