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Acculturation and Self-esteem: The Case of Second Generation of Baka Pygmies Immigrants from the Great Equatorial Forest of Southern Cameroon

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Abstract

Discourse on modernism is increasingly spreading within pygmy communities. However, this call for social change is more widely heeded by the youth, unlike the parents who advocate for sociocultural rootedness and identity fold. This tendency of the youth to acculturate is the problem addressed in this study. Among the various reasons cited, the most controversial is that young pygmies underestimate themselves. The hypothesis to be tested here is therefore the contingency link between acculturation and self-esteem

among second-generation pygmies' immigrants. This has been operationalized into five research hypotheses, all confirmed by the Chi-square test of empirical data collected through a questionnaire submitted to a representative sample of 120 "urban and village pygmies" from the districts of Djoum, Oveng, and Mintom II. This result led us to conclude that personality and social identity are determining variables in the adoption of outgroup behaviours and upward social comparisons.

Keywords: Self-Esteem, Acculturation, Second-Generation Immigrant

Introduction

Pygmies are the most primitive, marginal and marginalised minority social group in Cameroon (Abega and Bigombé Logo, 2006)^[1]. To solve this situation, "modernisation and social integration projects for Cameroonian pygmies" were developed and implemented in 1975, 1996, and 1988 by the various ministries in charge of Social Affairs. The fact was submitting the Pygmies to significant social pressures in order to encourage them to open up to the world, to emancipate themselves, and to adapt their behaviours to official norms. However, aware of their civic and social inferiority in a modern context, through voluntary transgression of official norms and/or an inability to conform to them, they remained deeply rooted in their culture and closed off from the world until today. Indeed, convinced that any relationship with the Bantu would be "a mismatched alliance that would ultimately lead, in the short or long term, to ethnocide, parasitism, or social paternalism, as they would lose their identity and bearings," they respond to these pressures for conformity either with a "yes of refusal," total indifference, or by retreating and/or isolating themselves in the unfathomable bottomless depths of the ever-green rainforest (Althabe, 1965: 15)^[4]. Hence the social conflict between the Bantu and the Pygmies, also called "the Pygmy problem."

This inextricable situation reflects the difficulty of reconciling the social thought of the Bantu, which is rooted in a perspective of modernization, with that of the Pygmies, who are situated within a context of cultural rooting and identity *folding*). However, for several decades now, discourse on modernism or modernity has been gaining force within Pygmy communities. This call for innovation is rejected by adults who are very hostile for, but is increasingly heeded by the younger generation. This trend among young people towards acculturation is encouraged by the government, which sees it as a means of resolving the "Pygmy problem" in order to involve them in the country's development and its emergence by 2035. Today, in a context where national unity and integration are threatened, and where decentralisation imposes local governance based on democratic principles, it seems pertinent to examine this acculturation in order to identify its difficulties and address them.

Self-esteem: Determinants and influences on behaviour

Self-esteem is the expression of approval directed towards oneself that indicates the extent to which an individual believes he is capable, valuable, and important (Coopersmith, 1984)^[9]. Reasoner (1995)^[16] and Duclos (2000)^[10] identified five components: Feelings of security, identity, belonging, determination, and competence. It is determined by the consideration of significant others, experiences of success and failure, social comparison, and valued ideals (Bourcet, 1994)^[5]. Self-esteem and feelings of personal efficacy (FPE) are often blended and positively correlated when it comes to activities valued by the individual (André and Lelord, 1999)^[2]. However, it is possible to have a very high FPE while possessing low self-esteem, just as one can have a very low FPE yet maintain very high self-esteem.

Wylie (1974: 45)^[18] argues that "the consideration of significant others only come into play in self-image: The subject sees themselves as they imagine significant others see them." André and Lelord (idem: 13) assert that the discovery and acceptance of oneself allows for the positive development of self-concept: "integrating one's qualities and flaws to arrive at a generally good and acceptable image of oneself". Goumaz (1991)^[1] believes that self-esteem is a prerequisite for any social learning: A devalued self-image can lead to decreased investment and professional development marked by negative self-evaluation. He posits that there is a significant link between self-esteem and educational style, as well as the quality of the parent-child relationship. Indeed, while the role of parents remains very important, the social environment complements this and thus influences self-esteem. According to Hoge *et al.* (1990)^[12], factors detrimental to young people's self-esteem include: a) underestimation or misestimation by parents and educators; b) indiscipline; c) ambivalence; d) overprotection by parents; e) laissez-faire attitudes; f) frustrations and degrading behaviours; g) negative criticism; h) inconsistency; i) negativity; j) perceiving mistakes as failures; k) excessively high aspirations; l) a lack of enjoyment and complicity with the child.

Taylor and Hamilton (1997)^[17] also show that self-esteem plays a role in risk-taking, either through underestimation that prevents adolescents from adequately protecting themselves, or through overestimation that leads them to believe in their invincibility. They argue that anxious individuals, pessimists seeking thrills in disinhibiting activities (such as alcohol, drugs, sexual depravity, etc.), as well as psychologically balanced individuals seeking validation, are more likely to take risks. However, low self-esteem allows individuals to be accepted by others, to consider advice and differing viewpoints, to be humble and virtuous, modest and civic-minded.

Acculturation: The Transition from Tradition to Modernity

Acculturation is the process by which an individual or group comes into contact with a culture different from their own in order to adapt fully or partially (Camilleri and Vinsonneau, 1996; Lipiansky, 1991)^[8, 14]. It involves both deculturation and enculturation for that individual or group (Camilleri, 1973, 1989)^[7, 6]. The psychosocial study of the phenomenon of acculturation focuses on the modalities and processes of interaction among multiple cultures, the effects of which are observable in the behaviours of individuals or groups

claiming various cultural roots. It aims to theorise the "manipulations of antagonistic cultural codes through which groups and individuals concretely manage their identity balance and social personality challenged by these variously conflictual and dysfunctional situations" (Camilleri, 1973: 134)^[7]. In doing so, pioneering research has preferentially focused on the rejection of cultural difference (Lewin, 1941), overlooking cases where individuals accept acculturation without attempting to create cultural enclaves. Nowadays, with the aspirations of developing countries towards modernization, meaning the internalisation of foreign cultural models, these overlooked cases have become interesting and have opened up a new direction for investigation, the one almost virgin of acculturation and/or cultural mixing. However, here too, research tends to examine how so-called "modern" majorities deal with perceived cultural differences in so-called traditional minorities. Rare are authors who try to know how this cultural difference lead to new behaviours among modern majorities. Rare are those who attempt to identify the mechanisms of change that facilitate the transition from tradition to modernity. According to Camilleri (Camilleri and Vinsonneau, *ibid*), this transition occurs through the rejection of individualism and conservatism, the primacy of rationalism over empiricism, and a dynamic conception of time.

Acculturation situations are diverse, and within each, the phenomenon of acculturation varies in intensity. However, it is the immigrant or allochthonous minorities that are most exposed to the phenomenon of acculturation. Berry (1967) identified eight factors that determine their reactions to the discordances and ruptures caused by new relationships. These are: The acculturative ideology of the host majority, the total or partial acceptance of the majority's culture, the anchoring of the minority's culture, knowledge (or not) of the majority's culture, prior experience of cultural change, the degree of prior urbanisation of the minority, the role of "mediators," and the level of education of the minority. The minority's reaction during the process of acculturation to discordances is not always one of acculturative stress; it can sometimes be a source of stimulation. In any case, it depends on the social personality of the minority. We can then, talking of acculturation task, distinguish between first-generation and second-generation minorities.

The first-generation minority (the pygmies born and raised in the forest) experiences acculturation for the first time. The process is thus perceived as a transition from the imaginary to the real. The minority individual, accustomed to the determinations of their cultural codes and systems, discovers with anxiety the indeterminacies of the new system. Their future will differ depending on whether their vision of it is perceived as provisional or permanent. If their integration is viewed as provisional, they will tend to preserve their original culture and settle for minimal adaptations that feel dissociated from their personality and identity. If it is seen as definitive, they will genuinely reassess themselves. And if it is engage in their new environment, the issues related to identity restructuring will come to the forefront. However, they will fully experience the ambiguous aspects of the new host society. In addition to these destabilising factors, the minority undergoing acculturation must confront three challenges: a) overcome the cognitive dissonance between their culture and that of the majority which devalues them; b) reduce a gap between,

in one hand, their evolution and their relationships with the host society and, in the other hand, the images that society projects onto them based on the stereotyped collective representation it constructs about their group; c) the compulsory adoption of what was merely an option in their own society.

Nonetheless, the repulsive aspects of acculturation that these minorities encounter do not prevent their exodus into so-called modern societies, as they are not conformists. They take advantage of the opportunities presented by the new culture and relativise the difficulties. They realise that adopting the new cultural code facilitates their adaptation and the achievement of their goals. These minorities can be divided into three groups: Idealists who are willing to sacrifice everything for the values with which they identify; radicals who completely reject the repulsive aspects of the new code; and pragmatists who lean towards opportunism. Berry (ibid.) identified five major variables influencing the acculturative behaviours of first-generation minorities: Sex, group size, socioeconomic differentiation and stratification, and sociocultural proximity.

For the second-generation minority (the Pygmies born and raised in Bantu towns or villages), the process of acculturation unfolds against a backdrop of a personality yet to be formed. However, they are exposed to the challenges of an ambivalent existence. Members of this group are particularly sensitive to the surrounding culture, as they were either born into it or were involved in its dynamics from an early age through their intimate participation in institutional activities, notably at school. Consequently, they possess basic tools of acculturation that allow them to experience the content and logic of both the majority and minority cultures. They are also capable of distancing themselves from both cultures in order to assess, compare, and evaluate them. Furthermore, they can grasp how families present themselves and what they wish to transmit. However, certain aspects of this transmission can lead to negative experiences. Some members may misinterpret the

ancestral cultural models that the first generation seeks to preserve. Additionally, the ancestral models they perceive are detached from traditional society. Yet, these are the models that the first generation tends to invoke whenever given the opportunity. Finally, the image of the traditional system is undermined by the frequent self-serving manipulations of parents. For all these reasons, the behaviours of young people often diverge from traditional prescriptions.

Explanatory Theory

Our hypothesis and research orientation are based on Bandura's (1996) [3] social learning theory according to which beliefs in personal efficacy are the key factor in human action. If a person believes they cannot produce satisfactory results in a given area, they will not attempt to engage in it. These beliefs about their efficacy influence nearly all their activities. Individuals who have strong confidence in their abilities approach difficult tasks not as threats to be avoided, but as challenges to be met. They set themselves stimulating goals and maintain a strong commitment to them. They invest considerable effort and increase it in the face of failures or setbacks. They remain focused on the task at hand and think strategically when confronted with difficulties. They attribute failure to insufficient effort, which fosters a success-oriented mindset. Finally, they approach potential threats or stressors with the confidence that they can exert some control over them. This effective perspective enhances performance, reduces stress, and diminishes vulnerability to depression.

Study Methodology

We adopted a hypothetico-deductive approach and, considering our previously outlined conceptual and theoretical framework, we formulated a general hypothesis (GH) which we operationalised into five research hypotheses (RH)

Table 1: Synoptic Table for the Operationalisation of GH

Hypotheses	Variables of the hypotheses	Indicators of the variables	Variables Modalities
GH: The acculturation level of second-generation immigrants youth pygmies Baka' tributary to <u>they</u> (their) self-esteem level	DV: Acculturation	- total or partial assimilation of the modernity - total or partial accommodation of the modernity - deculturation - enculturation	- not very high - not high - high - very high
	IV: Self-esteem	- feeling of security, - feeling identity, - feeling of belonging - feeling of, determination, - feeling of and competence.	- too strong - strong - weak - too weak
RH 1: The acculturation level of second-generation immigrants youth pygmies Baka' tributary to their feeling of security level.	DV: Same	Same	Same
	IV: Feeling of security	- physical security - psychological security	Same
HR 2: The acculturation level of second-generation immigrants youth pygmies Baka' tributary to their feeling of identity level	DV: Same	Same	Same
	IV: Feeling identity,	- self-knowledge - personal pride - difference - appreciation - valorisation	Same
HR 3: The acculturation level of second-generation immigrants youth pygmies Baka' tributary to their feeling of belonging level	DV: Same	Same	Same
	IV: Feeling of belonging	- self importance consciousness - faith in one's place or position - empathy, sympathy	Same

		- interpersonal relationships - belonging group	
HR 4: The acculturation level of second-generation immigrants youth pygmies Baka' tributary to they their feeling of determination level	DV: Same	Same	Same
	IV: Feeling of determination	- stubbornness - willing et zeal - audacity - need of self realisation - need of planification - need of de strategy - recklessness	samele
RH 5: The acculturation level of second-generation immigrants youth pygmies Baka' tributary to they their feeling of competence level	DV: Same	Same	Same
	IV: Feeling of competence	- efficacy consciencousness - certainty in own capacities - consciuous of own power - consciuous of own force - consciuous of own responsabilites	Same

Investigations

The preliminary investigation was conducted from 14 February to 21 July 2024 among around one hundred Baka Pygmies from Southern Cameroon. Based on the information collected and the analysis of the recorded discussions, we opted for an opinion survey. Considering our availability, we randomly and stratified a sample of 120 individuals from the study population.

The empirical data intended for the verification of the research hypotheses were collected using a pre-coded questionnaire consisting of 32 items. This was essentially a contextualised version of verbal scales reduced to four, based on the principle of aggregation as proposed by Likert (1980). Respondents were asked to position themselves according to their degree of agreement or disagreement with

the opinions expressed in each item. Prior to the actual administration of this questionnaire, we conducted a pilot test between 21 August 2024 and 14 September 2024 with a hundred Pygmies from Eastern Cameroon. This pre-test was followed by a series of two interviews during which we maximised our analytical methods regarding the functioning of the item statements, as well as the reactions of the respondents. This allowed us to enhance the psychometric qualities of our instrument. Given the intellectual comfort of the subjects, we opted for an interview-based questionnaire. The response rate in the sample was 99.33%, while it was 0.01% in the population. Once collected, the data were analyzed using SPSS software version 15.

Results and Analysis

1) For Research Hypothesis 1

<i>cross Table</i>						
Effectif						
		You have a strong feeling of security while being among bantu people				Total
		very true	True	False	Très false	
Your level of acculturation is very high	very true	22	4	0	0	26
	true	0	25	0	0	25
	false	0	2	32	0	34
	very false	0	0	1	34	35
Total		22	31	33	34	120

<i>Khi-Square Test</i>			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	307,344 ^a	9	0,000
Like lihood ratio	282,903	9	0,000
Linear-by-linear association	113,443	1	0,000
N of valid cases			
	120		

<i>Symetrical measures</i>			
		Valeur	Signification approximée
Nominal by Nominal	Coefficient of contingency	0,848	0,000
N valid observations		120	

These analysis shows that RH1 is confirmed.

2) Pour l'HR2

<i>cross Table</i>						
Effectif						
		You have a strong feeling of identity while being among bantu people				Total
		very true	True	False	Très false	
Your level of acculturation is very high	very true	22	5	0	0	27
	True	0	26	0	0	26
	false	0	0	33	0	33

	very false	0	0	0	34	34
Total			31	33	34	120

<i>Khi-Square Test</i>			
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	322,007 ^a	9	0,000
Like lihood ratio	303,648	9	0,000
Linear-by-linear association	115,270	1	0,000
N of valid cases		120	

<i>Mesures symétriques</i>			
		Valeur	Signification approximée
Nominal by Nominal	Coefficient of contingency	0,854	0,000
N valid observations		120	

These analysis shows that RH2 is confirmed.

3) Pour l'HR3

<i>cross Table</i>						
Effectif						
		You have a strong feeling of belonging while being among bantu people				Total
		very true	True	False	Très false	
Your level of acculturation is very high	very true	22	6	0	0	28
	true	0	21	0	0	21
	false	0	4	29	0	33
	very false	0	0	4	34	38
Total			31	33	34	120

<i>Khi-Square Test</i>			
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	264,002 ^a	9	0,000
Like lihood ratio	250,477	9	0,000
Linear-by-linear association	108,541	1	0,000
N of valid cases		120	

<i>Mesures symétriques</i>			
		Valeur	Signification approximée
Nominal by Nominal	Coefficient of contingency	,866	0,000
N valid observations		120	

These analysis shows that RH3 is confirmed

4) for RH4

<i>cross Table</i>						
Effectif						
		You have a strong feeling of determination while being among bantu people				Total
		very true	True	False	Très false	
Your level of acculturation is very high	very true	22	0	0	0	22
	true	0	31	0	0	31
	false	0	0	33	0	33
	very false	0	0	0	34	34
Total			31	33	34	120

<i>Tests dChi-Square</i>			
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	360,000 ^a	9	0,000
Like lihood ratio	329,523	9	0,000
Linear-by-linear association	119,000	1	0,000
N of valid cases		120	

<i>Mesures symétriques</i>			
		Valeur	Signification approximée
Nominal by Nominal	Coefficient of contingency	0,866	0,000
N valid observations		120	

These analysis shows RH4 is confirmed.

5) for RH5

<i>cross Table</i>						
Effectif						
		You have a strong feeling of competence while being among bantu people				Total
		very true	True	False	Très false	
Your level of acculturation is very high	very true	22	1	0	0	23
	true	0	30	0	0	30
	false	0	0	33	4	37
	very false	0	0	0	30	30
Total			31	33	34	120

<i>Tests dChi-Square</i>			
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	325,516 ^a	9	0,000
Like lihood ratio	295,948	9	0,000
Linear-by-linear association	114,898	1	0,000
N of valid cases	120		

<i>Mesures symétriques</i>			
		Valeur	Signification approximée
Nominal by Nominal	Coefficient of contingency	0,855	0,000
N valid observations		120	

These analysis shows RH5 is confirmed.

Interpretation and Discussion of Results

Our findings can be explained by the fact that second-generation Pygmy immigrants: a) feel physically safe among the Bantu; they believe they are at peace, in harmony, and comfortable with modernity. They also experience psychological security, as they feel at ease, relaxed, serene, calm, and tranquil. They are neither frightened, disturbed, alarmed, moved, nor intimidated by the Bantu (RH1); b) possess a good sense of self. They feel the need to preserve their personal pride, to distinguish or differentiate themselves from the Bantu, to value themselves, and to be well regarded by them (RH2); c) are aware of their importance as individuals and as members of a community, and of their place within their original community. They are empathetic and easily establish relationships with the Bantu. They take pride in being Pygmies. Second-generation Pygmy youths are determined, willing, enthusiastic, bold, and daring. They feel the need to realise themselves, to plan their lives and activities, and to develop strategies for success (RH4); d) recognise their effectiveness in their areas of activity. They do not suffer from feelings of inferiority; they believe in their abilities, power, and strength; e) are aware of the responsibilities that are theirs (RH5).

Thus, their personal abilities are not limited or negated by doubts. Those who are talented do not make poor use of their skills in situations that undermine their self-belief. They do not shy away from difficult tasks in areas where they may doubt their abilities. They find it easy to motivate themselves and are resolute. They have a very high level of aspiration and are deeply committed to the goals they choose to pursue. In challenging situations, they do not dwell on their shortcomings, the difficulties of the task at hand, or the problematic consequences of failure. Tending to equate sufficient performance with ability, failures do not diminish their faith in their capabilities. One may have a strong sense of self-efficacy in one activity and a very low sense in another.

However, we cannot be overly assertive, as the reality of statistics does not always reflect the situation on the ground.

Furthermore, certain factors were not taken into account in this study. The reality shows that these young people are distanced from ancestral culture, yet they refer to it with a sense of nostalgia or powerless longing. Thus, we observe a stance among them that promotes cultural integration through which they hope to minimise all tensions arising from cultural differences. This hinders the acculturation process and complicates their integration into the new society that serves as their identity anchor, or even into the ancestral society from which they are distancing themselves. In this ambivalent situation, a tacit contract of cultural coexistence emerges that prescribes an exchange of tolerance. Consequently, cultural traits cease to be demands or rules of life and become mere signs of belonging to the group that upholds them. This symbolisation of culture leads these young people to adopt a principle-based identity; that is to say, they assert their affiliation to a culture whose values and norms they do not follow and to which they substitute ancestral values and norms. Hence, all the misunderstandings they encounter within the codes of both cultures. To mitigate the conflicts arising from these misunderstandings, these young individuals avoid contradiction either by choosing one cultural code and adopting surface behaviours in public, by practising cultural alternation, or by engaging in cultural blending. Through techniques of reappropriating foreign cultural elements, they create cultural inclusions and dissociations.

Conclusion

This reflection begins with the observation of an inevitable acculturation of young Pygmies, particularly those who were born and raised in towns and villages, compared to those from forest-dwelling communities. Among all the reasons discussed, low self-esteem is the most contentious. This raises the question of whether the transition from tradition to modernity is indeed contingent upon self-esteem. We have formulated a hypothesis in the affirmative. This was operationalised into five research hypotheses, all confirmed by the Chi-square test of empirical data collected

via a questionnaire from a representative sample of 120 young Pygmies from the districts of Djoum, Oveng, and Mintom II. This result led us to conclude that self-esteem is a significant variable in the adoption of outgroup behaviours and in upward social comparisons. This finding allowed us to validate our general hypothesis. To explain this, we invoked Bandura's social learning theory.

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