

***Integration as Cultural Adolescence!  
A new perspective on integration***

**Wielant Machleidt**

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**Wielant Machleidt**

## **Integration as Cultural Adolescence!**

### **A new perspective on integration**

My prevention speech is a plea for a different understanding, a new perspective on integration. What does integration mean for migrants and refugees? Integration sets much more in motion than just cultural processes of learning and adaptation. Integration goes hand in hand with a radical change of identity and personality. All adults, native inhabitants and migrants alike, know this phase from their own biographies, namely as their own normative adolescence in their home country. In “cultural adolescence”, refugees and migrants repeat as adults in the host country – appropriate with their physical maturity – the psychological and social development tasks of adolescence, though at a higher level of maturity than as teenagers. Young people in the immigrant families and unaccompanied minor foreigners, on the other hand, have a double challenge to cope with. They have to cope with their adolescent “coming out” both in the culture of their country of origin and at the same time in the host culture – a double coming of age. And what about us, the nationals of the host country? When we experience a sense of foreignness, or otherness, in our interaction with the migrants, we too are somewhat “adolescent” once again. Because we are all in the process of becoming foreign, foreigners in a world of diversity, with the task of making that which is foreign, “other”, a familiar and trusted part of ourselves. In the following I shall discuss the developments that young and adult migrants have to cope with in the course of integration.

### **Migration – Integration – Prevention**

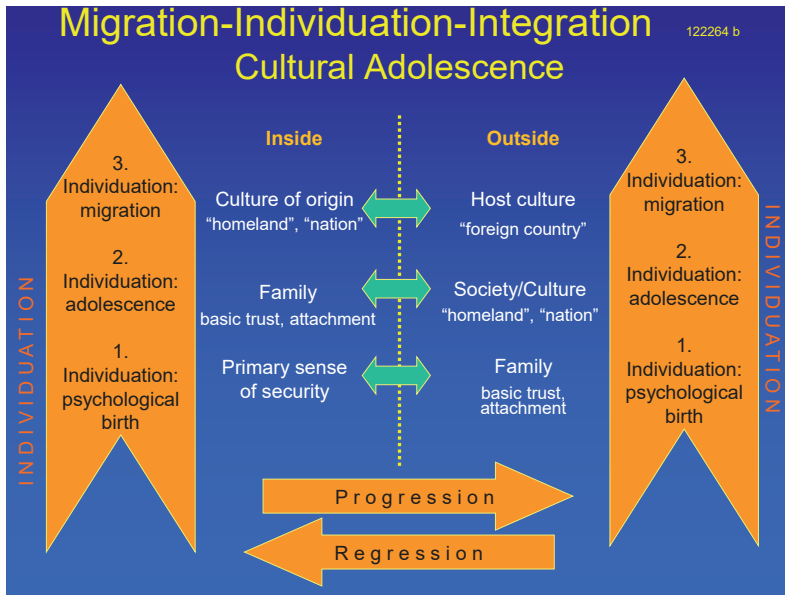
To begin with, I would like to ask what this understanding of integration as cultural adolescence has in common with crime prevention. It is imperative to actively shape developments at an early stage, where insufficient support could lead to a high-risk outcome such as the failure of integration processes (The 2016 Magdeburg Declaration [2017]). Preventing the failure of integration must be the overriding idea and

motivation behind all efforts when it comes to immigration for a civil society. Effective universal prevention measures are, for example, guaranteeing residence and security, preserving the physical and mental health of the new arrivals, or ambitious goals like managing the task of self-care through education, training and work and, not least, identification with the new home. This makes it indispensable to have social and integration policies with the inclusive goal of equal economic, political, social and cultural participation for all migrant groups. Viewed like this, prevention is a task for the whole of society, where each and every individual has their own contribution to make in contact with the immigrants. This kind of broad social acceptance of immigration is a good but ultimately also essential requirement for successful integration.

What the welcoming, immigrant-friendly culture among broad sections of the population revealed was and is a new quality in how people feel about and treat immigrants and refugees. A great readiness emerged that had not been seen before for the social commitment of taking on a responsible parental substitute role for the welfare of those seeking protection (Machleidt, 2016). This was an epochal turning point in the humanitarian treatment of immigrants, arising from a renewed German spirit. The euphoria that many felt at the time has subsided, as is only to be expected. The new civic quality of active citizenship is a promising prerequisite for the task of integration, a task for the whole of society, that is ahead of us now. “Cultural Adolescence” is the individual energetic centre for this, where the forces develop that can drive a creative integration dynamic.

### **Cultural Adolescence: Definition**

“The concept of ‘cultural adolescence’ postulates that the developmental steps and critical mental states of adolescence resemble in many respects the integration steps and crises that migration processes precipitate in the new arrivals” (Machleidt, 2013). There are parallels between the integration of migrants in the host society and the integration of adolescents in the society of their home country. Migration is, like the driving force of adolescence, a strong stimulus for the development and transformation of the personality in adult immigrants. Migration reactivates and differentiates the normal adolescent development dynamic once again at a more mature age (Machleidt and Heinz, 2018).



*Fig. 1: Instances of boundary crossing between the "inside" and the "outside" are important steps in the development of the individual and characterise the migration process as a third individuation. Growth can be understood as a flexible succession of "regression" and "progression".*

The structural model of Cultural Adolescence illustrates this dynamic (Fig. 1). The horizontal levels symbolise the stages of maturation. The earliest maturation stage, psychological birth, leads to the process of becoming part of the family and the formation of basic trust, normative adolescence to a process of becoming part of society, and cultural adolescence to integration in the host society. What was foreign, "other", becomes a familiar and trusted part of the self. The arrows represent the mobilised creative energies/forces for each developmental step. For the integration processes, these are the creative forces, the "thrust" or "engine" that must not be throttled! This is the concept we are working with (Machleidt, 2013, 2017).

### **Transformation of identity through Cultural Adolescence**

What changes are the result of Cultural Adolescence? There is a fundamental shift in closeness-distance relations to parental substitute figures in state and society. In the immigrants' case, what is taking place is the detachment from these symbolic parents, i.e. the representatives

of their home country, and the acceptance of the representatives of the host country. Another drastic change is the geographical and contextual cultural displacement. Because in the case of migration, flight and expulsion, those affected must – voluntarily or under duress – abandon the familiar places that provide a sense of security and find unfamiliar places providing a sense of security with new people offering protection and orientation, such as foreign institutions and contact persons.

In a modern immigration society, it is expected that immigrants integrate into the host society. For all of those who are able to stay, this begins with building and shaping a new home and a new life in the foreign country. This task is a complex challenge in which creative energies and resources can be mobilised for active self-realisation. The new arrivals have to deal with coping with experiences of otherness, with language acquisition, and with forming relationships in an environment that is socially and culturally foreign. In addition, educational and professional qualifications and the securing of a livelihood are to be achieved through work. Creating new forms of family and gender relationships, grieving for losses, and not least the development of a new bicultural identity, are other important necessities. Through the disruption of identity that is inevitable in these processes, in the in-between of countries and cultures, what arises is a creative tension between the place of origin and the new environment and a negotiation of the balance between clinging to the familiar and known and the innovative gain. An oscillation between holding fast and letting go on the one hand and, on the other, rejection and adoption of new habits and values, keeps the identity transformation and integration progress moving. A new identity is then acquired if the individual succeeds in establishing a delicate balance between the loss of meaning vis-à-vis the life that has been left behind and the reconstitution of sense and meanings for a life in the host country (Machleidt, 2014).

The key question here for those affected is: how much of that which is foreign and unfamiliar can I bear or tolerate without becoming unbearably foreign – a stranger – to myself? The ambivalences and doubts to be endured in the course of this process can provoke critical mental states. Like all developmental episodes, this kind of identity disruption goes hand in hand with an increased vulnerability to psychological maldevelopment. These identity crises undergone by migrants are, however, largely developmental crises that run their natural course and whose conflicts and incentives to change contribute to the formation of bicultural identities and to integration in the host society (Machleidt, 2017).

For integration to work, conducive social conditions and in particular support from people with a parental substitute role like mentors, teachers, integration facilitators, volunteers and, not least, reliable institutions are the best means to guarantee success. The first-generation migrants who have grown old in the host country are particularly suited to acting as good, reliable parental substitutes in the ethnic communities. With the knowledge they have gained through experience, they represent a kind of living archive of how to survive away from home – a priceless resource!

Integration is cultural adolescence and as such a transitional, intermediate phase, comparable to a long journey, a “rite of passage”. In today’s postmodern world, in which voluntary migration represents one form of mobility, it is more of a privilege than the stigma it was some years ago. How often in life do you really get the chance to begin anew – a new beginning that is, however, not without risk? Migration is a utopian promise of a better life and contains in equal measure the ambivalence between the hope of Elysian salvation and the fear of deadly apocalypse – as the biographies of the refugees demonstrate.

### **Disruptive factors jeopardise migrants’ mental health.**

These two facts are now scientifically proven: 1.: Migration is an anthropological constant of human existence. Migration has always, and will always exist. Adam and Eve were the first migrants. And they made it by the sweat of their brows. 2.: Migration is not a disease, just as pregnancy is not a disease! Migration is a critical life event but does not as such cause any mental illnesses. There is a temporarily increased vulnerability to mental disorders and psychological maldevelopment during cultural adolescence. This vulnerability has its origin in the loss of the former “cultural envelope”. Culture is like a second skin that protects us from psychological trauma. The new arrivals are still lacking this. Instrumentally, they do not yet possess the cultural techniques and the personal skills to cope with the problems of everyday life. Adverse circumstances and conditions before and during migration, following arrival in the host country and during integration are all the more liable to cause mental disorders and jeopardise integration. Contributing factors include, for example, uncertain residence status, drawn-out asylum proceedings, mass accommodation, perceived discrimination, social defeats, chronic stress, etc. Mental disorders in migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers thus reflect migration and integration conditions in the host country (Machleidt et al., 2018; Machleidt and Graef-Calliess, 2018).

The empirical evidence on mental morbidity among migrants shows that when social, societal and political stakeholders cooperate, this can have a substantial positive impact on the preventive preservation of migrants' mental health. From the perspective of universal prevention, a detailed knowledge of these dynamics is of utmost importance for immigration and integration policy – because universal strategies aim to “overcome prejudice, anxieties, fears, as well as rejection and animosity, and to engender social interaction” (2016 Magdeburg Declaration). The 2016 Magdeburg Declaration (2017) calls for the establishment of interdisciplinary crime prevention centres with representatives from all areas of prevention. These offer the ideal conditions for the early detection of psychologically and socially damaging integration conditions and corresponding increased risks for mental health. Beyond prevention initiatives, the healthcare system must see to the expansion of culturally sensitive medical and psychological healthcare and the development of effective intercultural psychotherapy methods. After all, a responsible immigration society must, in view of its own economic and social welfare, aspire to treat its immigrants with the same high quality and performance standards as it does its own population (Machleidt et al., 2018). There is no other reasonable option!

### **“We must be like parents to them”**

What an ageing, affluent civil society shares with the immigrants is a common desire for integration. What are good conditions for the successful integration of potential new fellow citizens? I spoke of the breakthrough in attitudes and dealings with immigrants brought about by the welcoming, immigrant-friendly culture and the readiness of many individuals to take on a parental substitute role for the new arrivals. This “being like parents to them” implies an attitude of “taking care” both as active citizenship and as an obligation of institutions towards the political goal of integration. In the case of the unaccompanied minor refugees who were sentenced in 2017 in Berlin for attempting to set fire to a homeless man, the institutions responsible proved to be unreliable. But reliable institutions are indispensable for integration to succeed, e.g. a “taking care” of young people to provide guidance *in loco parentis*.

I return here to the beginning, where I spoke of the double coming of age of young people from immigrant families and of unaccompanied minor foreigners. The increased demands of becoming independent

both in one's own family tradition and culture and at the same time in the host culture are often experienced by the young people as a task, complicated by conflicts around migration and culture, which without the support of parents, adoptive parents or volunteers, mentors, teachers or psychotherapists often seems likely to fail. This double coming of age goes hand in hand with an increased risk of mental disorders such as fear of failure, detachment conflicts causing depression, antisocial behaviour, addictive behaviour, failure at school and, finally, the reduction of complexity and ideologisation through radicalisation. During this phase the young people are unsure of themselves and are less tolerant of putting up with ambiguous situations and conflicting cultural norms (reduced tolerance of ambiguity). Instances of being overwhelmed or hurt by supposed or actual exclusion and identity conflicts jeopardise the double coming of age in both reference cultures and increase the risk of uprooting. In order to self-stabilise, this state requires the clearest possible guidance and messages from an attachment figure who provides security and support. With these young migrants it is imperative to recognise future dangers in good time and to pre-empt them with preventive social interventions – as offers to those affected, not as a benefaction they are forced to accept (Machleidt, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

Integration as cultural adolescence requires large-scale, liberal thinking and well-thought-out solutions in consultation with all of the groups involved. Integration is the key to confidence in the Western utopia of a future where people from different backgrounds and of different faiths live together in peace (Münkler and Münkler, 2016). This goal challenges us as an intercultural civil society to be identified with the acceptance of immigration as a long-term social perspective. As well as plenty of patience, we should also have a “robust tolerance of frustration”, optimism, and be neither easily alarmed nor given to discouragement.

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Address for correspondence:

Kaiser-Wilhelm-Str. 18

30559 Hannover

e-mail: [wielant.machleidt@t-online.de](mailto:wielant.machleidt@t-online.de)

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