

MIGRATORY WAVES: HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS IN THE SHAPING OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

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Abstract: *Sociology has always been interested in social changes and the way such changes affect society. The latter is not compact and monolithic, but rather malleable and modifiable. The desire for a unitary world where all people acquire the same cultural standard is strong, even though it is impossible to decide what standards all should conform to. A subject willing to migrate performs what Merton calls an “anticipatory socialization”. A migrant person prepares beforehand to be open to language models that are different from those of his/her own native language, as well as different models of belonging, for the present and the future. A migrating world is, in sum, a world dominated by a propensity to intercultural dialogue. In order to investigate this issue, two kinds of migration that took place from Albania to Italy in two historical periods are taken as an example to see how intercultural dialogue took place and how it is currently taking place. The examples we focus on are a succession of eight migrations that occurred between 1399 and 1774, and the two more recent migrations of 1991 and 1997. The Arbëreshë (or Albanians of Italy) primarily fled the Ottoman expansion while it was gaining new territories to the west; they also responded to appeals made by the kings of Naples and the Two Sicilies for soldiers to help ward off a conspiracy by the nobility. The Arbëreshë were granted land in the South of Italy as a reward, and the fact that such lands were mostly isolated made it easier for them to keep their customs and language. In the two latest migration waves that occurred in the 20th century, Albanians mostly fled their country by sea, facing dramatic situations to cross the Adriatic sea by boat and reach the ports of Apulia. The first migrations, the “historical” ones, led to a deep intercultural dialogue. The Arbëreshë followed the history of Italy and fought in the wars for the independence of the country. When they emigrated to the Americas at the beginning of the 20th century, only half of their population was left in Italy; and in getting to other countries, most of them were considered Italians, since that was actually their nationality. In the 1960s and 1970s there was an ethnic awakening to enhance and preserve the linguistic minority of the Arbëreshë, who were granted the status of protected minority by Unesco in 2017. Finally, we remember an internal migration displacing very large numbers of Italians from the south to the north of the country; many Arbëreshë were assimilated, even if an Arbëreshë community was recreated in Turin that kept the language and religious forms. In 2018, almost 500,000 Albanians from the latest migration applied for Italian citizenship.*

Keywords: *Albanian migration in Italy; intercultural dialogue; internal migration; maintenance of language and customs*

1. FOREWORD

What I would like to discuss in this article relates to the process of integration that each individual goes through to integrate into society, particularly when the need arises to integrate into a new group or society. Integration is possible through intercultural dialogue. This is useful for establishing and maintaining relations that, in their turn, highlight reciprocal comparison and exchange of knowledge among people who come from different cultures, but also simply from different social layers. Intercultural dialogue always has a reason to exist, but this is especially true when people migrate toward countries that are foreign

lands for them. Mobility is a human right.¹ Everyone has, in fact, the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State, but also the right to leave any country, including his/her own, and to return to his/her country.² We have chosen the historical migrations to Italy by Albanians that took place between the 15th and the end of the 20th century, with a view to

¹ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948, articles 13, 14, 15.

² Furthermore, everyone has a right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution and the right to a nationality. Everyone is therefore free to move, and this should be assumed by international regulations.

showing the importance of expulsion factors and reception motivated by humanitarian ends; but also of attraction factors, such as for example the search for employment, the possibility of living a better life and finding greater wellbeing. Preparation for the change involves an encounter that occurs in daily practice: in those who migrate voluntarily, anticipatory socialization is triggered (Merton, 1957), the preparatory stage for socialization that will take place in the future. It consists in learning models of behaviour that lead to avoiding clashes and adjusting more easily to the new society. However, it should be considered that dialogue must take place for both parties involved; and when the resident population is presented with a *fait accompli*, defence mechanisms tend to be enacted. At times of economic crises this has a significant weight, often even greater than that of the humanitarian aspect.

When migrants arrive wherever in the world, a process that was well described by Bauman (2002: 78) is triggered. He describes the *parvenu*³ as someone who has just arrived and comes from somewhere else. His stay in any place is to be temporary, while that of the other residents will appear to be centuries old and eternal. Since he is a stranger, the “newcomer” raises fears in those who are already labelled as parvenus: a parvenu needs another parvenu in order not to feel a newcomer.

Emigration represents a demographic and economic phenomenon that can be analysed from two different points of view: in the perspective of the country of departure or in that of the country of arrival. Expulsion factors belong to the place of departure (wars, famines, poverty, desire to change); attraction factors, which show (especially on TV) a rosy, happy world where it is desirable to live, belong to the country of arrival.

2. CREATION OF CATEGORIES AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

There is nothing natural or eternal behind ethnicity, but just a process of continuous reformulation of identity (Fabiotti, 1998:134). Ethnicity is a constructed category and is never definitively attained. It manifests itself as a constant challenge to the theory of culture: it is essentially a relational category. The notion of culture is something continuously changing, acquiring new practices and discarding others. Culture itself as collective practice becomes the

object of constant renegotiation, because even recognition leads to a new redefinition.

2.1 Ethnic belonging. Giddens (2000) takes Hobsbawm’s thesis (1983:56) to the extreme when he observes that we could state that all traditions are invented. No traditional society was ever completely traditional, and traditions and customs are always created for a variety of reasons. It is a myth to think of traditions as something that is difficult to change. Traditions are always the property of groups, communities or collectivities.

This point of view is very contemporary and reflects the flexibility and fragmentation of the current historical period. As compared to the museification of popular culture juxtaposed to dominant culture, the post-modern critique of tradition takes the opposite direction: it is oriented toward a dialectic complexity of relations between hegemonic culture and subordinate culture (Marta, 2005:39, Ragnedda, 2006).

The frameworks within which we organize reality do not depend on the meaning of our experiences. Only by entering other people’s experiences is it possible to understand the meaning they produce. The “finite provinces of meaning” (Schütz, 1974) are the background for the social construction of reality that is only possible with a collective processing of the meaning itself. Such elaboration occurs through interaction, which is an essential pillar of social structure: a group is social in that it expresses and collects meanings and relations established through interactions among its components over time. What varies is the situations in which formal relations are generated. Ethnic belonging is a social category detected in situations of social interaction where subjects decide to which group they belong. Exploration and distinction are no longer possible, in an extremely fragmented scenario that does not provide suitable conditions for comparison and selection that could, in their turn, generate a personal assessment (Tessarolo, 1990).

2.2 Toward a decentralized society. The current model for society is decentralisation. Differentiation and pluralism intended as intercultural dialogue are present in all key issues of contemporary sociology (global versus local, universal versus particular, cosmopolitanism versus regionalism etc.): all these forces and notions are presented as modes of antagonism and conflict (Padovani, 1996).

The resurfacing of ethnic belonging responds to a dual issue. On one hand, it compensates for the

³ Simmel defines the *parvenu* as the stranger who comes to stay. To see also Sennett (2014).

weakening and fall of other criteria of belonging by displacing identity onto linguistic, cultural and historical planes. On the other, it forces society to disown the social contract upon which complex systems are based, whose existence depends on the ability to negotiate aims and differences. In sum, the rediscovery of ethnic identities brings to the surface the conflictual nature of complex societies and the awareness that such conflicts can not be eliminated.

The category of interculturality intended as a form of dialogue is tainted with difficulties because multiplicity of belonging is not a condition of balance. On the contrary, the individual perceives himself/herself as divided and in conflict. Recent conflicts in which different ethnic entities are on opposing sides are generated precisely in terms of the reaffirmation and recomposition of identities (Schütz, 1974).

Social psychology has significantly contributed to the study of the outcomes of an encounter between different social groups. People belonging to the external group are codified in terms of general categories, while the members of the group to which one belongs are assigned to more specific categories. Greater familiarity with own-group members allows a greater number of behaviours to be observed. Lesser contact with members of the other group could lead instead to a homogeneous and simplified vision of the group as a whole. The perception of social variability is therefore in direct proportion to the amount of knowledge available. When remembering positive or negative items of information, subjects more efficiently remember negative behaviours enacted by the external group. Subjects prefer to remember features that make the groups different, rather than features that make the groups similar.

In these conditions, the individual is reduced to a mosaic of diversified behaviours that cannot produce principles of unity in personality. What is sought is rather the unity of a cultural legacy (language, memory, culture). In our society, precisely when communication and economy are becoming globalised and new technologies gaining speed, a paradox is fulfilled: society stops projecting itself toward the future and relies on the past, or on ahistorical desires. The system and the actor no longer enact a reciprocity of perspectives but rather a direct opposition.

3. ALBANIAN MIGRATIONS TO ITALY

The analysis of two different waves of Albanian arrivals in Italy can, in the first case, help

us overcome the complications implied by consistent immigration for the recipient country. The migratory waves we consider differ from one another because they occurred in different historical periods. Eight immigrations took place between the 15th and 19th centuries. The Arbëreshë have been Italo-Albanians for long (over 600 years is a long period!), they have obtained Italian citizenship and their life is in Italy. When Italians migrated to the United States, one or two generations were enough for many of them to no longer feel they could go back to their country of origin.⁴

3.1 The first wave: Arbëreshë. We use the term Arbëreshë to refer to all that concerns the diaspora linked to the migratory waves spanning from the 15th to the beginning of the 19th century. It must be remembered that all Albanians were called Arbëreshë, but only Albanians born in Italy have continued to use this term to define themselves, while those living in Albania call themselves Shqiptarëve. In order to understand how the Arbëreshë settled in Italy, we need to go back to the reason why they came and whose call they answered. We can identify the beginning of the displacement between 1339 and 1409, when the king of Naples appealed to Albanians to come to Italy and give assistance in the fight against his lords and the Anjou government. Ten years later, Alfonso of Aragon called the Albanian chieftain Demetrio Reres to Italy and, in exchange for the help received, granted the territories that, to this day, are inhabited by the Arbëreshë in the region of Calabria. The settlements in Apulia were created with a similar process, while those in Molise date back to a call to Albanians to repopulate the valleys whose inhabitants had been decimated by the plague in 1600. In the territories of Molise, the latest settlement took place in 1774. On their part, the Arbëreshë were fleeing the war related to the westward expansion of the Ottoman Turks.⁵

The maintenance of their language, religious tradition (the Byzantine rite) and language of primary socialization, together with the geographical location of the settlements in valleys, allowed the preservation of language and customs. The long separation from the mother country led the Arbëreshë to differentiate themselves from

⁴ Writing about the “American character”, Margaret Mead notes that Americans purposefully forget their European ancestors and look instead to the more recent steps they have made in America (1946: 39).

⁵ The city of Krujë was conquered by the Ottomans in 1478.

their fellow countrymen and cultivate customs of their own. It also made it impossible for them to “update” their language over time, as their fellows countrymen did in Albania. All this helped independently develop their belonging as Arbëreshë.

The language of the Italian Arbëreshë population is the ancient Arbërist in the Tosk (*toskë*) variety of southern Albania, with some inflections of Geg (*gegë*). It was also maintained because the Arbëreshë have two eparchies (bishops).⁶ The language was transmitted without territorial proximity and in the oral modality. The Arbëreshë language is not immediately understandable for a native speaker of Albanian. However, there is a reasonable level of intercomprehension between the two languages: 45% of words are common, 15% are neologisms created by Arbëreshë writers and then passed into the language.

It is estimated that the Arbëreshë community in Italy numbers 100,000 people and makes up one of the ethno-linguistic minorities of this country. The Arbëreshë have their home country in Italy, where their roots are by now and where they cultivate their own traditions and diversity. They also participate in the economic and political life of the country. They fought in the Independence Wars of the 19th century, were part of Garibaldi's *Mille* (“the one thousand”) and landed in Sicily with him; with Francesco Crispi (1887-1893) they had a Prime Minister; they experienced the troubles of the Italian economic crises at the beginning of the 20th century and emigrated to America as Italians, with Italian citizenship.

The preservation of their own traditions does not have a political use of the tradition itself. It comes rather from a perception of the past as being always positive; consequently, each transformation is regarded as a loss and degradation. The decision of being a minority community is, in itself, a declaration of double belonging.

The linguistic history of the Arbëreshë reveals the deep impact of the national language, in its quality of written language, on the linguistic conditions of the local language. The latter is confined to a role of subordinate language, being an oral and non-literary language, thus making bilingualism unstable. Even though it is a “non-covered dialect”, the Albanian spoken in Italy shows a tendency to perform certain functions that in a dialect “covered” by a literary language are

usually performed by the literary language (Altimari, 1983).

Arbëreshë and Albanian are equalised, meaning they are equal within a defined area, subject to the people and the languages spoken by them, but only relatively to the regions where these languages are used. Linguistic minorities are in fact regional linguistic minorities (Salvi, 1975, p. 10).

Italian Law no. 482 of 1999, on the protection of linguistic minorities in the country, acknowledges that linguistic minorities exist; and article 2 guarantees the protection of the languages and cultures of the Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovene and Croat population, and the protection of the language spoken by French, Franco-provençal, Friulan, Ladin, Occitan and Sardinian populations.

From some demographic considerations dated between 1951 and 2001, we note that the overall number of inhabitants of the single communities is decreasing, if we limit ourselves to the adoption of the socio-linguistic status of each community as the parameter with which to measure the transmission of the Albanian language from generation to generation. This parameter shows the speed and intensity of the linguistic change. Data reported by Giacomarra (2003) seem to confirm that mothers teach their children Arbëreshë as the primary language: 94.5% speak Arbëreshë and, among them, 90% say they learnt it as their first language. Only 2.3% of children whose parents are both Arbëreshë say they have learnt the language at a later date. However, Ruffino (2006) had found that 60% of 11-15 year old children knew Arbëreshë and, among these, 28% spoke the language fluently and frequently. The young people living in cities continue to speak Arbëreshë, possibly partly because of linguistic valves that obey communication strategies of an unconscious form of resistance. The presence of the Arbëreshë in Italy is an exceptional case in the history of peoples. In 2017 an official application was submitted to UNESCO for the inclusion of the Arbëreshë population as immaterial and social living world heritage. The representatives of small linguistic groups must be capable of thinking and feeling in one or more of the languages with greater diffusion, to which minority languages can contribute in form and thinking since all languages have something to learn from one another (Ong, 1989).

3.2 The second wave: Albanians 1991-1997.

In 1990 the fall of communism led to a second

⁶ There was also a pope of Arbëreshë origin: Clement XI (1700-1721).

migratory wave of Albanians toward Italy, with tragic moments and numerous deaths. Many Albanian migrants were hosted by the Italian Arbëreshë communities, especially in Sicily. The new Albanians are well integrated into the social fabric of Piana degli Albanesi by now, where an Arbëreshë community was created that contains a well established core of Shqiptarë.

Almost 500,000 people arrived in Italy between 1991 and 1997. Now they live and work here and belong to the Italian society, just a short distance from their home country, Albania, where a recovery is currently under way. On 1 January 2018, there were 440,465 Albanian residents in Italy. The second migratory wave has not formed – and maybe never will – a community, in contrast with the community of the Arbëreshë, although the latter was such in the diaspora. Furthermore, these Albanians will never be Arbëreshë, but Italo-Albanians. In the year 2000, Albanians were at the top of Italian statistics concerning foreigners reported for crimes and illegal migrants (72%). These figures have been constantly decreasing. As many as 189,000 Albanians applied for Italian citizenship between 2006 and 2017. The younger ones are going back to Albania, where the economic situation has improved significantly.

In order to see how their integration in Italy developed, we can use the data reported by the Italian Institute of Social Security, INPS. In Italy there are 250,000 Albanians working legally; the owners of individual businesses are 31,358, meaning 8.6% of non-EU entrepreneurs present in Italy. Among foreign communities present in Italy, Albanians represent the group with the highest economic contribution to the hosting country.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The right of human groups to identity and diversity should become an accepted fact. Argumentation techniques in favour of such acceptance may only develop where discussion is free. Only in a free society rational choices become possible. The argumentation process is an antidote to the opposing temptations of fanaticism and scepticism: both the fanatic and the sceptic fall victim to the mirage of ultimate truth. The difference between them is that the fanatic is convinced he possesses that truth, the sceptic is certain that such possession is an illusion (Bobbio: XIX).

The theory of argumentation rejects antitheses that are too stark and shows that, between absolute truth and non-truth, there is room for truths that

have to be subjected to continuous review thanks to the technique of presenting reasons for and against. It is known that when men stop believing in good reasons, violence begins (Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1976:538).

It is because of the possibility of argumentation which provides reasons, but not compelling reasons, that it is possible to escape the dilemma: adherence to an objectively and universally valid truth, or recourse to suggestion and violence to secure acceptance for our opinions and decisions.

Only the existence of an argumentation that is neither compelling nor arbitrary can give meaning to human freedom, a state in which a reasonable choice can be exercised. (Perelman 1969:514).

Intercultural dialogue requires education in this from an early age, when it is easier to see the other not inevitably as an enemy, but as someone who belongs to another group, which should not necessarily be overpowered. It is important to recognize others and ourselves as real human beings, and not as cultural models (Tessarolo, 2018). The two migratory waves from Albania to Italy show how we can recognize others as real human beings and also how unexpected turns can surprise us. These Albanian migrations to Italy highlight that many reasonable choices have been possible, both for integration and specific identity.

I would like to conclude by quoting Sennet, with a change. He observes that “unexpected turns”, although caused by uprooting (the immigration of the Arbëreshë and later Albanians), are what makes it possible for a stranger to become a citizen of the same home country, even outside its borders.⁷

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⁷ I would like to name the students from the University of Padua who presented a dissertation on the language of the Arbëreshë: Santina Palummo and Ginevra Delfino on Calabria; Paola Orlando on Molise; Biagio Nigro on Apulia. Furthermore, Albanian students Mejsila Resjaku and Blerina Lika, whose dissertations focus on the attitude toward Gheg and Tosk, the language varieties respectively of the North and South of Albania.

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