MIGRATIONS: BETWEEN DIVERSITY, RICHNESS AND TRANSCULTURALITY

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Abstract: *We live in a new "era of migrations": today, with a disruptive impact, migrations are once again one of the most visible and controversial factors that change our societies. For some it is the dawn of a new world, characterized from métissage and universal brotherhood; for most people, it is the beginning of an invasion. However, who are the immigrants? Immigration is always a matter of boundaries: who is "we"? Who is "they"? The receiving society has the power to define, classify and construct the social category of immigrants intended as foreigners coming from poorer countries, who are allowed to stay in a temporary way and to certain conditions: therefore, immigrants are those coming from poor countries or from countries whose culture is perceived as very different from ours. In (brutal) summary, we can say that the definition of immigrant is closely linked to our mental boundary, which appears to be mobile and porous. A negro is perceived as immigrant, while a wealthy Arab as a friend: the "wealth has the power to bleach". So, if the phenomenon is constituted "simply" by the passage from the "poor" to the "rich" side of geography of a world terribly unequal, from a cultural point of view there are deep and multiple implications. In this paper we analyze the relationship between migration and immigration, complementary in the sociology of Abdelmalek Sayad and of Pierre Bourdieu, to attempt a definition of "cultural pluralism" capable of holding at least three perspectives: intercultural, multicultural and transcultural.*

Keywords*: community; intercultural context; transculturalismo; universal brotherhood*

1. INTRODUCTION

Migrations are always part of the history of mankind, if it is true that "we all have African origins". The archaeological research, the Homeric poems, the biblical evidence, tell us about individual and group movements, trades, peaceful colonization and cruel invasions: experiences "of movement" that have built the history of human civilizations. The permanence, laboriously conquered during the Neolithic age, was never absolute: the movement of populations, in its various forms and with different outcomes, has always accompanied the formation of stable societies.

Today, again and with a disruptive impact, migrations present themselves as one of the most visible and controversial factors of change in our societies. In urban spaces, into the labor market, in classrooms, in places of religious meeting and in circuits of illegal activities, are under way replacements and mixtures of old and new protagonists. And the newly arrived are almost always poorer than those previously established, as well as different by language, physical appearance, habits, beliefs and religious practices. The widespread perception is that of a disruption of the social order. For some, it is the dawn of a new world characterized by *métissage* (or miscegenation) (Callari Galli, 2005; Nouss, 2006) and by universal brotherhood; for most, it is the beginning of an invasion.

It is possible that in a few centuries ours and the past one will be remembered as the centuries of migrations. Although it has always been a constant feature in history, the migration phenomenon has grown more and more thanks to the development of means of transportation and of communication networks. Leaving to historians the long-term evaluations, we see as useful some social sciences considerations that attempt to understand and face a momentous phenomenon.

In view of such a breadth, the prediction is that such a phenomenon is distinctive of our time. Therefore, the social scientist poses a number of questions particularly about the causes of migration, the inclusion of migrants in countries where they move and the processing of their

cultural identity. Above all, he has the objective to deconstruct prepackaged ideologies on this topic, rereading in a critical view all the popular lexicon based on an emergency policy promoted by predators of hand-stitched boundaries.

In 2015, migrants represented a total of about 3.3 percent of the world's population: in figures, about 243.6 million out of more than 6 billion human beings (Caritas and Migrantes, 2015); while in the UE-28 area, migrants are 35.2 million, an increase of 3.6% compared to 2014. Considering the distribution in different countries, 76,2% of foreign residents is hosted in Germany (21,5%), United Kingdom (15,4%), Italy (14,3%) and France (12,4%). As of January 1, 2015, in Italy resided 60.795.612 inhabitants, including 5.014.437 foreign citizens (8,2%) of which 2.641.641 women (52,7%). Compared to the same data in 2014, the foreign population has increased of 92.352 units (+1,9%).

According to numbers, we are talking about a small quantity of humanity, but the perception is dissonant compared to the data, because certain aspects such as, the concentration in specific areas, the rapidity of the formation of new migration streams and dramatic modalities of a (large) part of arrivals, increase the sense of loss and threat.

2. MIGRATION. ASSOCIATED CONCEPTS

But, who are the immigrants? This represents a first problematic node: it is not easy to define who the immigrants are or, more precisely, who among the foreigners should be classified as such. The immigration is always a matter of boundaries: who is "we"? Who is "they"? With "we" normally we indicate not only the natives, but also "our friends", or foreigners that we favorably welcome as residents and possible future fellow citizens; with "they" we intend to refer to strangers in the strict sense of the term, who we are willing to admit only temporarily, but that, in principle, we would never want to see settled in our cities and, least of all, we would never like to see among full citizens. The recipient society has the power to define and classify, to construct the social category of immigrants intended as foreigners coming from poorer countries, authorized to stay in the country temporarily and at certain conditions: the rules, as well as the common sense and the daily language, contribute to demarcate the social boundaries related to immigrants. Customarily, we define "immigrants" only part of the foreigners who reside and work in our country. British or French people are not "immigrants" and the same is true

for Japanese or Koreans even if they would be included into the conventional definition of immigrant adopted by the UN: "a person who has moved to a country other than the country of habitual residence, and living in that country for more than a year". The same is true for the term "extra communitarian", a legal concept that has become almost synonymous of "immigrant", with paradoxical consequences: it does not apply to Americans, but applies to Romanians. Therefore, are immigrants those coming from poorer countries or from countries whose culture is perceived as profoundly different from ours. In (brutal) summary, we can say that the definition of immigrant is closely linked to our mental boundary, and this one appears to be mobile and porous. A negro is perceived as immigrant, while a wealthy Arab is perceived as a friend: the "wealth has the power to bleach" says Ambrosini (in Ambrosini & Abbatecola, 2009:13).

The immigration is not only a matter of populations movements, but is a far more complex matter that involves the policies of the receiving States, mainly related to the modalities (implicit or explicit) of categorizing more or less acceptable foreigners, the reactions of the society toward the newly arrived and, of course, of the migrants themselves. So, if the phenomenon is constituted "simply" by the passage from the "poor" to the "rich" side of geography of a world terribly unequal, from a cultural point of view there are deep and multiple implications.

We need to highlight that the phenomenon of migration determines consequences, often heavy, both on countries of origin and those of arrival: migration and immigration, complementary in the sociology of Abdelmalek Sayad (2002), mutually refer to each other as a total social phenomenon: in fact, to each immigration within a society there is always an emigration from another society. Relationships between human beings are transformed by migration, from the arrival and stay of migrants (while in departure countries relationships are transformed by their departures and prolonged absences), renewing the cohabitation and coexistence of social groups and individuals in the territories and communities. The countries of origin (the "poor side") see undermining their present and potential human capital, since those leaving are often children and young people, therefore, the workforce and (potential) intellectual strength, and the *brain drain* is a further nefarious consequence on already poor countries.

Observing the reality of contemporary migration, the analysis of Sayad results to be still

perfectly current: Sayad studied the Algerian migration into France during the 70', which was a mass migration from a predominantly rural society to an urban and industrial society; now as then, the migration phenomenon manifests itself as a direct result of colonization; now as then, it has as a point of arrival those countries representing rigorous models of nation-states, representatives of that "imperialism of the universal" mentioned by Pierre Bourdieu (1998).

In addition to excessive economic and social commitment, the receiving countries need to perform a cultural conversion, anything but superficial, which expects and requires the potential renegotiation of shared meanings and of traits, at times profound, of the collective identity. The matter of cultural pluralism is central to reject the ethnocentrism and all forms of discrimination, encouraging an ethic of recognition and respect for differences. But that of cultural pluralism is a broad paradigm that "contains" at least three perspectives: intercultural (Hannerz, 1996), multicultural and transcultural (Welsh, 1999).

The intercultural perspective has strongly insisted on issues related to diversity and otherness; however, where emphasis is put on the differences between groups there is the risk of creating even more distance between them and, involuntarily, this can start processes of segregation and ghettoization. Thus, the cultural barriers remain and this may result in the reaffirmation and strengthening of stereotypes.

The process of recognition and enhancement of otherness, can lead to useless and often harmful essentialisms and to an exasperated idealization, by minorities, of the culture or of the country of origin (the idea of authenticity, produced by nostalgia of "pure origins", is another consequence of this phenomenon, which should be revised and superseded). Therefore, despite good intentions, the intercultural dream may prove counterproductive and can lead to exasperate cultural conflicts rather than help their resolution.

Beyond the difficulties faced in spreading the intercultural project, it would be good to ask ourselves whether at the basis of the good intentions of the intercultural proposal we should proceed today, as suggested by Demetrio, with "a change of paradigm, a different concept of the culture and of relations between cultures" (Demetrio, 2003). Currently, in response to its highlighted inadequacy to explain the complexity of current phenomena, the traditional notion of "culture" needs some revision. Especially in social, anthropological and psychological sciences we can increasingly hear speaking of transculturality and

transculturalism. These new concepts put emphasis on the dialogical character of cultural influences, tending to a conceptualization of the interaction where nothing is ever completely "other" (foreign and stranger) and, therefore, help to understand the processes of formation of the multiple identity of the subject (both as individual and community) in all their complexity.

The question that strongly rises and pretends an overbearing response relates to the very idea of "culture" that must be subtended by a pluralist society, in intercultural species: in the absence of such a response, we would leave ample space for aporias and paradoxes.

The illuminated West has identified in the concept of multiculturalism its modern utopia: the multicultural society is (or should be) hospitable, oriented to accept otherness, available to "embrace" the difference. The multiculturalism and its direct development, the interculturalism, have shown to be weak because anchored to a conception of culture characterized by social homogenization, ethnic consolidation and intercultural demarcation (Welsh, 1999:194); while the real experience, with multiple cultural interconnections increasingly dense and complex of the process of globalization and transnationalization, show all the fragmentation of the social mosaic, revealing as impossible the concept of close cultural systems that have always lived and have always been fed by hybrids and exchanges.

Already in the 40's of the 20th century there was a talk about *transculturation* when it became necessary to overcome the concepts of *acculturation* and *deculturation* (Ortiz, 1940; Malinowski, 1982). Today, in cultural studies, particularly in colonial and post-colonial context, the word transculturation has overcome the original uni-directionality to construct a model of mutual interaction (Pratt, 1992; Pratt, 1995): is therefore appropriate to see in the *transculturation*, intended as a cultural multidimensional exchange model, a forerunner of today's concepts of transculturality and transculturalism.

The modern reality, profoundly and evidently marked from the *transnationalization* (expression that anthropologists prefer to the generic one of *globalization*), therefore requires some sort of "fine-tuning" of the notion of culture, mainly from the point of view of *flexibility*. The endless contaminations in the fields of economics, finance and politics, forming the modus operandi of late capitalism, affect the culture introducing a continuous alteration of meanings and cultural identities: the transnationalization did not produce

the homogenization of culture, creating a kind of "diffused indistinct"; instead, with the variety of phenomena that accompany it (migrations, movement of knowledge, of ideas and products), it became characterized by a noticeable increase of cultural diversity, which however takes a new shape compared to the past because dense interconnections and increasing deterritorialization make it always harder to categorize different cultures as "discrete units". The particular articulations of local and global in today's societies, gave rise to new cultural forms, modern and plural. To explain the formation processes of these «migrant modernity» (Schulze-Engler, 2002:65-79) and of virtual community identities, cultural expressions produced by the globalization (Appadurai, 1996), become therefore necessary new conceptualizations and models of cultural interaction.

The concept of *transculturalism* elaborated by Welsch is operative other than descriptive and, recognizing Nietzsche as a precursor, focuses on the cultural fertilization at different levels: from the macro level of the societies – whose cultural forms today are increasingly characterized by internal differentiation, complexity and hybridization – to the micro level of individual experience, where the personal and cultural identity almost never corresponds to the civic and national one, which, instead, is more and more marked by multiple cultural connections.

At least theoretically, the transcultural model is a hypothesis that can be pursued both at global and *glocal* (Robertson, 1999) level, representing that sort of "third way" proposed as an alternative to other models that have shown (more or less covertly) to be assimilationist. But, to overcome this temptation we cannot avoid to rethink the matter of boundaries, to be intended, in fact, not in a political sense, but cultural and ideological.

To try to accomplish this necessary task of removal of barriers, it is necessary reasoning about the theme of culture and, particularly, on the theme of diversity.

We tend to consider "cultural diversity" that sort of conceptual container where keeping differences related to religion and geographical origin: this approach is often taken to the extreme and there is the tendency to link to each immigrant, or group of immigrants, a "culture" that each one brings with himself, as if it were a static ballast. This baggage is considered more or less problematic – or more or less a resource – depending on how it is perceived the culture of the country of origin. This perspective, which seems to be dominant, has a limit inherent to the static

nature attributed to the culture, instead of considering it, more properly, as a process subject to change that evolves in close connection with the context.

It is clear that the culture of any social group, of any size, among other things includes nations, ethnic groups, cities, neighborhoods, labor organizations, gender and generational groups (Barrett, 2013:15-41): from this perspective we can observe how everyone can simultaneously belong to more than one culture intended as such, and we could even think that, in the same space, not all cultures live together harmoniously (Maffesoli, 2004).

The diversity of the world is infinite, and the cultural diversity has always existed as human condition (De Sousa Santos, 2011:9-22) that, in a globalized world characterized by the migratory phenomenon happily defined as the "total social fact" (Sayad, 2002), today manifest itself very much evidently.

The modalities of approaching the relationships with diversity, or to use a more correct lexicon according to Simmel "to the other and to the otherness" (Simmel, 1908), are configured with mixed feelings typical of such relationships into the sociological conceptualization of Simmel's interpretative categories of distance and proximity, difference and similarities. The stranger, although belongs to the community in which he is placed, is defined by this relationship of distance and closeness, originating mechanisms of acceptance or rejection. Therefore, the ambivalence of the sociological category of the foreigner, in the relationship that he builds with the other, is bearer of a change of the consolidate social space.

The social sciences, starting from issues related to the settlement of those arriving, have initially examined migrations in view of an immigration economy and of the process of social and national integration (Rea, Tripier, 2003). The social anthropology of Anglo-saxon matrix has privileged the notion of *social networking* (Hfily *et al.*, 2004) and the transitional dimension of these nets, highlighted by the French approach, has stressed the comprehension of a transnational form of migration based on *communities of itinerancy* (Tarrius, 1989; Escofier, 2009). Therefore, the significance and characteristics of contemporary migrations require to understand ways of "collective existence" among migrants and the subjective dimension of the experience of the communities of itinerancy, where individuals are united by their passage through Europe and by a changeable transmigration, which ends up favoring

the *métissage* and soliciting multiple systems of belonging.

As already remarked from the aforementioned Abdelmalek Sayad, from marginal research object within humanities and social sciences, today migration is fully entitled as a fundamental research object, to question ourselves about the social bond and relationship with otherness, whereas the other, bearer of an objective difference with his arrival and his stay, brings with him social stories that must be "re-known", "re-processed" and deepened, along with those structures that characterize the person: social structures, traditions and religions, political and mental structures .

The wandering of migrants, the transmigration of people and social stories between worlds and cultures, involves some changes and is at the same time mutual fecundation of diversity that enrich one another (Le Quéau, 2007). However, the wandering requires a meeting space (Cambi, 2006) between different sensitivities and cultural heritages, partially negated by a society that is afraid of otherness, where the meeting becomes the narration of two or more otherness (Tarsia, 2007). The theme and the experience of the narration, which has become a significant element of contemporary culture and social practice where multiple people share a common history, was established as a fundamental approach to the relationship with different cultures (Della Porta *et al.*, 2000; Melucci, 2000). If social research cannot neglect and ignore the social history of people, similarly there is no observation and understanding of human relations that can ignore the spaces through which people transit and live, considering the relationship with ourselves and with each other within the relation with the living space (Kern, 2007; Augè, 2009).

All element "make up" the broader concept of *culture*.

3. CONCLUSIONS

At the time of the first struggles of "sans papiers" (undocumented) migrants in France, Jacques Derrida affirmed that the migrant is a sort of key: an "outside" element "to the inside" that can only watch from the keyhole the society and the culture where he would like to be introduced, while he has already abandoned the comfortable pocket into which he had been cared for. With the metaphor of the key, Derrida presented the emigrant-immigrant as suspended in a limbo (that with the door that does not open) and bearer of a deep and double break: stranger twice, in his country of origin and in the country of adoption, he

does not belong to any places, he cannot deeply identify himself in either of the two cultures. Stateless, not by choice but by imposition, he is an evanescent figure, whose presence in the countries of immigration is measured simply in terms of a dreary accounting (on one hand, economic benefits determined by the presence of a worker without rights and, on the other hand, risks inherent in the presence of a representative of cultures "different" from each other). And, as added by the French philosopher, if in power the key is a bridge, an element able to connect two spaces otherwise closed and unconnected, in practice, in our falsely open societies, it becomes a rather uncomfortable sign of a bulky presence, witness of a permanent incapacity.

It was back in 1997. Derrida was speaking of that hospitality that France, a country historically of immigration, no longer seemed able to guarantee. While sensing the discomfort of a twofold inadequacy, his thoughts originated from a crucial assumption: the emigrant-immigrant-key had come to the threshold of the door and had to be welcomed. The door had to be open: the immigrant had made a choice and needed help to take off his condition of emigrant.

Spurred by the political necessity of the moment, Derrida went to ignore in his speech the other side of the coin: that of the society of origin, which, having suffered disruptions caused by the massive departure of its members reacted rejecting them, stigmatizing their absence as treason. Then, Darrida, and with him much of the more progressive European thinking, ignored the double negative connotation of the above-mentioned limbo: the immigrant-emigrant not only is not accepted in the country of immigration, but he is also rejected by the country of emigration and sentenced to an impossible mental schizophrenia between two equally hostile worlds. From this uniqueness of reflection resulted an undeniable gap, which marked and still mark most of the studies and representations of the phenomenon: so abundant is the literature on immigration, so insufficient, if not totally lacking, the literature on emigration.

Probably, the promotion of a transcultural habitus (*inter*- more than *multi*-) offers the possibility to our West to watch the otherness no longer as a threat, but as a potential asset. This consideration, which concludes this text, looks at the issue of migration "from below": it is not about ideologically avoiding to assess the phenomenon as an effect of the relationship between dominant and recessive, instead, much more modestly, it is about watching the migrant for what he deeply is:

my similar, who, just like me, is a "human being that needs help".

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