

THE INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS BETWEEN MULTICULTURALISM AND ASSIMILATION

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ABSTRACT

Over the last few decades, Italy has become a country of immigration, thus inverting the recent trend of its history. The country was found unprepared to face this change. Only recently, it has started to experiment new forms of acceptance and integration inspired by the concepts of multiculturalism and cultural interaction.

Migration policies cannot be implemented but in the wider context of the EU; the undertaken strategies have been inadequate so far and the phenomenon still tends to be socially perceived as a deviance.

Keywords: *Immigration, Assimilation, Multiculturalism, Deviance*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1980 Africa has been the continent which experienced the greatest increase in population (2.3 times), whereas Europe registered only a 7% increase. The migratory flows coming from Africa increased (Ministry for Job and Social policies, 2014) in absolute terms (from 350 to 500 thousands) as well as in relative terms (from 10% to 20%) and concerned primarily the African-European axe. A combination of elements contributed to the phenomenon. On the one side, the *pull* factors (OECD 2014), such as the availability of less attractive jobs (low skilled jobs or with few possibilities of career) refused by local workers, which persist in these years of crisis too (Ministry for Job and Social Policies, 2014; Ambrosini et al., 2015). On the other side, the *push* factors, such as the increase in population, conflicts, ethnic and religious wars, poor economies without perspectives, family reunifications. Europe has then become the first continent in terms of attractiveness for migrants (31.4% of world migration) with a total population of 34 million residents in a non-native European country (about 7% of the European population) and of 51 million immigrants living in a non-native Country (about 10% of the European population). Furthermore, Europe has become the first continent in terms of emigrants' impact on

the European population itself (UNAR, 2014). In 2013, most of resident European and non-European foreigners scattered over 5 countries. 3 countries share a common history of migration, i.e. Germany (7.7 millions), the United Kingdom (4.9 millions) and France (4.1 millions). 2 countries are relatively new to migration flows, i.e. Spain (5.1 millions) and Italy (4.9 millions), equal to 8.1% of the Italian population). In Italy, the resident population (Eurostat, 2014) has stayed the same whereas resident foreigners have increased over the period 2000-2013 with an average annual rate of 10%. Migrants to Italy (Ambrosini, 2014) come primarily from Romania, Albania, China and Ukraine, are predominantly European, female, Christian (orthodox) and are concentrated in the most developed regions of the country, with the number of minors that tripled over the period 2001-2014

(<http://demo.istat.it/strasa2015/index.html>) from 295 thousand to more than a million and 800 thousand foreign students, i.e. 9% of the total number of students¹. This scenario, in addition to the emergency on the Italian coasts where migrants arrive but also leave for other European countries, underlines the need of finding answers in Italy but in a coordinated European

¹Available online at:
<http://demo.istat.it/strasa2015/index.html>. Last access:
18 July 2015.

framework² as President Juncker underlined on the occasion of the speech on the State of the Union delivered on September, 9th 2015 before the European Parliament. Governments need to define policies and programs which are more adequate to the new social world.

2. EMIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION

Immigration has been on top of main political agendas, including the Italian one. Given its geographic position, immigration is an old and new social phenomenon. As suggested in the introduction, its scope - which could not be envisaged little time ago - leads to a series of interventions which cannot be just timely and sporadic, but should represent a new strategy and a new way of thinking what seems to be an exodus, a sort of incessant flow of “human flesh” in the hands of mean traffickers who satisfy illegally a need of escape of those who hope for a better – though uncertain – future. Nevertheless, Italy cannot and should not have a short memory when dealing with this tragedy. In the recent past, emigration was considered an economic, political and social need. In 1874 Leone Carpi underlined the economic aspect pointing at how migrants were almost farmers who felt obliged to leave because of their extreme conditions of poverty and pain caused by their lords’ tyranny (Carpi, 1874: 24). Therefore, the first migrants were farmers, and more specifically, as Franzina puts it, “peasants” (Franzina, 1998: 66). The expression was not depreciative, but it underlined a phenomenon starting from the countryside which seldom involved towns. As for the political and social aspect, we should remember that millions of people were allowed to leave their home country with the hope of a better life for them and their offspring. At that time, the journey was free; so, many people left for Brazil despite the many risks, dangers and surprises. It was at that moment that a former MP coming from Veneto decided to document all hardships encountered by migrants. He decided to share the journey with them. Thanks to the detailed report of Ferruccio Macola, we know that what happened in the past is not so different from what happens nowadays in Sicily or in other regions. “He wondered among the

wards – he notes – What a horror! We kept near to the walls. Here and there some repugnant materials covered the floor and made any movement dangerous. [...] I’ve never been able to figure out how so many human beings could live there for twenty or thirty or more nights with the pestilential fumes and the wet air; with the smell of bad digested or rejected food; with the unbearable smell of excrements; with the total absence of cleanness; maybe the sea had deprived all women and children of their strength to go out” (Macola, 1894: 93). The history of the Italian emigration, as the Ambassador Incisa di Camerana underlines (2003), lasted for three years ending in the late 1980s. From 1946 to 1972 the exodus towards industrialized countries interested more than 7 million Italians (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 1982). At present, we are assisting to a slow – though continuous - transformation which changes the demographic and migratory history of our society, now one of the most important havens for North Africans. Italy felt culturally and organizationally unprepared to this phenomenon which often turned in tragedy and was perceived first as a threat and a deviance to social and cultural organization.

3. POLICIES FOR MULTICULTURALISM AND INTEGRATION

In its Communication of May, 13th 2015 on the European Agenda for Migration, the European Commission has finally proved to be aware of the phenomenon having such a complexity that a “more European” approach is now needed. The engagement of a single Country, as in the case of Italy, is not enough to solve the problem in terms of hosting or deterrence to leave. Waiting to deal with the causes pushing to the exodus, and after experiencing the inadequacy of certain interventions meant to contain the emergency, the EU should adjust the immigration policy in order to answer the social pressure and terroristic threats.

It is about promoting and adopting new integration policies able to provide immigrants with an opportunity of inclusion in our aging societies characterized by a progressive demographic decline.

The industrialized countries previously concerned by immigration adopted first a policy of openness for workforce since migration was useful to the economic progress. Then, they started to control

²Available online at:
http://ec.europa.eu/italy/news/2015/20150909_discorso_sullo_stato_dellunione_it.htm. Last access: 10 September 2015.

arrivals. According to Marotta's analysis, governments did not manage to control this phenomenon because "[...] they allowed foreigners' exploitation on the basis of national needs, by choosing to keep or send back according to the labor market trend, without considering the psycho-social consequences on individuals as well as on the concerned communities" (Marotta, 1993).

Shortly, they did not consider a fundamental aspect, i.e. the family perspective of these immigrants who would have become real citizens in the host country as it happened in other countries where multiculturalism policies worked.

When governments decided to close frontiers, illegal traffic flourished, fueling illegal contacts in the labor market.

If we consider that this measure has already proved not to be appropriate and that countries cannot consider immigration as an independent variable of social economic conditions, it should be recognized that a concrete action is opportune, even if improvements will be visible in the long run (Di Liegro, 1993).

The European Community in its Resolution of November, 18th 1992 tried to coordinate migratory flows by harmonizing legislations on asylum applications. In April 1993, the European Community issued a new Resolution to condemn violence against immigrants and to adopt stricter norms in order to limit illegal arrivals and crimes in the host countries.

In July 1993, proof of the fact that the phenomenon was perceived in all its complexity, another Resolution was issued to have a common policy on migration to manage the access to the labor market, family reunifications and repatriations. The Italian Parliament approved law 40 of March, 6th 1998 with the aim of regulating what the EU Resolution had envisaged.

Although governments were willing to regulate immigration at a European level, the German chancellor Angela Merkel was ready to state that multiculturalism had completely failed (BBC on line, 2010).

For the English sociologist Anthony Giddens, multiculturalism is ruined by what normally the lack of culture and education generate in debates. To this regard, he maintains in a critic stance that "Instead of saying that multiculturalism failed in Germany, on in Europe, we should admit that we rather experimented it" » (2014: 133).

And he continues "Multiculturalism does not imply relative values where no standards exist to

judge claims on cultural activities. And it does not imply that we should accept or highlight the physical and moral barriers separating different communities. On the contrary, multiculturalism implies the daily pro-active approach to communities» (2014: 133).

Policies have been well implemented in Canada where they are seen as "a way to recognize the diversity of different lifestyles in a society, trying to promote fruitful exchanges in a general system of rights and duties descending from citizenship" (Giddens, 2007:143). Elsewhere they have been interpreted as a mere recognition of the presence of different cultural groups, therefore based on the concept of "cultural pluralism".

According to Kymlicka (2003), multiculturalism as a policy of social inclusion, is only possible by respecting three indispensable conditions. First, the construction of a public opinion that does not vanish when the first beneficiaries of policies are illegal aliens, considered as old foxes that do not respect the rules; second, the perceived economic aspect, i.e. that immigrants do not receive much money than what they can give back; third, the acceptance of the Islamic cultures and the possible terrorist drift and their multicultural inclusion.

Kymlicka takes into account the legislative, cultural, social, economic aspects with particular regard to the welfare system which is still object of discussion for the scarcer and scarcer resources there destined.

Canada meets all these three conditions with the lowest rate of illegal immigration, whereas Italy has the highest rate and an almost complete absence of multicultural policies (Giddens, 2007: 144).

The Canadian case can be explained by two essential factors, as previously analyzed by Charles Taylor (1994). First, the cultural preservation and dignity of lifestyles. Second, the understanding that interaction and exchange are the cornerstones of mutual respect.

It is evident that separated identities can no longer survive (Castles, 2002) in this new context and that the implementation of policies requires citizens' strong patriotism (Laborde, 2002).

Given the latest terrorist attacks and the precarious economic situation, it is hard to get concrete actions and results. Immigration is perceived as a threat for individuals and, more in general, for Western societies (Ambrosini, 2011). Multiculturalism triggers social fragmentation and tension.

Some examples in the opposite direction can be found in David Goodhart on the United Kingdom (2014) or in Thilo Sarrazin on Germany (2010) who discuss on the possibility to eliminate immigrants from solidarity networks and welfare systems.

Given the factors characterizing the present debate, Giddens wonders if it would be better to abandon the idea of multiculturalism and to define new policies on the basis of a new society where multiculturalism does not consist in “finding a place for foreign cultural groups, promoting the interaction among minorities, communities and host countries or reducing disparities, but in focusing on negotiation and dialogue in order to reconstruct public spaces actively” (Giddens, 2014: 139).

According to Zygmunt Bauman, one of the factors (2003) which impedes this debate is its limitedness to small élites whose task was to explore new horizons and invite masses to follow.

The alternative to multiculturalism which proved to be not enough to solve immigration problems is integration/assimilation. Integration is intended as social and economic integration which can foster immigrants’ inclusion and assimilation is seen under a cultural perspective including the linguistic as well as normative and ethic learning (Entzinger and Biezeveld, 2003).

In this case too, problems appear and slow down the process of integration. In 1800 the first obstacle was represented by race, now “the need for homogeneity as a premise for integration is no longer linked to race and language, but to religion” (Ambrosini, 2007: 218).

Religions, deeply rooted in immigrants’ identity, become a potential threat having an impact on the recognition of civil and political rights.

4. STRATEGIES OF INTERVENTION

We should investigate possible adequate interventions at a national level to tackle immigration problems.

Many solutions were proposed and tried in countries that were already concerned by the phenomenon such as France, Great Britain and Germany or the USA (Thomas, 1997). Solutions proved often not to be able to solve the problem.

The United States (Hirschman, 2004) adopted the “assimilation” concept which European countries translated into “integration” in a more flexible way

with particular emphasis on dialogue (Ambrosini, 2008).

The dialogic exchange seems to have led to a conflictual debate (Appadurai, 2013). Threats and terrorist actions fuel a growing suspicion against immigrants.

Unfortunately, governments did little when there were the right political and social conditions to bet on integration and interaction; nowadays, the international changes make integration policies difficult – or impossible – to implement. We should restart by understanding the true meaning of integration. For this reason, the present trend goes in the direction of a neo-assimilationist stance which engenders concepts such as “incorporation” or “inclusion” where immigrants have to adapt to the host country.

In this case the protagonist changes; the host society has the duty to incorporate migrants and not migrants who have to integrate. Purposes and processes stay the same (Ambrosini, 2007: a221).

This seems to be the best form of integration since it involves society and migrants in a context of openness and integration.

Migrants, for their part, have to learn the language and then the social code in order to enter the labor market (Entzinger, 1990). They keep their freedom on private life, food habits, traditional clothing and religious practices. Vincenzo Cesareo, who has been studying for years the phenomenon, says that “a more decisive normative harmonization and a better operational coordination among European Countries” is necessary if we want to implement the integration strategy (2013:44).

In December 2009, the European Union approved the Stockholm Program which launched the implementation of a single asylum procedure and a more adequate redistribution of immigrants across the Union. The strategy was conceived for supporting host countries such as Italy, Greece, Spain and Malta which, by their geographic position, are the first destinations of illegal immigration (Cesareo, 2013: 43).

The most delicate question however concerns the fundamental human rights. Which ones? Immigrants’ or residents’ ones? Italy seems to have violated immigrants’ fundamental rights since they were reporter to be “clumped” in Centers for Identification and Expulsion, deprived of human dignity.

Following what happened in France and the United Kingdom, fears for terrorism push Italians to mistrust immigrants and media contribute to this

feeling by accentuating the negative aspects of immigration.

For this reason, the idea of assimilation in our Country is plunging its roots and immigration is seen again as a “factor of turbulence in the social order” (Ambrosini, 2011: 350).

Public opinion is more and more convinced that immigrants should stick to the host country’s social practices, and let be assimilated, abandoning their cultural traits which tend to stigmatize them with relation to the resident population.

As Ambrosini puts it, it seems society is shifting from a liberal stance in which citizenship is a “way of integration” to a more conservative position in which citizenship is “a reward to integration” (2011:350).

The two solutions lead to opposite scenarios. The first would grant all rights even in absence of a full integration. The second would fuel marginalities, exclusion while waiting a recognition of something which is not promoted.

The lack of integration and the more complex management of illegal immigration which is the result of inadequate national interactionist policies (Ambrosini, 2011: 352) entails a generalized idea that immigration depends on social uncertainty (Cesareo, 2015) and establishes a direct association between foreigners and criminals.

This immediate association is contradicted in facts by a double political line. At a national level, the affirmation of the principles of cultural homogeneity; at a local level, a certain predisposition to negotiate with the representatives of ethnic communities about their social inclusion (Martiniello, 2000).

In facing the problems of urban population, immigration is not the right word. Instead, *diversity* seems to fit better since it underlines the main feature of this phenomenon (Ambrosini, 2013).

Social cohesion is nowadays the most appropriate expression and the purpose to follow in order to avoid conflicts which would lead to the erosion of the social order which need to be kept safe for the sake of the entire community.

To conclude, the words of the American philosophers Martha Nussbaum, who has been dealing with these issues for many years, are telling. “It is of the absolute priority to support efforts meant to educate citizens in order that they do not see what is different or extraneous as a threat, but as an invitation to explore and understand, to enlarge one’s views and predisposition” (2011: 336).

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