THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MIGRATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY. ASPECTS OF AN ACTUAL PROBLEMATICS

Iuliu-Marius Morariu
dr., Facultatea de Teologie Ortodoxă, Universitatea „Babeș-Bolyai" din Cluj-Napoca
(email: maxim@radiorenasterea.ro)

Abstract. *In this article, the author investigates an actual problematic, namely the one of the migration, that influenced the evolution of the contemporary society. He takes a look on the way how it is related the complex process generated by it with the cultural identity of the one who decide to become part of it. The investigation is an interdisciplinarry one and uses literature from spaces like the Romanian, English or Italian one in an atempt to highlight not only the sociological and the historical aspects of the migration process, but also the pshycological ones and to deepen the relevance that the problematic has for the social psychology.*

Key words: *migration, minority, culture, identiy, adaptation, religion, ethnicity.*

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Rezumat. *În acest articol se analizează o problemă actuală, aceea a migrației, care a influențat evoluția societății contemporane. Autorul aruncă o privire asupra modului în care este influențat procesul complex al migrației de identitatea culturală a celor care au decis să fie parte a ei. Analiza este una de tip interdisciplinar, și utilizează bibliografie din spațiul românesc, englez sau italian în încercarea de a sublinia nu doar aspectele sociologice și istorice ale procesului de migrație, dar și pe cele psihologice, spre a adânci relevanța temei pentru psihologia socială.*

Cuvinte cheie: *migrațiune, minorități, cultură, identitate, adaptare, religie, etnicitate.*

Introduction. Migration has been an important phenomenon in the history and evolution of the world[1]. It is relevant for both the religious and the economic space[2], the social, the psychological and so on. In the history of the world, some migratory waves have brought with them the interaction between cultures, the emergence of new peoples, the imposition of some cultures on others or the acceptance of common values.

Each age was characterized by its migrations and each migration had both positive and negative aspects. Ages that did not know the possibilities of movement and mobility like the contemporary ones have had migratory movements that marked the subsequent history of the whole of humanity. It is enough to take a look

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[1] Brenda J. Baker, Takeyuki Tsuda, *Migration and Disruptions: Toward a Unifying Theory of Ancient and Contemporary Migrations,* Gainesfille, Florida University Press, 2015, p. 15.
[2] Olha Kostyuk, *L'imprenditoria Immigrata in Italia*, în Oikonomia*, 20 (1), 2020, p. 9.

at the arrival in the European space of peoples from different Asian places (Huns, Goths, Gepis, Bulgarians), to understand how the society we live in is ontologically impressed by this phenomenon. Sometimes due to expansionist policies, sometimes following a crisis, sometimes due to cataclysms or people's desire to find better living conditions than they had, migration was therefore a complex phenomenon. Therefore, as the authors of an important contemporary encyclopedic dictionary point out, it has consequences both in terms of human life and in terms of the animal kingdom or geology. Regarding its impact on our species, it is important to underline the following distinctive aspects:

"1. Generally (as a biological or social phenomenon), any movement of individuals, mostly in groups, from a geographical area to another, determined by changes in environmental, demographic, physiological conditions, etc. Particularly: a. In the anthropological and social sciences, the movement of a population to areas other than that of origin, in which it is permanently established (unlike what happens in nomadism), due, since prehistoric times, to factors such as overpopulation, mutations climatic conditions, famines, territorial competition with other populations, search for better real or presumed living conditions, etc.; in sociology, with reference to more recent cultural, is the same as emigration"[3].

Conscious of the relevance of this process for the evolution of society, but also of the fact that, in recent years, due to problems of a religious, economic-socio-cultural nature, or due to resources, the migratory phenomenon has returned to the attention of the whole world[4], launching new challenges and generating discussion topics, we will try to dwell on its meaning in the following lines. We will investigate, on the basis of the existing recent literature[5], but also other bibliographic sources on which we had access to this complex element of the social history of humanity through the relationship between migration and cultural identity. We will try to bring to attention the multiple facets of the last element and to see what are the aspects that must be considered in contemporary discourse regarding the question considered.

Migration and cultural identity. In one article dedicated to the difference between personal identity and its many defining aspects and cultural identity,

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[3] See http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/migrazione/, accessed 01. 06. 2020.

[4] Therefore: "It is estimated that there are currently over 200 million migrants and refugees in the world, with a 50% increase in the last 35 years. And the growing trend is bound to continue", Antonino Urso, Teresa Di Bonito, *Migrazione: Etica Sociale e Accoglienza Psicologica*, în Oikonomia, 11 (1), 2014, p. 29.

[5] Such as Daniele Fedeli, *La Costruzione Identitaria in Età Evolutiva. Opportunità di Crescita e Rischi di Frantumazione*, în Oikonomia, XVII (1), 2018, pp. 7-9; Antonino Urso, Teresa Di Bonito, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-35; Idem, *Identità Personale e Identità Culturale*, în Oikonomia, XVII (1), 2018, pp. 10-14.

which is also of particular relevance, professors and psychologists Atonino Urso and Teresa di Bonito from Rome, defined the world as a polyhedron, emphasizing the complexity and more differences exist. The two then showed that: "with the model of the polyhedron all cultural, personal, ethnic, religious and sexual differences are overcome and respected"[6].

Starting from this statement, to which we fully subscribe, we would like to extend this definition to the idea of migration. In our opinion, the migratory phenomenon itself should be seen as a polyhedral three-dimensional geometric figure, the definition of which is very difficult. Because? Because although it focuses on population mobility, it can embody many forms. A simple look at the recurrence of the term can be very helpful in understanding this problem. Therefore, migrants are considered both those who leave their place of origin to work and those who take refuge due to life-threatening dangers. Migrants can be considered after they have passed a certain period of stay in the territory of another country, or they can be considered as soon as they have entered that territory, depending on certain factors[7]. The term is therefore complex and benefits from many nuances.

An extremely important element both for its understanding and for the dynamics of the migration phenomenon, which has seen an upward trend in recent years, is identity. Defined by Daniele Fedeli according to the four fundamental characteristics, respectively: uniqueness, coherence, continuity and evolution[8], identity contains both aspects that can be correlated with ontological data and the evolution of the person, his quality to be self-taught, adaptable or self-efficacious[9]. Therefore, as the Italian researcher cited above points out: "... the construction of identity is the result of the continuous interaction between personal dimensions, often also of a neurobiological type (for example the temperamental characteristics of the child such as inhibition, which can lead him more easily towards identity representations based on attitudes of shyness, confidentiality, etc.), and social dimensions (eg. educational messages from parents, peer pressure, models conveyed by the media, etc.)"[10].

There are therefore mobile and mobile elements that contribute to the construction and definition of identity, it is not entirely a concept that does not allow changes. True, the fundamental aspects relating to cultural heritage[11] and the values that often contribute to its definition have a perennial character, but social

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[6] Antonino Urso, Teresa Di Bonito, *op. cit.*, în Oikonomia*, XVII (1), 2018, p. 10.

[7] World Council of Churches, în *Who Do We Say That We Are? Christian Identity in a Multi-Religious World*, Geneva, World Council of Churches Publications, 2016, p. 8.

[8] Daniele Fedeli, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[9] A. Bandura, *Autoefficacia: Teoria e Applicazioni*, Trento, Erickson Press, 1997, *passim.*

[10] Daniele Fedeli, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[11] Antonino Urso, Teresa Di Bonito, *op. cit.*, în Oikonomia*, XVII (1), 2018, p. 12.

interactions, the desire for adaptability or other aspects of social relevance, can cause the reconfiguration of similar problems.

Furthermore, although identity is generally private as an individual fact, there is also a form of collective identity. In some spaces, given the fact that it was used in nationalist or ethnocratic currents[12], it gained negative accents and was seen as a prerogative of far-right movements. However, collective identity is a complex cultural construct, relevant for fields such as politics, social psychology, religion or history, as a way to manifest the quality of the human being and express his originality in a community. Thus, as professors Antonino Urso and Teresa di Bonito observe: "Identity, however, is not only a characteristic belonging to the individual: it can also be proper to a specific community, as well as to the whole of society. In fact, individual and society are in reciprocal dual relationship: society participates in the construction of each person's identity, while the individual contributes to transforming society, understood in its declinations of institutions, organizations and groups"[13].

Due to the fact that the identity is directly related to the defining patterns of the individual, being the one that suffers from more than one process of social reintegration, we believe that the migratory phenomenon cannot be understood without it. All the more so in a society increasingly characterized by the concealment of important social practices[14], in which loneliness can launch challenges whose chronicity has devastating effects.

The migration, whatever it is its cause, carries many challenges. Whether he leaves his country to study, work or escape the dangers that threaten his existence, the one who ends up having this status as a migrant, has had to face some pressures, to try to integrate into the new context, social, cultural, sometimes academic to which it belongs and to learn (a new language, local customs, etc.). Also, he has to find the financial resources to keep himself in the new space, which in many cases is quite difficult. In many cases, he is viewed with reluctance or even rejection. All these aspects lead the aforementioned psychologists to declare that: "The emigration is certainly one of the circumstances of life that most expose the person to forms of psychic disorganization; however, where the individual possesses sufficient cognitive processing skills, he will be able to overcome the crisis

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[12] For the Romanian context see, for example: Nichifor Crainic, *Ortodoxie și Etnocrație*, Bucharest, Cugetarea Publishing House, 1930, *passim*.

[13] Antonino Urso, Teresa Di Bonito, *op. cit.*, în Oikonomia, XVII (1), 2018, p. 11.

[14] As professors Urso and Di Bonito underline: "The contemporary society appears to be profoundly marked by social and cultural practices that have produced not only the weakening of those bonds that derive from the sense of belonging and participation in collective life, but also - as the final result of the progressive destruction of the psychological sense of community - isolation, anomie, segregation [...]. Contemporary society appears to be profoundly characterized by social and cultural segregation", Antonino Urso, Teresa Di Bonito, *op. cit.*, în Oikonomia, XVII (1), 2018, p. 12.

and may even take it as an opportunity for «rebirth»: the old man immerses himself entirely in the baptismal font to re-emerge as a new man, in a sort of "re-creation"[15].

The adaptation involves, as in other cases, the adoption of a mask[16]. Man is polite, he changes certain behaviors, sometimes in depth, sometimes only in an apparent way. Morphopsychology can be an advantage or a disadvantage for him, along with the way he is willing to fit into the new culture and assume its values (which can sometimes be different from those of the culture he comes from, or even contradict that culture). This is obviously possible for adults. But what happens to children who are part of a migration process, brought by their parents to a foreign country? As the specialists point out: "A small children still does not know very well who he is (it's a kind of small chaos); in search of his own identity, he begins to connote himself and mean himself, reflecting himself in the look and behavior of his parents, based on their expectations: we could say in based on the masks that his father or mother make him wear, when he is not yet able to define and express his identity[17].

Parental influence is therefore very important and learning is achieved, up to a certain age, through imitation. Therefore, children will generally do what they see their parents doing. This makes the whole problem easier for a parent who is adaptable. Yet, migration means leaving your home, your land, your friends, moving away from people and places that had become part of a daily routine and that were proof of the stability of life. It means, in a word: eradicate. This can have dramatic and long-term consequences on the psyche of those going through these processes. This explains why some migrants remain unintegrated throughout their lives, often positioning themselves on the social periphery, on the border with the law or even becoming delinquents (their children are perhaps the ones who manage to fit into the new context), while others, out of desire to integrate and not to be rejected, almost denies his roots, refuses to speak his language and even changes his name, in order to somehow lose their ethnic trace (as Romanian, I have encountered such cases in Spain and in Italy). Different attitudes are testimonies of different characters and different ways of adaptation.

Furthermore, when the migration phenomenon is preceded by a long journey, dissensions can even occur between immigrants from a single group. In many situations, migrants settle into compact ethnic groups once they reach their destination. When the general perception of a certain ethnic group is fairly homogeneous among the populations in which they want to take root, graft (in

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[15] *Ibidem*, p. 14.
[16] Carl Gustav Jung, *Opere Complete,* Volumul 16*,* Bucharest, Trei Press, 2013, p. 13.
[17] Antonino Urso, Teresa Di Bonito, *op. cit.*, în Oikonomia*,* XVII (1), 2018, p. 10.

general, the connotation being, in such situations, negative), conflicts can also arise between them, generated by the desire of some no longer be perceived in terms of stereotypes that people have of their own group or of the desire of some to emancipate themselves. Sometimes, as experts point out, the reasons may be different. As Prof. Urso and Prof. Di Bonito underline: "Very often, long separations, but also reunions, are a source of great tensions for the immigrants. These events, in fact, impose a difficult period in which we must recognize others, even very close relatives, we must try to reconstruct the contact and of the relationship between people who, although linked by kinship or great affection, have nevertheless traveled a part of the journey alone and distant from their native environment, towards an intercultural pragmatics: the expression and interpretation of psychological distress immigrants"[18].

In the light of these aspects, it is hardly surprising that the social integration process is often accompanied by many challenges for government agencies, but also for therapists in areas such as psychology. Social experiments such as those conducted by Milgram and Zimbardo[19] have shown how important context is in personality formation and modeling and how relevant social feedback is in the development of a given behavior. In the case of migrants, especially those who have chosen this status due to imminent dangers, the psychological impact is very strong. Therefore, as a contemporary researcher points out: "Psychological assistance to migrants is certainly a difficult undertaking and, due to the hinted complexity of the coexisting problems, requires multiple training and specializations. The same clinical relationship is not presented as a simple contact between two individuals, but contains a bridge between two worlds, each of which reproduces its knowledge, personal beliefs and individual expectations![20].

The phenomenon of migration is therefore complex and poses many challenges, both for historians and economists (who come to talk about the benefits it entails and the dangers it can represent), psychologists or the state, as an organism called to manage it. In addition, it has specific elements that define each social category, the age of the person passing through it, the sex (because for women it involves, for example, more problems than for men, they are often put in the starting situation not only the house and parents, but also children and taking great risks, including loss of life; moreover, women are more vulnerable than men).

Beyond all these elements, however, there can be also found positive aspects. Among the consequences of migration, namely the displacement of the population, both individually and within the community, we must also talk about

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[18] *Ibidem.*

[19] P. Zimbardo, *L'effetto Lucifero: Cattivi si Diventa?*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2008, *passim*.

[20] Antonino Urso, Teresa Di Bonito, *op. cit.*, în Oikonomia, XVII (1), 2018, p. 10.

the positive aspects such as the interaction between cultures, the resolution of certain economic, demographic or other problems. Therefore, it must be seen as a complex and versatile phenomenon. Furthermore, there is always a land that is poor and enriched by the migratory phenomenon. Sometimes the depletion of a space can only be temporary and short-lived. An example of this can be considered the great migratory wave in America, which began in the nineteenth century and ended in some countries at the beginning of the First World War, in others with the onset of the Second World War.

From countries like Italy, Romania[21], the Habsburg Empire, but also from other places, many people then took the road to the "Promised Land". Some forced by some ethnic and religious persecution (because of the latter they also left those on Mayflower), others out of desire to earn money and others out of knowledge. They all had economic aspects as their motivations. Their departure, at some point, impoverished the countries they had left behind. Since they had relatives left at home, after a while, they started sending money to them, and this brought an often-large monetary influx into the economy of their home countries. Therefore, migration had therefore, as often happens today, an economic relevance for the countries from which it originated. It was also important to the countries they had come to because they benefited from the workforce. Often those who left were qualified in various fields, which also brought numerous benefits from this point of view.

On a cultural level, the migratory phenomenon is characterized by the interaction between people from different spaces and cultures. While at first glance this could give rise to a true "clash of civilizations"[22] and could bring with it real challenges in defining identity, it generally produces enrichment. In relation to people who often think and interact differently, man often comes to clearly define his own identity and to enrich himself by understanding the identity of the other, being the relationship, despite all the difficulties, what could be defined by the win-win relationships.

Conclusions. As we have tried to show in this research, the phenomenon of migration, which has recently experienced an increase in intensity, is complex and its analysis poses many challenges for both the political and sociological space or for the religious space (because every culture based on ethics and often ethics are influenced by religious principles).

In the process of understanding the meaning of migration, a special element is played by an element that we have stopped on, namely identity.

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[21] Şerban Drutzu, *Românii în America,* Bucharest, Casa Editrice Casa Românească, 1926, *passim*.
[22] Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* în Foreign Affairs*, LXXII (3), 1993, p. 22.

Combining aspects related to heredity, culture and social interaction and having a determining element that cannot be changed (consisting of strongly rooted principles) and one whose modification depends on integration in the new context and coexistence, identity that which can facilitate the success of the migration process, or can contribute to its failure. As we have tried to demonstrate, although it includes challenges of an economic, cultural, social or psychological nature (psychological counseling of a migrant is often more complicated than that of a simple person who is part of a therapeutic process, due to the complexity of the migratory phenomenon itself and how it affects his mental state), migration often contributes to the definition of one's identity through its capitalization in a context of otherness. At the same time, it has beneficial effects because, by following the interaction between cultures, all cultural funds, as well as individuals, can become rich and learn new things.

Overcoming the difficulties of adaptation is often a real challenge. The fear of exclusion, which can sometimes give rise to coping mechanisms close to delinquency, can be dangerous. Yet, in many situations, once these difficulties have been overcome, migration becomes an aspect that has a beneficial impact on both the individual and society, both economically and culturally, psychologically or spiritually. In addition, overcoming obstacles psychologically strengthens the individual and transforms him into a person capable of facing new challenges.

In conclusion, we can say that the phenomenon of migration is complex one, and it can have both negative and positive consequences and that in its understanding and in the success of a social integration that it would be desirable to follow, identity plays a very important role.