CHANGES AND PRESERVATION TRENDS IN THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF IMMIGRATION

Anița Grigoriu, Assist., PhD, ”Spiru Haret” University of Bucharest

Abstract: This study is focused on the way in which cultures interact. Most of the times, communities play the role of lifebelts for the generations of immigrants, therefore those who, once uprooted from their culture of origin, seek for their own identity. However, the process is time consumimg. The countries in which the immigrants come have got their own cultures, and because of this, each community hosts the newcomers in its own way. The research highlights the extent to which immigrants preserve the traditions and customs of the country of origin.

Keywords: culture, identity, globalisation, migration, cultural traditions

Introduction

Currently, a large number of people live outside their country of origin as a result of the globalization process. Many immigrants fear that their children will assimilate the traditions and customs in their new country and that they will lose connection with their cultural identity. Carola Suárez-Orozco (2008: 18), author of numerous studies targeting the impact of migrations on identity, often wonders how people can learn the history of the group and of their culture when that group is scattered all around the world and if the rituals, the memories and the stories once told by the parents to their children manage to replace an entire actual community. In the attempt to answer, the author finds that for the newcomers, the ability to develop an identity which allows for a flow of culture exchange between the world in the family of origin and the new place is a primordial task to adapt. For those who live in different cultures, the best approach is to develop a "cosmopolite approach" (idem, p.111), including a feeling of belonging to a global culture of inclusion.

The customs, the memories and the stories told by the parents to their children are meant to strengthen certain beliefs, but they cannot replace an entire actual community. For the first generation of immigrants arriving in the country as adults, the identity is deeply rooted in their place of birth. However, for the second generation, the route to integration in that society is far simpler and more accessible than for the first generation given that the former have developed sets of values and norms very close to those existing in the society in which they are raised.

Theoretical background

Often, globalization is seen as a threat to identities. "Globalization questions alliances and identities, sometimes crushing (especially in case of underdeveloped structures or societies), but also strengthening them. With it being a threatening process but also stimulating identities, we can say that it has Janusian features" (Rusu, 2008: 32-33). In order to argue this statement, the author gives the examples of the almost incessant wars in the name of resources which, although devastating, did not bring down the oil owning nations but determined them to come out with a new collective action: terrorism. Just like the person who can travel to any corner of the world: this is not just a win for the transport companies, but also an incentive to difference and a revival of the local identities. Migration affects

significantly the individual and collective identities and creates new identities. That is why noticing in due time the transformation of an identity, either inside or outside a nation, is very useful.

"The Culture of Immigrants", concept presented in depth by Denys Cuche, almost always equals to the "original culture" of the immigrants, i.e. of their country of origin. This is characterized by habits concerning food, clothes, religion, social matters whose deep meaning cannot be noticed, but "which allow the immigrant to be identified as an immigrant, to invoke his/her origins" (Cuche, 2003: 158). As stated by Denys Cuche, the origin national culture is defined as an invariable culture, with little evolution.

Usually, the countries where the immigrants come from encounter professional changes in various fields: economic, social, political and, implicitly, cultural. This is why the immigrant cannot be seen as representative of his/her culture or of his/her original community because he/she is outside the cultural evolution of his/her country and community. Cuche says that irrespective of the efforts made to remain faithful to their culture of origin, the immigrants will always lag behind the changes that occurred in their absence. This is "one of the major problems of immigrants coming back to their country: they no longer recognize it, because it changed so much, often more from a cultural perspective than from a material one" (idem, p. 157). This is why returning home is no longer a reason of joy, of reliving/finding their own self, because the country is a foreign place, different from the one they knew and which takes time to readapt.

Indeed, currently there are great differences between cultures which, naturally, lead to cultural anachronisms and sometimes to the extreme of excluding, disfavouring and, eventually, hating the other. In order to relax relations between people, a new approach is needed for the human dialogue. The desire to know and better understand the others, tolerance and respect toward strangers are merely a few of the ingredients with the help of which people, if they used them, could solve many of the conflicts born from cultural differences.

In this line, Chen and Starosta point out that "the development of greater intercultural under-standing and intercultural communication competence is an essential part of human life in the contemporary age" (2008: 216).

Modern societies are characterized by a high level of cultural diversity which jeopardizes traditions and this led Ulf Hannerz to state that "mankind said farewell to the world that could be seen a mosaic of the cultures, made of separate pieces, with well-traced borders" (1992: 125). Nevertheless, globally, there is a series of paradoxes (Boaca, 2009: 67-68): in Asia, Middle East, Africa and Latin America there is evidence of cultural syncretism and hybridization of ideas but also of stating ethnic, religious and cultural differences.

Case study - Romanian immigrants in Italy

For the case study, I have selected the situation of Romanian immigrants in Italy who are currently the largest community of resident foreigners in the Peninsula, about 1 million, according to www.istat.it. As research method, I used the face-to-face questionnaire, taken during March 9th – March 30th 2012, in Lazio, Italy, officially known for its large number of Romanian immigrants, with a sample of 305 subjects, adults (18 years old and over), outside institutions, living in Italy for at least one year, other than for tourism.

The national culture of Romanian immigrants in Italy is preserved by their statements according to which they keep specific Romanian traditions (stated by 79% of the respondents) and that they go to an Orthodox church (57%). Thus, 79% of the respondents believe Romanian folk traditions to be important and very important, circa 6% of the respondents believe they are more or less important and 13% - of little or very little importance.

Their answers are corroborated by a series of variables targeting the level of importance toward traditional costumes, folk music, fairs and exhibitions of folk objects, believed to be very important by most Romanians in Italy. Thus, over 71% of the respondents believe that the Romanian traditional costumes are important or very important, 15% believe they are more or less important, while circa 14% believe the traditional costumes to be of little and very little importance. Furthermore, from the total respondents, 70% believe that Romanian folk music is important and very important. For 15% of the respondents, folk music is more or less important, while for another 15% it is of little or very little importance. The fairs and exhibitions of Romanian folk objects are important and very important for 50.2% of the respondents.

How important is:	Very important	Important	More or less important	Less important	Not important	DK/NA	Total
1. Romanian traditional costumes	32.8%	38.4%	15.1%	9.8%	3.9%	0	100%
2. Romanian folk music	41%	28.5%	15.1%	9.5%	5.9%	0	100%
3. Romanian folk traditions	38.7%	40.3%	5.9%	7.2%	5.9%	2%	100%
4. Fairs/exhibitions of Romanian cultural objects	25.6%	24.6%	11.5%	16.4%	18.7%	3.3%	100%

Table no. 1. Summary table with the allocation of respondents depending on how important they believe to be Romanian traditional costumes, Romanian folk music, Romanian folk traditions and fairs/exhibitions of Romanian cultural objects.

The data gathered from the field research on appreciating Romanian traditional costumes, folk music, traditions and fairs, exhibitions with Romanian cultural objects show that respondents believe Romanian traditions to be very important (79%), with the smallest percentage of respondents who appreciate fairs/exhibitions of Romanian cultural objects (50.2% important and very important).

Most Romanian emigrants in Italy (75%) communicate more in Romanian within their families, while 18.4% in Romanian and Italian and circa 5% more in Italian. Most respondents state to have learned Italian while living in Italy (91.5%), whereas only 3.9% state to have studied it in Romania, prior to emigrating, motivated by the need to find their way in their jobs, in the society and life all together. Knowing the language can be an indicator of the high level of integration of Romanians in the Italian society.

Most respondents (52.1%) state that at home they cook both specific Romanian dishes and Italian ones, 46.6% only cook Romanian and 1.3% only cook Italian. Romanian products can be found in most of the over 400 shops owned by Romanians. Moreover, Eastern Rome has the largest commercial warehouse of "Made in Romania" products all over Italy. The commercial warehouse belongs to Florin Simon, from Bacau, considered to be the most successful emigrant businessman in Italy in 2012, but also the first Romanian in Rome to open a shop with traditional food products.

Romanian products can be found in Italy in the over 400 stores owned by Romanians, but can also be ordered online. Pravaliadeacasa.ro targets Romanians in the Diaspora and it is the first online shop to trade authentic Romanian products. The www.pravaliadeacasa.ro website hosts over 800 items "Made in Romania", including books, handicraft objects, food, beverages, clothes, ceramics, Christian icons, movies, music etc. Some of the nostalgic products such as: "Buzau Pretzels", "wallnut jam", "Romanian Muscatel" or the famous "Amintiri din copilarie" (t.n.: "Childhood Memories") by Ion Creanga can be easily purchased online by the Romanians in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Great Britain, USA, Canada and Israel, at the initiative of the Romanian Ovidiu Sandor.

The analysis of Romanian communities in Italy regarding religious belief, according to the field research, shows that 96.7% of the subjects state to be Orthodox, 2% Catholic and 1.3% other cults. More than half (57%) of the Romanians abroad state to be church-goers, while 39% of the respondents state that they are not in the habit of going to church. The overwhelming majority of Orthodox believers on the Italian territory have a great influence on this cult in a country where for ages the Roman-Catholic belief has had a very important role. As gratitude to the Romanian Orthodox Church's concern toward the Romanians left abroad, for work or study, but who return home in August to spend their summer holiday, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church decided that the first Sunday after the *Dormition of the Mother of God*, celebrated on August 15th, to celebrate the "Sunday of Romanian Emigrants". The constant communication between the Mother Church and the emigrants is very important for preserving the cultural, ethnic and orthodox ecclesial identity.

The support of family, friends or strangers is very important in the immigrant's decision to stay abroad or to return home. Almost all Romanian immigrants (92.8%) say that they visit often their co-nationals in neighbouring areas, which can indicate both a rich presence in Italy, but also a concentration on areas of the Romanian community.

53.4% of Romanians in Italy meet other Romanians over a meal, stating their hospitality but also that they are friends with other Romanians in the same situation, and so they visit each other and have meals together. Other answers: in church (3%), at shows (1.6%), while 36.7% of the Romanians stated that they meet in other circumstances (public transportation, on the street, while shopping, "all over", as some respondents put it), showing that they live in large communities, concentrated in areas. 5.2% of the respondents did not provide an answer.

When asked "How do you feel as a Romanian among strangers?", opinions differ. They vary from proud to be a Romanian, to denying being one all together. Thus, 31.8% of the subjects state to be proud to be Romanian, 10.2% say they are ashamed to be Romanian, 55.7% are neither proud, nor ashamed to be Romanian, while 2.3% did not answer. Negative answers such as "ashamed to be a Romanian" stem from reprehensible actions that certain co-

nationals perpetrate on the Italian territory. Also, excessive media coverage of crimes in the Peninsula, caused by Romanian, has damaged the overall image of Romanian immigrants, the association to the criminals being inevitable most of the times.

The attitude of Romanians in Italy toward their co-nationals was checked by the following question: "If someone said nasty things about Romanians, would you fight back?" 71.8% of the respondents say they would take a stand if someone talked nasty about Romanians, while 24.9% said they would not do anything, probably due to the reasons above, and 3.3% did not answer.

Nonetheless, the high percentages indicating taking a stand express a strong feeling of solidarity of Romanians in Italy, but also a feeling of belonging to one's people.

Conclusions

In general, we can say that Italy is a society that favours both the development of specific identities and intercultural communication, without affecting the locals or the newcomers. Moreover, specific elements of Romanian culture (language, religion, traditions and customs) are appreciated by most Romanian immigrants in Italy.

Thus, the results of the survey indicate a preservation of the national identity outside the country's boundaries, within the community of Romanians in Italy, especially due to the fact that they speak their mother tongue and that they keep traditions and customs.

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