
CONSEQUENCE OF MIGRATION ON CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

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Abstract: Mobility, migration of people, has been and is always in the attention of the liable factors, but also of researchers. One of the multiple perspective considered when addressing and analysing this phenomenon is that relating to the cultural and religious consequences of migration. This article aims at analyzing both the preservation of the cultural and religious identity of migrants at the place of destination and the tendency to enrich such identity until reaching assimilation of the cultural and religious traditions of the majority population. The wide area of migration also includes the case of the Romanian migrants in Lazio area, Italy, who, according to analysts, attest the manner in which they express their cultural and religious identity and adjust such identity, to a smaller or greater extent, in the area where they live and work.

Keywords: culture, religion, identity, assimilation, migration.

1. Introduction

Migration is a consequence, a product, or even a cause of the economic and social phenomena characteristic to the countries receiving migrants or to their countries of origin. The presence and the number of migrating persons vary to a significant degree. If an extended crisis can deflate migration, an economic boom can support such phenomenon. We can see migrants in the most varied scenarios. They leave footprints everywhere: at the bus terminals, on the ships crossing from the South to the North of the Mediterranean Sea – by means of improvised networks – in the hallways of the police departments, in hospitals, schools, tribunals and, lastly, at work.

Making the most of the sensational and in search of audience, mass media does not miss the opportunity to analyse migration whenever they get the chance. But what is it that makes this phenomenon to be so striking? What makes these persons different from the rest of the people? Is there a certain acceptable behaviour in the case of migrants?

Some migrants have a skin color which is a little different and speak a language completely unknown to locals. Others wear clothes and eat food never seen before, and listen to music somewhat strange to the ears of the locals. Most of the time, migrants have a different religion, and, should they belong to the same denomination, they have strikingly different liturgical traditions and they express themselves differently. People say about them that they speak a lot and loud, and even that they have a specific body odor.

Finally, summarizing the experiences in the name of civilization and progress of the 20th century, I. Sarbu, Romanian philosopher and writer, states in his work, *Adio Europa*: “Not every change means transformation, not every transformation means development, not every development means progress; not every progress leads to civilization, not every

civilization means kindness. And not even all kindness is always right, nor any justice is always democratic or of value: values, too, may not lead to kindness, light, salvation.”¹

Next, we will analyze the manner in which waiving the *identity* of the common heritage in the name of principles specific to postmodernism influenced the relations between the people in destination countries and the migrant flows. Considering that, in the specialty literature, the influence of cultural and religious phenomena on migration interferes in some areas; we will not address this issue now, but in the relevant subsections. Furthermore, we will also present the manner in which the above phenomena prevent or promote the assimilation of migrants, as well as their role in the public policies on integration.

1. Culture, Religion, Identity

2.1 Culture

The identity of a group or a nation is connected to its own culture. Culture includes a number of models, of behavioral norms transmitted within society, expressions of art and mythology, beliefs and other forms of thought and human activity. Culture can bring people together and it can separate them, as we will see in the following two examples.

The first example is provided by A. Bloom, taken from the American culture, preceding the Cultural Revolution of the second half of the 20th century.

“Practically speaking, in the U.S., the Bible was the only common culture that brought together the simple and the educated, the poor and the rich, the young and the old, and – as a real model for a vision of all things, and as a the key to the whole art of the Western world, along with other great works that, in one way or another, are a replica of the Bible – provided access to serious reading. Gradually, its disappearance leads to the disappearance of the very idea of such a comprehensive book, and the possibility and need for explanations about how to understand the world. Fathers and mothers lost sight of the fact that the highest aspiration that could have for their children was for them to be wise, similarly to priests, prophets and philosophers. Competence and success is everything they can imagine. Contrary to popular belief, lack of education implies the loss of the idea of an order of things as a whole. Nowadays, parents no longer enjoy the moral and legal authority that they had in the Old World. They lack self-confidence, as educators of their children, the belief that children will be better than their parents not only with respect to wealth, but also to their intellectual, moral and physical abilities. There is always a belief more or less open to progress, thus leading to considering the past more modest and looked at in a patronizing manner. Future cannot be predicted by parents; it overshadows the past that they perceive as inferior.”²

The second example, specific to European culture, is presented by Andrei Pleșu and it represents the status of the Romanian society at the end of the communist regime. Andrei Pleșu presents the intellectual as manager of the cultural phenomenon. In communist Romania, as well as in the rest of Europe, intellectuals have an ingrate position as they serve the state. Their assessment and appreciation do not constitute a transparent process on the cultural product market; they are compensated and appreciated by a surplus of ministers of culture.

¹ Sârbu, I. D., *Adio Europa*, Ed. Corint, Bucharest, 2005.

² Bloom, A., *The closing of the American mind*, Ed. Simon & Schuster Inc., New York, p. 55.

“How can one be a man of culture today? Obviously, the question is the result of a latent dissatisfaction, of the feeling that it is hard, and sometimes impossible, to be a man of culture; specifically, one cannot extract sufficient power, enough doctrine from cultural values, so as to face in a respectable manner the current life situations, not to mention extreme situations. Probably just like you, I have noticed two things over time: first, it happens that, in extreme situations, culture does not help: you are having a hard time and you find that nothing that you read can provide you some support, that your readings are pure literature, a shelf full of books without any existential efficiency: you can not rely on any author. You feel the need of another resort to support you; you feel the need to take from another field even the energy to keep doing culture. There is, therefore, a precariousness of culture when it comes to extreme situations.”³

To a certain extent, the phenomenon can be accounted for by the fact that cultural information is only shared by a minority, a minority that has nothing to do with the actual life. Intellectuals' life is characterized by the frustration of the French education system, which, according to Gustave Le Bon's *Psihologia multimilor*, focuses on general knowledge. Compared to the situation described by Alan Bloom on the role of the Bible as a cultural vehicle and liant, European civilization encouraged a segregationist and elitist system which separates the intellectuals from the half-intellectuals, thereby causing frustration for some and resentment for others. The situation was fully used during the communist regime, in order to control and isolate the two categories.

2.2 Religion

Religion is considered from the perspective of an always closer relationship to the cultural phenomenon. Similar to philosophy, religion provides an answer to human's quests, to the questions about the order of things in the world, the phenomena which are difficult to explain, the origin of the universe. However, while philosophy resorts to the human intellect, religion has a revelatory character. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church,⁴ God, in his love, revealed himself and offered himself to man. Thus, he provided a comprehensive and final answer to man's questions on its existence and on the meaning and purpose of life. The Catechism states that all religions present man's essential search for God.

Church, an institution introduced with Pentecost, reserves the universal mission of spreading the Gospel (the good news). Thus, we witness the so-called “multicultural phenomenon”, as the Apostles, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, address the crowds in their languages. As an institution with a dual nature, *i.e.*, divine and human at the same time, the Church has been and is constantly subject to cultural pressures and, at the same time, it has had and still has a strong influence on culture. Taking possession of and passing on the legacy of the Greek and Roman culture in the early second millennium, the Church founded the higher education system. Since the Middle Ages, its contribution was significant also when it comes to primary education, by the organization of parish schools. Following the Second Vatican Council, the pressure caused by the evolution of society determined the Church to thoroughly look into this phenomenon and to adopt significant new measures with respect to liturgy. One of these measures concerns the celebration of the liturgy in vernacular.

³ Pleșu, A., *Minima moralia*, Ed. Humanitas, Bucharest, 1994.

⁴ See *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice*, Ed. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993.

Generally speaking, religious world is subject to remarkable cultural pressures coming from the secular world. The latter enjoys financial resources and the resources of the media, as well as the contribution of the academic world and of the political class. We also need to mention the pressure coming from religious organizations close to proselytism, especially in Latin America (Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico). Other pressures also come and State. For example, in U.S., the public health insurance law adopted in 2010 (ACA - *Affordable Care Act* or *Obama Care*) requires employers with a confessional nature (universities, hospitals, NGOs, etc.) to support the expenses of their female employees for “reproductive health” (abortion pills, birth control pills).

Furthermore, cultural pressures also come from the so-called sexual minorities, feminist movements, families formed of remarried persons and of persons living in free partnership (common-law marriage). All these suggest new forms, such as acceptance by the church of abortion, ordination of women, granting Holy Communion to divorced persons, couples living together outside of marriage. These trends of acceptance or rejection of the “new” – which are the result of the cultural trends that dominate and influence the society – are carefully monitored and are speculated in the media; they divide the church leaders in “conservatives” or “liberal”, according to their orientation.

Migrating persons are more exposed to cultural pressures caused by the phenomenon of secularization, and consequently, to a more reduced practice of religion in the destination countries. This is why the church leaders pay much attention to migration, establishing a pastoral function for this phenomenon.

2. Culture in the Process of Migration

Cultural phenomena have a decisive role in shaping public life. Events with high emotional impact, induced by facts and intensified by media, can influence economic and political decisions. Therefore, decisionmakers in pluralist countries take into account these phenomena. Migration process is influenced by the public, the latter acting in a volatile manner and not always according to reality. Conflicts in relation to migration are often at cultural level and are the result of the opposition of different identities. This leads to the tendency of preserving national identity which, as Herder said, lies in traditional culture.⁵

National identity is, as Francis Fukuyama, political scientist, stated, a social concept;⁶ it revolves around its own symbols, national history, collective myths, national heroes, and the theme on history accepted by the public. This type of religion, a secular religion in which God plays a more or less important role depending on the country we are referring to, provided support in preserving the national identity, and even won battles in wars. Romanian states also managed throughout history to preserve what is most valuable and to assimilate migration flows, using this identity as cultural shield.

These national values need to become fully familiar to new citizens. To this end, Francis Fukuyama states: “In some countries, especially in Germany, the history of the 20th century made it difficult to talk about national history, and this dialogue has to be readdressed

⁵ Herder, G. Johann, *Idei cu privire la istoria omenirii*. Retrieved from https://ro.scribd.com/doc/32022748/Johann-Gottfried-von-Herder-Idei-cu-privire-la-istoria-omenirii#force_seo, 30.11.2014, ora 5.30 PM.

⁶ Fukuyama, F., *Identity and migration*. Retrieved from <http://tria.fcampalans.cat/images/onidentity.pdf>, 19.11.2014, ora 11.52 AM.

in light of the new diversity in Europe. If local people do not value their country enough, then European countries will have difficulties in asking newcomers to value them.”⁷

When they reached decline, the great empires erected earth walls over distances of thousands of kilometers to protect themselves from invasion. Nowadays, because of the migration phenomenon, many believe that identity is the last resort against new invasions.

The same political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, said that the countries of Europe and North America tend to have a weak identity. Many boast their own pluralism, multiculturalism and diversity. Yet, national identity managed to survive these processes. It is worth noticing that national identity is very different in the two continents, being stronger in North America than in Europe. According to this political scientist, this accounts for the difficulties that Muslims face in adjusting in countries such as the Netherlands, France, Germany or England.

3.1 Identity and Relativity

Immigration is closely linked to identity. This relationship needs to be addressed in the context of postmodernism and the growth of relativism. The influence of these two contexts – starting from the academic world towards the public – makes it almost impossible to support a speech based on positive values and own traditions. Thus, for example, is quite difficult to impose these values to migrants as a condition for the granting of citizenship. Those promoting multiculturalism argue that they have already gone beyond identities based on religion and nation, being already at a higher level.

Denial of identities based on religion or other values, identities so far recognized, inevitably leads to the Samuel Huntington’s question: “Who are we?”⁸ In the absence of common values, we must find and apply other values in order to work and ensure order in another system of reference. If this is not done, the authors of the new doctrine promoted by multiculturalism will be overwhelmed by people who will wander in search of an identity.

3.2 Assimilation vs. Non-assimilation, Cultural Separation

The interaction between migrants and the indigenous population may lead to assimilation or non-assimilation (separation). The concept of “assimilation” does not refer to “integration”, which means creating a state of social equality for a group different from the majority population, reflecting the size of the group in the total population of the country or area.⁹ Assimilation occurs when a dominant group imposes its culture to the subordinate groups in such an efficient manner that the latter no longer differs from the dominant culture.¹⁰ The conflict between assimilation and non-assimilation depends on a large number of factors, such as the choice of the place of migration, the reaction of the local people, the relationships created at work, the size of the group of migrants, migrants’ political culture, the relationships with the persons who remained at home, and, not least, the status of the economy in the destination country.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Huntington, S., *Ciocnirea civilizațiilor*, Ed. Antet, Bucharest, 2007.

⁹ Johnson, A. G., *Dicționarul Blackwell de sociologie*, Ed. Humanitas, Bucharest, 2007, p. 304- 305.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88- 89.

With respect to migrants' salaries, studies on minorities conducted by Francine Blau and Lawrence Blau¹¹ show that their salaries are lower than those of the majority of the locals. This may be partially explained by the failed efforts of these minorities (migrants) to be assimilated by the indigenous majority. This failure can be motivated by a desire to maintain a separate cultural background or identity, which would thus be reduced if the migrant group were assimilated. Lack of desire for assimilation can lead to adjustment costs, such as risk of not speaking the language, gaps in the labor market regulations and difficulties in communicating at work.

Another important element is the degree of acceptance by the majority. One of the factors that lead to tension is of economic nature; it is well known that the presence of migrants causes negative effects on the labor market, by reduction of salaries or increase of unemployment.

The studies conducted by Gil Epstein and Ira Gang¹² found that networks play an important role in overcoming obstacles to adjustment and assimilation (costs related to information, risks), by strengthening confidence and regulating international mediation contracts. In particular, the necessity for these networks is felt when specific assimilation is not pursued. It is often acknowledged that the trend of assimilation is counterbalanced by a certain resistance from the indigenous population, in order to prevent this process of assimilation.

Another cultural phenomenon connected to migration is – according to the same studies mentioned above – the dangers to the family structure in the destination country, following interaction with local economic factors and the new culture. This has strong consequences on the identity and assimilation of migrants. This phenomenon can be observed, for example, in the Muslim families coming from Asia, the Indian subcontinent (Pakistan families) who changed the family structure and the way of life along a generation. It was noticed that there is a break between generations in terms of housing (according to the Western model), by the phenomenon of separation of parents from adult children. Other characteristic changes were added to this process, such as the cessation of religious practices and the declining birth rates. The phenomenon can also be noticed in the Latin American minority of the U.S., who adopted both the break with the family structure and the adoption of a system based on cohabitation outside the family (common-law marriage), as well as the single parent families, the local religious practice and the adoption of other denomination.¹³

Regarding the assimilation vs. non-assimilation binomial, it was noticed that there is a phenomenon leading to cultural separation and cultural enclaves. We have the example of Turkish migrants in Germany, who use only information obtained through their own media channels, in their native language. This was facilitated by the emergence of satellite channels and cable television.¹⁴ Cultural policies having a precedent in other European bilingual or multilingual areas (Belgium, Switzerland, Sweden, Spain) led to the funding of bilingual

¹¹ Blau, D. F. & Lawrence M., Gender Differences in Pay. Retrieved from http://econ2.econ.iastate.edu/classes/econ321/orazem/blau_wages.pdf, 26.11.2014, 11.58 AM.

¹² Epstein, S. G., Gang, N. Ira, *Migration and Culture*. Retrieved from <http://ftp.iza.org/dp5123.pdf>, 19.11.2014, 10.06 AM.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

television channels in Turkish and German, and to the promotion of television and film companies in both languages. The same situation was reported in the U.S., where a strong Hispanic minority is present.

3. Religion in the Process of Migration

Migration also has another important component relating to human identity: the religious feeling. The global nature of migration brings together people from the most varied nations and languages and who are also members of different religions. We will address here the Christian religion. Regardless of religion, religious feeling can act one way or the other, depending on the willingness to migrate and on the context. Migration from one place to another implies, in fact, the relocation of a spiritual microcosmos, together with the person or group it belongs to. From this perspective, one can speak of a church and a community that are both in movement and transnational.

Transnational Religion and the Diaspora

The transnational nature of religion refers to the presence the same religions beyond national borders. It can be said that the first transnational organization from chronological perspective is the Catholic Church. The centralized management and unique doctrine of this Church allowed dissemination of a single message and a uniform religious service. At various times in history, messengers of this dissemination were especially the members of religious orders such as the Benedictines, the Dominicans, the Franciscans and the Jesuits. On the other hand, as noted by Susanne Rudolph,¹⁵ Islam was disseminated through networks of mystic people, Sufi Orders and Sufi individuals who spread their faith according to their inner vision.

Modern migration and globalization generate new cultural connections. At the beginning of the 20th century, the local churches in Europe, many believers of which migrated, were heavily involved in supporting such phenomena. Being concerned of the danger of proselytism, such churches contributed with financial resources and missionary priests in view of establishing new ethnic churches. For example, the Italian bishops cooperated to support and help migrants.¹⁶ Another example is the example of the Irish migrants settled in New England, Boston and other cities where, unlike their predecessors, they did not have to create a new national environment in a foreign territory, but they rather adjusted to the new environment. Irish priests were sent there, supported by the Archdiocese of Boston, the Irish Church and the Irish Government. Their mission was to help migrants to settle in the U.S. and to preserve their connections with Ireland. It is known that within the church, they provided catechism lessons in view of marriage, as well as lessons for the management of mortgages in Boston and Ireland, and other activities for the support of migrants.¹⁷

As mentioned above, the Catholic Church acts as a transnational religious structure. Starting with the mid-19th century and up to the present day, the Church got involved “by sending religious people, by missionary campaigns, by management of own schools, by

¹⁵ Rudolph, H. S., *Transnational Religion and Fading States*, Ed. Westview Press, 1996.

¹⁶ Text adapted after Levitt, P., *Between God, ethnicity and country. An approach to the study of transnational religion*. Retrieved from <http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/Levitt.pdf>, 21.11.2014, ora 13.15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

erection of sanctuaries for pilgrimage, by organization of international meetings, thus creating a wide international network.”¹⁸

The transnational character is ensured by networks. From economic perspective, it relies of the exchange of goods and services, whereas from religious perspective it contributes to the transformation of identity through language and ritual service.

Religion manifested at transnational level also includes popular religious practices in a more or less institutionalized manner. These practices have a national dimension; they carry a specific national atmosphere and relate to traditions specific to certain liturgical periods of time (Christmas, Easter, celebrations influenced by traditional practices). Starting with the Second Vatican Council which introduced the use of the national languages in the liturgy, the Catholic Church promoted expression of preferences for local music and religious elements, thus encouraging the active participation of the believers in the liturgy and in the religious service. It was noted that the practice of own religious traditions has cultural influences on the country of destination, whereas the religious and cultural elements in the host country have a rather significant influence on migrants.

4. Conclusions

The migration process includes in its structure an economic dimension, a social dimension, and cultural and religious dimension. It points out several processes that are found in different geographical areas, at smaller or greater distances. The study of migration involves the separation of economic, social, cultural and religious phenomena, and the analysis of the same in a dynamic context, specific to the forces that activate it, as well as from the perspective of the causes and of the effects it is influenced by. The complex reality presented above shows that migration is a process with a strong social character, involving great masses of migrants. In this context, generally, the reality presented by the statistics show that, from professional perspective, migrants have an average level of training. The situation differs significantly for different ethnic groups. Migrants from the developed North generally have a lower level of education; the jobs they provide are usually rejected by the indigenous labor force. This type of work has created a migration model based on networks. This provides a real social capital, which we addressed above. They are also a cultural and religious microcosmos ensuring psychological comfort to migrants. This is true for migrant groups and certain stages of migration. The importance of cultural and religious element is paramount in the migration process. The religious element may stimulate integration or can hold back until cancellation. This is why the compatibility between the two cultures, that of the departure area and that of the adoption/arrival area, is important. Compatibility between complementary cultures or geographically close cultures can be easier to achieve, being more difficult, or almost impossible, in case of divergent cultures and antagonistic religions.

The cultural and religious element pertains to the individual identity and to the group identity. The cultural phenomenon that has dominated the debate in the recent decades is related to multiculturalism, diversity, positive discrimination, characteristics also expressed in public policies, on the basis of a massive secularization of society. This complex phenomenon

¹⁸ Casanova, J., *Public religions in the modern world*, Ed. University of Chicago Press, 1994.

led to a weakening of the identity at individual level in the destination countries. Thus, the relevant societies become unable or do not wish to impose a model for the assimilation of the external element.

As stated, religious practices may become an impediment for migration or for the adjustment in the host society. In the country of origin, abandonment of connections and of the relationships created means giving up the investment of capital that can not be transferred. On the other hand, contact with a strongly-secularised society, as is the case of those in the Western part of Europe, becomes a burden for those used to practice their religion. This is manifested in public cultural space (media, entertainment), but also at work, in the relationships with colleagues.

At the same time, the cultural factor specific to the home community may or may not encourage integration. Knowledge of the language spoken in the host community is a gateway granting access to information on the labor market, facilitates relationships and communication with colleagues, employers, authorities and service providers.

On the other hand, enclavisation as a cultural phenomenon, developed on the migrant network infrastructure, replaces some of these inconveniences, but renders migrants vulnerable and dependent in front of the decisions taken without their consent.

In conclusion, it can be stated that, in the management of individual and group migration, as well as within the public policies, the cultural and religious element is just as important as the economic element. The redefinition of identity is a dynamic process, sometimes following a tortuous or traumatic path, but it is one of the risks accepted by those who embark on this journey.

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