NATIONAL IDENTITY IN A WORLD IN MOVEMENT

Mariselda TESSAROLO

Senior Scholar, University of Padua, Italy

Abstract: National identity allows one to be typified before others, it is indispensable for simplifying and organizing the large amount of stimulation coming from society overall. The displacement of large numbers of individuals poses questions on the stereotypes relating to national characteristics. The media (TV, newspapers, Internet) play an important role in spreading stereotypes by creating, supporting and bringing information that is often not correct to the attention of public opinion. The media also construct "mythical" social images and categories that often become rooted in individuals' ways of thinking. This occurs more easily when the people one comes into contact with belong to populations that are not sufficiently known through literature, cinema, tourism, but only through immigration. Stereotypes are thus predominantly negative because they ride the waves of "invasion panic" and "job loss" that strengthen a feeling of belonging in local individuals, and also activate claims leading to a process of making other nationalities inferior. The economic crises of this historical period do not help to meet others with a personal engagement aimed at understanding, but rather at rejection. A point of contact might be found through the recognition of the culture of others, allowing the fears caused by "diversity" to be dispelled.

Keywords: national identity; national characteristics; media information; culture of others; how the migrant is known

1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings do not have an inclination to territorial permanence and they overcame distances that are now unthinkable in order to reach new territories, to improve their life conditions, to enjoy greater freedom and abundance of food. In all cases, they were able to build communities and states, to speak their own language and have their own customs. It is possible to be "citizens of the world" only by being citizens of a State first. In fact, if national identity is not experienced first, one can not then perceive and understand the similarity of belonging to any other nation[1]. What is national identity if not an ability to typify and organize the stimulation grasped within society? Immigration and economic and cultural exchange are important because they try to give an answer to the diversities that are highlighted in numerous contexts due to cultural and structural reasons.

In the 16th century the stereotypes by which the various countries are known began to form. The national roots outline these early typifications that subsequently, with the formation of national states, gave rise to the stereotypes universally used (Elias, 1994). This was the beginning of the use of a stereotype in the presentation of one's heroes, such as for example the cliché of the English gentleman or that of the Italian Latin lover, represented in a very similar way by American and French, German or Swiss. It is difficult to avoid the clichés according to which Frenchmen are brilliant and Germans tough and aggressive[2]. Even though such generalizations are false, they have an influence on behaviour because men and women relate to one another through generalizations consisting of labels, allowing them to immediately and synthetically define the characteristics, roles and expectations of behaviour (Montanari, 2002:11). In daily life as well, people perceive and are perceived through schemes of typification. Such schemes amount almost to a form of pre-cognition, that is combined with the expectations determining both the aspects linked to the various roles and the ways in which the roles themselves are enacted (Berger and Luckmann, 1969).

---

[1] The expression "citizens of the world" is frequently used but actually void (utopian?) because a passport, or at least an identity card, is becessary for moving from state to state.

[2] In a study of minority languages (Tessarolo, 1991) we found the same stereotypes of the speaker reflected in the languages not known by the subjects: sweetness in French, hardness in German etc.

Individual behaviours are therefore rational in reference to a model that becomes a veritable script, helping actors to play the role presented by the exemplary model. Typifications are, in sum, behaviour codes, within the limits of which one may still act with a certain degree of subjectivity. Identity, culture and community are three words that are constantly associated and that imply one another (Balibar, 1991). Belonging to one nation has a logic of its own in which we may identify the classes of the imaginary and the symbolic, to which the class of the paradoxical must be added as well (Milner, 1983:28). The first are based on the attribution of a common feature, and in any case a visible one (white, coloured…). The second are based on a fact that basically can not be represented, that is, the fact that a number of subjects answer to the same name, a name to which they respond when called: "Italian", "French", "Romanian", "Christian" etc. Such a means of identification does not apply to individuals as being similar, but as being united, even if absolutely unique. Nationality is a community word. Identity is never single and its correlation is the fact that an individual is part of an ultimate community, or a finite world, and of a "vision of the world" where all belongings may be hierarchically organized. The "paradoxical" classes serve instead as classes of the real and they should be, in relation to the real, what the aforementioned classes are in relation to the symbolic or the imaginary: paradoxical classes consist of the denial of one or more common features. Such classes manifest a non-belonging in the real: they are forms of exclusive inclusion or inner exclusion.

Stereotypes are important because they do not limit themselves to constructing forms of mental representations, but serve to convey cultural contents and shared knowledge[3]. They need a language mediation, which may also take place through newspapers, textbooks, television and advertising, to make the interpretation of the world known to the public. Numerous studies of social psychology report that subjects show positive behaviours toward their own group (in-group) and negative behaviours toward the other group (out-group). Stereotypification is based on the fact that different national groups are characterised by a sufficient homogeneity as regards behavioural inclinations, attitudes, orientations, so much as to allow us to speak of a specific "space" and of a typical "national personality". Very brief descriptions to be derived are examples of stereotypes that are part of a legacy of common sense whose content is known: Germans are rigid and obstinate, they like order and efficiency; Britons are reserved and controlled, formal, comply with rules, are individualistic and competitive; Italians are nice, family-oriented, inconstant, spontaneous; Americans are informal, spontaneous, ingenuous, technically very competent, conformist, competitive etc. (Alessandri, 2016; Destefani, 2016).

2. NATIONAL CHARACTER

Unlike Elias, who studies the European courts, Montanari (2002) explains national character with the example of how the narrative of the police/detective genre is presented by different populations. She observes A. Conan Doyle, and therefore Sherlock Holmes, has a keen spirit of observation, brilliant deductive ability, great control, an attitude of detachment, obstinacy and certainty to succeed. Sherlock Holmes is the basic figure from whom the British Agatha Christie shaped other characters such as Miss Marple and Poirot. The interpreters of German police stories, such as inspectors Derrick and Wolff, show heroism and expose themselves to risks even when they lack adequate equipment to face the situation. This model shows personal value and a willingness to take risks. The French model proposed in films may be represented by Arsène Lupin, the nice gentleman thief, or by Maigret, who is very down-to-earth, intelligent and familiar with the feelings and emotions of everyday life. The Italian inspectors, Montalbano, Coliandro and others, investigate with cunning, creativity and a good amount of irony and intelligence; they identify themselves with the environment in which they operate. Perhaps the stereotype of the Italian man today is slightly different from that offered by Goethe over two centuries ago, either a martyr or an irresponsible person spending most of the time outside and enjoying life, fighting day and night, prey to a happy infantilism from North to South, with the irredeemable spirit of a Latin lover. National ideals are also reflected in educational models: in Italy the great mother, in Germany the warrior image, in Great Britain freedom and independence[4].

---

[3] What is negative and is generated as a consequence of the stereotype is prejudice, that is, a negative assessment of what was typified.

[4] Stereotypes have always had great importance in history, as shown by Tacitus, who wrote over 2000 years ago and suggested the stereotype of the undaunted warrior.

National identity is a modern phenomenon of a dynamic, fluid nature, according to which a community sharing a set of features tends to believe that its members are bonded by something ancestral. National identity is formed through stereotypes, which hide a process of categorization with consequences such as the in-group bias and the out-group homogeneity effect: one's own nation is perceived as more diverse in its composition than foreign nations that, in turn, are seen as more stereotyped and therefore more homogeneous. Favouritism toward one's own group leads to nationalism, which legitimizes its dominance.

Among the scholars in this field, Smith (1992) considers the multidimensionality of national identity, constituted by a historical territory or motherland, historical memories in common and myths, which are the "oneiric" work of peoples. A myth is a symbol in the Greek sense of the word, so that it is to be understood as an "enigma" that, with its opacity and consequent wealth of meaning, initiates interpretation.

Culture granted by the system of public education and by mass media also has the task of making known the legal rights and duties in common, presenting them to all the members of a nation and consequently spreading such knowledge to other nations as well. The stereotypes of the various countries are mostly conveyed by daily information through the selection and comments of the news, affecting the formation of public opinion and its orientations. It should be remembered that the media have the power to decide what to tell – and how – of a given country. The process allowing a change in stereotypes, that has its explanation in the hypothesis of a contact, is the one that starts from reciprocal knowledge and could lead to the denial of the stereotypes themselves. This hypothesis does not always work because the encounter of two cultures, instead of letting affinities emerge, facilitates the consolidation of differences in specific conditions of crisis, thus resulting in a strengthening of the stereotype that may even become a prejudice.

The self perception of one's own culture leads those who are immersed in it to judge other cultures as being very different. Stereotypes may therefore be considered genuine habits, leading to the creation of social representations that correspond to a state of disequilibrium highlighting the unpopular but ineradicable domination of one part of society over the other.

According to Moscovici (2005:38), the purpose of all representations is making something unusual or unknown familiar. Everyone wishes to feel at home, safe, that is, inside a consensual universe. The very dynamic of social relations is a dynamic of familiarization in which objects, individuals and events are perceived in relation to previous experiences. The unfamiliar, nonetheless, attracts and fascinates individuals and communities, and at the same time forces them to make explicit the implicit assumptions that are the basis of agreement. The fear of the outsider is deeply rooted. The act of representation is a means of displacing that which disturbs, which comes from another place but little by little becomes "neighbour". In other words, "near": what is unusual becomes usual.

Social thinking owes to convention of memory much more than it owes to reason: the basic tension between familiar and unfamiliar is always resolved in favour of the first. Before seeing a person and listening to him/her, we have already judged him/her, we have made an image for ourselves that we will then try to confirm progressively. More or less consciously, we transform that which is new going in the direction of what is known to us (Bartlett, 1974). This way to proceed aims to give a familiar aspect to that which is not, and it does so by activating the mechanism of anchoring, which reduces categories to ordinary images and places them in a familiar context, and by classifying, that is, giving things a name. The second mechanism is the objectification of those ideas, the transformation of something abstract into something actual. Objectifying culture leads to constructing reality starting from ideas that are genearlly meaningful. Anchoring and objectification are ways to manipulate memory: the first keeps it active (by classifying), the second decodes what we need to know through what is already known (Moscovici, 2005:65).

3. LIVING IN A WORLD IN MOVEMENT

In the present world, and not only the Western world, the displacement of populations leads to pluralisation, which refers to a context in which the disorganization of the subjective experience no longer finds a limit in the institutional organization of national societies considered as containers of all human spheres. Instead, it enters into a double disconnection produced by globalization, that questions the bond between individual and organization. We may therefore understand the extent of the change that is under way.

The "society of individuals" may only exist in relation to specific institutional transformations and, particularly, with manipulation of the physical

strength and the growing stability of central bodies of society. Only thanks to monopolies like these does self-regulation reach such a level of automaticity as to become second nature (Elias, 1994:447). The subjective experience of modernity, therefore, is characterized by the fact that the process of individualization of social life takes place within an institutional context, one that is organized. The need for identity is always present and is not a legacy from the past, something that is swiped away or marginalized by the progressive rationalization of social life. Grounding is a relevant and scarcely acknowledged need, besides being one of the most difficult to define. It starts with participation, which may be real, active and natural inside a collectivity that is naturally participating; or it may be automatically imposed by place, birth, profession, surroundings etc. In the second case, it needs to be morally, intellectually and spiritually supported through the environments to which it naturally belongs (Giaccardi, 1996:49). However, these environments become hybrid and the mixing leads to a space that is hybrid as well, where everything is mixed. Cultures are increasingly permeable (Hannerz, 1998), particularly those that have always occupied a marginal position.

3.1 Romanians in Italy. Since the early Nineties, Italy has changed from being a country of transit for Romanians into one of final settlement. In 2009 the incoming flow of migrants exceeded the outgoing flow (Luciotto, 2009). In the list of countries of origin of those who migrate to Italy, Romania ranks first followed by Albania and Morocco. The novel aspect of migration is currently represented by women. A process of feminization is under way in migratory flows, due to the fact that the demand for workers is for jobs that are traditionally feminine, jobs where women are "trapped" as they enter a home environment, a closed one where there are no trade unions in place to protect the work of the carer. In this regard, an experience of so-called "complete migration" is also examined and two Romanian scholars, Scârneci Șandru (2014), relate it to an original life project envisaging a come-back. If we observe the relation between Italy and Romania, this has not always been the case. In the history of Italian migrations we should remember that in the 19th century migrations directed to Romania, from the North-East of Italy, concerned stone workers and wood workers. It was an exportation of labour toward the Transylvania and Dobrugia regions, which were known as the "Romanian California".

Between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Romania was the destination of seasonal migrations and the flow of Italian migrants to Romania increased tenfold over three decades, from 830 people in 1871 to over 8,000 in 1901. Between the First and Second World War there were approximately 60,000 Italian workers in Romania.

In Italian school education, a minimal knowledge base of the history Italy shares with other countries should be part of the curriculum. Latins are at the basis of Romanian history and many events brought Romania close to Italy, starting with Trajan, under whose power the Dacian population mixed with Roman colonizers. Decebalus, hero of the Dacian resistance, is depicted on the Trajan Column standing in the centre of Rome[5]. The Latin poet Ovid spent his exile in Constanta, on the Black Sea, where the city university bears his name. Romania's strong desire to keep its Latin language must be acknowledged, considering the distance between Romanian and Slavic languages or Hungarian, spoken in the surrounding countries. In 1906 the City of Rome presented the City of Bucharest with a statue of the Capitoline Wolf, symbol of the founding of Rome[6]. More statues of she-wolves were given to other Romanian cities during the Mussolini era. In the 19th century there was a big increase in the number of translations from Romance languages in Romania, thanks to a favourable historical context. The book *Cuore (Heart)* by E. De Amicis[7], translated by an Italian teacher settled in Romania, Clelia Bruzzese, was published in 1893 and immediately became a school book – and such it remained till the early 00's for the patriotic values it conveys. It is currently among the suggested readings for primary schools (Cosma, 2007).

In 2008, the Turin International Book Fair started presenting examples of Romanian

---

[5] Few Italians and few Romans perhaps know what tale the images on Trajan's Column depict. It is important to remember that the monument does not represent the apex, but the difficulties faced by the Roman army in the first and second Dacian wars, and that defeats are depicted as well. The scene of Decebalus' suicide acquires ethical and political meaning and relates to the honour the hero deserves. Muscardini writes that the feeling expressed here confers humanity on the "Bellum Dacium" (2005:6).

[6] The date, 1906, tells us that this event bears no relation to the use of the same symbol in the Italian fascist era.

[7] In Romanian, "Cuore. Inimă de copil. Carte pentru copii".

literature, translated into Italian and published by the Milan-based publishing house Rediviva. The same company also publishes an open access newsletter on the Internet. The Romanian Institute of Culture and Humanistic Research in Venice publishes a magazine called "Orizonturi culturale italo-romane"[8]. We should finally remember that during the First World War Romania was one of Italy's allies. In January 2016 1,151,000 Romanians were living in Italy. According to data supplied by the Central Direction of Italian Criminal Police and the Ministry of the Interior, the number of crimes reported between 2004 and 2014 increased by 40.1% for Italians and by 34.3% for foreigners. Romanians are involved in 6.2% of crimes against patrimony and in 5.2% of crimes against persons. The main crime for Romanians is exploitation of prostitution (31%). In 2009, at the culmination of the so-called Romanian crime emergency, 2966 Romanians were jailed in Italy, decreasing to 2791 over the next seven years, in spite of an increase in the number of Romanians living in Italy. The alarm spread by newspapers is unjustified and only causes xenophobic reactions. Media such as newspapers and TV hyper-represent crimes committed by migrants. What we are witnessing is an attitude of closure by European countries, not just Italy, toward foreigners, who are turned into social enemies through a double spiral of panic and exclusion. It is a situation portraying other nationalities and poorer and less developed regions of the world as inferior, to such an extent that fear of the stranger is no longer called "racial hatred", but becomes a matter of security and of facing an invasion by foreign offenders (Dal Lago, 1999)[9].

4. CONCLUSIONS

It seems appropriate to consider the experiences of Romanians living in Italy as a case in which a framing process is carried out, a process due to a series of activities and oeparations whose result is precisely the creation of a frame. From time to time this may correspond to a cognitive or a representational, cultural, methodological or other kind of device (Bruno, 2014:11). It is a specific –

and partly new – way of comprehending, and consequently redefining, the whole public sphere and that of the media, which considers network logics and participation logics. The mechanisms used by the media in trying to influence the way receivers of information organize their personal image of the environment have been known for long. It would be useful for the relation between media and audience to become increasingly more circular and not concern single messages but a flow of representations and meanings that are continuously re-processed, contributing to the construction of reality. Journalistic information should be marked by greater morality and this is a fundamental aspect: this would be the only way to come to a pacification. By suggesting a vision of the world through the lens of single items of news, an atmosphere of fear may be constructed, suggesting a specific key for the interpretation of events. News presented in a certain way resonates with and relates to pre-existing schemas that different audiences may recognize. In their turn, audiences are led by their newspapers to confirm and reinforce what they already think (everyone tends to always read the same newspaper and listen to the same news report). Each vision of the world, in sum, implies a political-symbolical dimension. This may be recognized and identified as being part of the reference culture of individuals considered as members of a group. However, since it is so closely connected to the cultural dimension, its use appears normal and natural, so much so that the processes with which social representations are constructed remain mostly invisible to the eyes of the individual (Bruno, 2014:159). Precisely because these visions of the world appear "natural" and act at an implicit level, they are seldom made explicit. Here we may find their strength and their roots, and this is why the different frames should be discussed in contexts such as school or opinion groups.

Pluralism is a typical aspect of the current period, regardless of our political point of view. If we follow the two types of ethics mentioned by Weber (1997), the ethics of responsibility and that of conviction, even though they are based on different and seemingly juxtaposed motivations, we will not take different positions because they are both driven by an ethics of conviction in as far as they follow a rationalization aimed at confirming. Weber's so-called "polytheism of values" finds a confirmation in global society, which follows the shift from the ethics of conviction to the ethics of responsibility since it implies the ability to make right choices just where tradition gave way to plural values.

---

[8] "Italian-Romanian Cultural Horizons".
[9] In this article we do not consider Italian small and medium firms operating in Romania, of which there are approximately 40,000. They represent another way in which similar yet different populations get to know each other. Of course, it would be interesting to investigate what the main stereotypes are for both sides.

One's homeland is not a physical place, but a shifting need; wherever it may be, that homeland is always to be found elsewhere (Sennett, 2014:93). So it is important to recognize others and ourselves as actual, specific human beings rather than as cultural models. Such recognition may also depend on unexpected turns such as the non-destruction of reference systems, but a simple cracking of these. That unexpected turn produced by the uprooting is what allows a stranger to become a citizen of the homeland of birth, even away from it (Sennett writes: becoming Russian away from Russia).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Alessandri, A. (2016). Stereotipi nazionali nei giornali di tre paesi europei. *Metis*. Vol.XXIII, no.1. 99-108.
2. Balibar, E (1991). Cultura e identità, in Identità culturali. Problemi del socialismo. *Cultura e identità*. no.3. 13-34.
3. Bartlett, F.C. (1974). *La memoria. Studio in Psicologia sperimentale*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
4. Bauman, Z. (2002). *Il disagio della postmodernità.* Milano: Mondadori.
5. Berger, P.L. & Luckmann, T. (1969). *La realtà come costruzione sociale*. Bologna: il Mulino.
6. Bruno, M. (2014). *Cornici di realtà. Il frame e l'analisi dell'informazione*. Milano: Guerini.
7. Cosma, I. (2017). Le sfide della traduzione di Cuore in romeno (1893-1936). *Translationes*. Vol.9. 98-113.
8. Distefano, M. (2016). Come sono visti gli italiani all'estero? *Metis*, Vol. XXIII, no.1. 109-134.
9. Elias, N. (1994). *La società degli individui*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
10. Giaccardi, C. & Magatti M. (2001). *La globalizzazione non è un destino. Mutamenti strutturali ed esperienze soggettive nell'era contemporanea*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
11. Hannerz, U. (1998). *La complessità culturale*. Bologna: il Mulino.
12. Luciotto, E. (2009), Donne migranti. *Jura Gentium. Rivista di filosofia del diritto internazionale e della politica glocale*. Vol.VI, no.2. 179-187.
13. Milner, J.C. (1983). *Les noms indistinct*. Paris: Ed. du Seuil.
14. Montanari, A. (2002). *Stereotipi nazionali. Modelli di comportamento e relazioni in Europa*. Napoli: Liguori.
15. Moscovici, S. (2005). *Le rappresentazioni sociali*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
16. Muscardini, G. (2005). La lupa capitolina e la continuità Dacoromana. *Dacia Journal* [online]. URL: http://www.daciajournal.ro/pdf/Dacia_2008/Art%2009.pdf. [Acccesed on April, 2018].
17. Scârneci F. & Şandru C. (2014). *Italia-Romania. L'esperienza completa della migrazione*. Martignano (Le): Kurumuny.
18. Sennett, R. (2014). *Lo straniero. Due saggi sull'esilio*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
19. Smith, A.D. (1992). *Le origini etniche delle nazioni*. Bologna: il Mulino.
20. Tessarolo, M. (1991). *Minoranze linguistiche e immagine della lingua*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
21. Weber, M. [1919] (1997). *La politica come professione*. Torino: Einaudi.