THE REPRESENTED MEXICO. IDENTITY SOCIAL REPRESENTATION PROCESSES FACING THE MIGRATION PHENOMENON

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ABSTRACT

Mexican migration in Europe is both an interesting and a significant example in which the cultural identity, the social subjects and how this phenomenon interacts with the power asymmetry are questioned. Most of the studies on Mexican migration are focused on the United States and Spain because of their statistical significance. As a consequence, there are not so many case studies available, especially in Europe. The Mexican community in Italy has been excluded from migration studies due to its apparently low numerical consistency. However, it is one of the largest Mexican communities in Europe.

This paper aims to analyze some of the different ways through which the social representation and the identity constructions are embedded in the migration phenomenon in an effort to demonstrate how the dispositives of power are articulated through the material productions of culture and the complexity of social composition forms. It also aims to show the relationship between migration, identity and representation in the modern globalization crisis context.

The paper is part of a PhD research in Political Sciences at Pisa University in Italy in collaboration with the Humanist Studies Department of Roma Tre University in Rome. Its main objective is to analyze some of the problematic points in the process of trying to build an identity and how the social representations change when facing migration, considering the Mexican migration in Italy as a case study.

Keywords: Migration, Identity, representation, narrative, memory, community

INTRODUCTION

According to the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (Instituto de Mexicanos en el Exterior, IME), by March 2015, the number of Mexicans in Italy amounted to 4,357. There are 11,913,989 Mexicans abroad (IME, 2014), of which 97.79% live in the United States of America (U.S.A.) and the remaining 2.21% (262,570) are in Europe (40%), Asia (4%), Oceania (2%) and Africa (0.35%). In contrast to the Mexicans in the U.S.A (usually men looking for work in order to send some dollars back home), most of this 2.21% is made up of women (IME, 54%).

According to this data, most of the Mexicans living in Italy work for private companies (21%); then, there are students (12%); housewives (7%) and missionaries (1%). Unfortunately, there is 44% whose occupation is unknown. At the same time, the Mexican Embassy in Rome estimates that there are about 2,000 undocumented Mexican migrants in that country. On the other hand, it is important to point out that the Mexicans who go abroad are not, for whatever reason, required to register at the Mexican Embassy.

However, this is a qualitative research that uses an ethnographic methodology, so the interest is focused not only on statistics but also on the social agents. This makes even more evident how the identity processes are developed when facing the migration phenomenon. That is the reason why this research involves a small group of Mexican migrants from different regions in Italy, as a representative group through which it is possible to carry out the analysis of some of the social representations that seem to create identity.

The bilateral agreements signed by Italy and Mexico (2012) attempted to put in place an efficient mechanism for the migration management between these two countries, which obviously has had an impact on the migration policies and- specially-on how Mexican migrants are treated throughout their integration process when arriving in the host country.

It also takes into account the fact that Italy is a country with a recent Mexican migration and has a medium to high-level economy when compared with that of the United States. There are similarities between Mexico and Italy that

are important for the development of this research, like their historic and cultural traditions and the fact that Romance languages are spoken in both countries and that they share a Latin origin.

Over the last two years, identity studies are getting more presence in the social sciences because of their wide meanings and conceptualizations. Identity studies are helpful to understand all the categories that the concept of "identity" involves. In the context of migration, identity studies are a resource for finding specific social manifestations related to integration, inclusion, diversity and multiculturalism. That means that "identity" as a concept is useful in two different ways: theoretical- methodological, which derives from the conceptualization, and interdisciplinarity between the different social sciences (anthropology, sociology, social psychology, etc.) and as a social category for studying the social agents as producers and builders of their own culture and society.

ITALY AND MEXICO

"Almost at the same time, Italy and Mexico underwent an intense political, cultural and economic commotion during the first decades of the twentieth century with long-term consequences that brought about deep and important changes in the historic path of both countries. Italy was involved in the First World War (1915-1918), then the country went through a difficult post-war period (1919-1921) before finally getting entangled in a complex revolutionary process that transformed the country into an authoritarian nationalist regime with totalitarian tendencies: Fascism (1922- 1943). For its part, Mexico endured the Mexican Revolution (1910-1919) through different stages and a complex dynamic that engendered an authoritarian nationalist regime with long-term and sui generis characteristics (1920-2000)" (Savarino, 2012, p.43).

The Mexican community in Italy has fluctuated and has not grown exponentially. The massive Latin American immigration in Europe--and especially in Italy—is a phenomenon that characterizes the last part of the twentieth century and is part of larger population movements and, without a doubt, the result of globalization. In Italy, talking about Latin America, the first migration wave came about in the 70s (in the twentieth century) and its main actors were people from Argentina and Chile fleeing their countries for political reasons. In the second wave --- which took place in the 90s (20 years later)—there were women from Peru and Ecuador migrating for an economic motivation.

Mexican immigration to Europe has not always had a political or economic reason. Mexican migrants in Italy have personal motivations for leaving their country and settling here. According to statistics from the Mexican Embassy and through interviews with some individuals from the Mexican Community , some Mexicans decided to come here to study and/or to work, but most of them are women who fell in love with an Italian man and after a long distance relationship, they decided to get married and have a family. We could start thinking about some sort of a love migration phenomenon.

	Regione / Región	Maschi / Hombres	Femmine / Mujeres	Totale / Total	% del totale / % del total
1	Lazio	540	774	1,314	32.49%
2	Lombardia	224	524	748	18.50%
3	Veneto	75	235	310	7.67%
4	Toscana	77	203	280	6.92%
5	Emilia-Romagna	64	183	247	6.11%
6	Piemonte	71	172	243	6.01%
7	Campania	31	119	150	3.71%
8	Sicilia	15	124	139	3.44%
9	Friuli Venezia Giulia	20	66	86	2.13%
10	Liguria	18	59	77	1.90%
11	Puglia	13	61	74	1.83%
12	Abruzzo	20	53	73	1.81%
13	Marche	19	47	66	1.63%
14	Calabria	6	59	65	1.61%
15	Umbria	15	43	58	1.43%
16	Trentino-Alto Adige	20	34	54	1.34%
17	Sardegna	16	28	44	1.09%
18	Basilicata	0	8	8	0.20%
19	Molise	0	5	5	0.12%
20	Valle d'Aosta	1	2	3	0.07%
	Totale / Total	1,245	2,799	4,044	100.00%

Fig1. Mexicans in Italy (IME 2016)

IDENTITY AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

The social representations are defined as a set of information, beliefs, opinions and attitudes about a particular object (Abric, 1994), a form of complex and shared knowledge that has a "practical intentionality" and contributes to building a common reality for a social group (Jodelet, 1989).

The concept of identity involving other categories such as values, education, social classes, territory, ethnicity and gender has always been in a state of perpetual change. And it is just because of its mutable and capricious character that the identity could be construed as an invention.

As part of the processes of identity construction (Hall, 1993), this "identity invention" (Remotti, 2010) grows out of the various social representations of the culture it belongs to and it could be used arbitrarily when needed. Thus, identity could be used as a social representation of race (color of the skin, physical characteristics), religion (cults, rituals, belief systems), territory (geographic space, dwelling), family (values, name, surname), gender , sexual orientation and a heavy influence from the past, politics and mass media, as well as the myths and symbols that are associated with this term: identity.

The social agents go through the construction of a collective and individual identity when facing the need to belong in a social group which is totally new and different. Nonetheless, when talking about collective or historic identity, there is a kind of shelter and belonging, a kind of anonymity. That being said, when some of these elements are missing, "the identity" suffers an aggression. When migrating, the subject finds out that its territory is not there, and neither are there any other aspects in which identity lays on. For the individual, this will mean a mutilation, a stigma in the system of identity references of the person. "That is, it goes from the territory represented internally by the social actors to being incorporated into their value system, whether in instrumental or symbolic terms." (Giménez, 2007,p.22).

The idea of "clinching" the identity (both the individual and the collective one) creates the illusion of community. Anderson (1983) uses the concept of "imagined community" to refer to a nation building based on the power of cohesion of the collective imagination or shared images. By using that concept, he defines nation as "an imagined political community that is both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know, meet, or even hear of most of their fellow members. Yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (...) Finally, [the nation] is imagined as a community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." (p.271)

In the case of the Mexican migration in Italy, there is a sense of nostalgia for this "imagined community" they left behind for no apparent reason. Being in a country they do not belong to just to be with the person they love is sooner or later seen like a big sacrifice and a huge oppression for the bicultural relationships. Women who have just arrived in Italy often complained about the life they left behind in Mexico and missed their past selves. "I used to be a wedding planner. I lived in a very nice apartment in the south of Mexico City. I used to have a car and travelled a lot because of my job. When I met Francesco, we decided to get married almost immediately. I had to sell everything and take a plane to Italy. I was so deeply in love. I don't mean to say that I am not happy, it is just that I am a housewife. I even had to learn how to cook! It is nice to have a family but here I feel like I am a nobody." This is part of an interview with Diana, a 35-year-old woman who has been living in Rome for the last 9 months and is married to a man from Calabria.

It seems that the "imagined community" because of migration is lost. There exists the need to create and re-create some social dynamics to find it. The notion of imaginary built between America and Europe is a key analysis for the identity construct, which is simultaneously linked with postcolonial approaches.

MIGRATION AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

Migration is a concept that has always been present in Mexican History. Year after year, outbound Mexican migration affects and modifies the mechanisms of identity representation and its social actors as they go from detachment to entrenchment.

Immigration groups, which in addition to being part of the host society still feel identified with their home community, are not necessarily looking for integration. This could be explained as a "diasporization," that is, a "set

of practices for which identification with a homeland constitutes the basis for the organization of cultural, economic and social activities that transgress international borders." (Friedman, 2003, p. 9). Multiculturalism is part of migration stories in which identity and its representation turns into a search for certainties for social subjects. Hence, a process begins whereby identity could look for a kind of affirmation of the identity and/or a critic position about it or both. This process depends on origin, social class, level of education and age.

As far as Mexico is concerned, the identity process is more complex as it does not belong to the indigene world any longer, nor does it belong to the Spanish settlers of the sixteenth century. Rivalries and historic grudges are factors that weigh heavily on the construction of the different social representations. In the case of Mexico, the weight of colonialism and conquest is inevitable (Fanon, 2007).

For the Mexican migrants, there is a melancholy they bear in the social representations that are part of them. The inferiority complex that arose during colonialism is now translated into racism and classism, depleting both the self-perception as well as the representation to the outside. There is a conflict between belonging and distinction, demarcation and autonomy. The dispute between the attributes of social belonging (social groups and identity categories) and particularizing attributes (idiosyncrasy of the social subject) is in the eyes of Mexicans a constant struggle in the process of self-representation that intensifies when facing migration.

MEMORY AND IDENTITY

In the process of self-representation of the migrant, the historical memory is fundamental insofar as it keeps and registers events, facts, narrations, testimonies, and social representations linked to the social life outside the country. It is from this memory that it becomes possible to have an approach to identity construction and to its socio-cultural and ideological manifestations. However, in the absence of direct stimuli, memory gropes for a substitution. (Hume, 2001).

The relationship between history and memory is about creating a register of certain events through its documentation, so the image of certain social actors could be saved for the future. However, writing history as a reflection of the memory and looking at memory as what "really" happened is becoming increasingly challenging. Historians, sociologist and anthropologists are always confronted with the dilemma of selecting events for their interpretation. It is individuals the ones who remember and social groups the ones who decide what is "memorable" and how it should be recalled by means of a complex process that gets feedback from social, local, situational and individual imaginaries. So we can conclude that there exists a censorship for the historical memory. (Halbwachs, 2011)

On the subject of migration stories, the subject looks for the creation of a symbolic space where memories can be shared and where a simulation for the identity experience could be generated. Giménez (2009) declares that "Collective memory is learned and needs to be reactivated incessantly. It is learned through generational socialization processes –commonly referred to as "tradition"; in other words the communication process of a memory from generation to generation. The collective memory needs to be reactivated periodically to ward off the constant threat of oblivion (...)." (p. 23). For a migrant, the memory is the base of the identity and forgetfulness would be tantamount to losing it.

METHODOLOGY

Mediation between theoretical research and social intervention processes will be carried out in an interdisciplinary way. The methodology that determines these modes of intervention involves capturing experiences (through the classic anthropological tools of ethnography, such as history of life, in-depth interviews, participant observation, group interviews and focus groups). These interdisciplinary crossings propose actions to enable social subjects, self-represent their own conditions of existence and collaborate with construction of social meaning based on the recognition of identity constructs (and their ways of being enunciated) as a minimum basis of the political realm.

Inhabiting, representing and recounting/narrating are three actions that work with the social partners proposed in this research so that it is possible to define conditions of self-representation in the link between migration and identity from these elementary modes that conform the vital relationship between the singularities and their surroundings.

In this context, in addition to using a geopolitical approach and social formations (Marx, 1977) referred to under different forms of habitation, it also means focusing on the appropriation of the sense of place as the apex organization of the sense of the world and the concept of social in the typologies and social topologies put forth in this research.

The complex universe of this research posits as analytical categories the identity, the migration and the social representations. Through their mobility and interchangeability, these categories allow for a more precise taxonomy, one that expresses the specificity of interdisciplinary research projects and one that at the same time produces the convergence of the different fields of the study problem and outline actions for the development of specific models of social intervention.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this research has been focused on the inner contradiction of the term identity from an interdisciplinary perspective, which looks at the problem not only from a theoretical perspective, but it is also concerned with the social performance as it relates to human movements and displacements. This approach will allow the conceptualization of social intervention processes derived from working on certain diaspora categories.

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