

Being Foreigners even if They are not as such

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Abstract

The Albanian immigrants but also other foreigners in Italy, at the beginning were faced with many difficulties trying to integrate into the new society, a phenomenon which is still a problem for some countries these days. Having been an immigrant myself in Italy (first generation) I wanted to reflect the problems of the second generation families and the society around them, comparing them with the Albanian immigration of the '400 both in culture and integration. How this generation is able to preserve their culture in comparison with the Albanians called "arberesh" and how is this society treated in legal terms (citizenship)? Why are they considered Italians de facto, as Graziella Favaro says, but although they were born and raised in Italy they are not referred to as nationals. This research is important not only for Albanians, but also for Moldovans, Moroccans, Romanians and many other foreigners from different countries who have the same problems.

Keywords: *Albanians, foreigners, second generation, culture, Italy.*

Throughout Italy the phenomenon "foreigner" has frequently been discussed especially among the second generation. There have been talks on the issue of cultural enrichment these youngsters provide for the Italian society; there have also been talks about the problems of racism and discrimination they encounter, even those who have Italian citizenship. In short, there was much discussion about the fact that they were foreigners even if they were not foreigners at all. However, I want to start my presentation with a very simple sentence but with a great significance on Italian – Albanian inter-culture as it has been accepted by the Albanian youth, but I will also try to make a comparison between Albanian immigration which existed in Venice in the Middle Ages and that of post - Middle Ages.

Mother what does it mean to be “shqipetar”?

These are words uttered by Elena 12 years in Venice who belongs to the second generation, to the children of immigrants born in Italy or arriving before the age of six.

Another way to communicate, another culture, another way of life.

These are the words that a parent of the first generation also known as the “generation of sacrifice” due to the struggle with so much stress, feelings and subjective experiences of distress and maladjustment, and a way to experience everything on his own, would say to those belonging to the second generation who did not have such problems because they found everything ready and the background was well-prepared even though they faced prejudice and racism, too. But before discussing this topic in depth, I want to discuss on the meaning of this phrase (Mom what does it mean to be “shqipetar”?) during the Albanian immigration (“arberesh” so called Albanians of the old emigration) to the Middle Ages and post- Middle Ages. What would be the response of a parent who lived in those times? Having a look at the preservation of language, clothes, dances, songs, etc., that have not changed over time but retained their original form up to these days, I think the answer would have been: Your language, your tradition, your way of life.

I cannot leave without mentioning the words of a professor from the University of Padova, a well-known professor, whom I appreciate very much, the words of Adonis Brandalise that during the final examination of the Master in Intercultural Studies asked me a question! Why the “arberesh” have preserved their culture unlike those of nowadays? Being a new researcher in this area I could provide only two answers for him: being terrified from the Ottoman rule they settled in Italy against their will, and then the mass immigration grouped them all together in churches, but today they live in individual places.

He absolutely agreed on these reasons but he also added another strong reason which emphasized the fact that their culture was the same as the Italian one and it was much easier to preserve the traditions.

Further research shows that minority ethnic communities were located within an urban area, well developed at the time. This may partially explain the fact that immigrants of the second and third generation have preserved as distinct linguistic, cultural and religious features, which led to the formation of brotherhoods. However, nowadays it is very difficult to keep the roots of the family with the Albanian youth of the second generation, because Italy has undergone radical changes and because parents speak Italian at home. However, I

must add that when they return to Albania we always hear them speaking Italian. The words “buongiorno” and “ciao” are also used by many youngsters who live in Albania because Italian culture is now part of them, even if they have never been to Italy, they know a lot about Italian music, cooking, and fashion.

However, for many people of the older generation, who have immigrated for economic reasons, immigration is a temporary event, or so it was said, and their ultimate goal is to return home as soon as possible. On the basis of these expectations, older people tend to preserve their values and their living style, and often live in the past. Beyond that, learning a new language and adapting to a new culture is much more cognitively authentic for the older generation who generally never comes to a satisfactory level. The concern of losing cultural roots does primarily falls to the second generation, to the children who were born in Italy.

These young people born in Italy have developed a certain degree of autonomy with respect to both families and the host society. Their course of socialization, language acquisition and acculturation was developed at an early stage within educational environment of the host country. Adolescents who were born in Italy have not been directly exposed to immigration, the journey is the stage of uprooting and re - orientation in the new context. Some of them have rarely visited the original contexts of the family and know the country of origin only through family stories, more or less full of nostalgia and regret.

These individuals, however, do not master the cultural system of their place of origin, but they find themselves under pressure between old and new world of relationships, going through emotions and subjective experiences full of distress and maladjustment, thus encountering many difficulties along the way towards socio - cognitive and personal balance, and in order to become successful, they need to be assisted to develop a more autonomous and well-defined personality detached from their families. They, however, by virtue of the increased opportunities for social exchanges with Italians, know best the language of the country in which they live. Their parents look at them with some sort of disappointment because they have weak references and counterfeit of their historical roots and family: they experience these situations as a loss of role, they are afraid of receiving negative evaluations from their countrymen and feel as not being able to put their children in such conditions to adhere to their expectations. This occurs mostly when they are compared with families who come from different villages of Albania where cultural traditions are deeply rooted.

By attending every day Italian peers the difference in these young people is also seen in comparison with their brothers, sisters (born in Albania) and

especially with the topics considered taboo by their fathers. From this point of view, the problem of second-generation arises not due to the fact young people of immigrant origin are poorly integrated regarding their culture, but because of having been brought up in Western contexts, having assimilated tastes, aspirations, their consumption patterns of their native peers. But the problem is that Albanian youngsters of the second generation are faced with the culture of origin even if they are less willing to know the differences between the family and the surrounding environment.

Thus their identity, now both Albanian and Italian swings between one and the other, passing idealization of one to disregard the other culture and vice versa, and through an identity conflict. So there are two streams and they never belong fully to either of the two camps and often act as foreigners in the private context but as Italians in the public one. While some Albanians hinder the acculturation of the younger generation, the latter want to get the best out of their culture for their children and for the new economic possibilities of education. Compared to their parents they have a greater influence of the new culture. The way of communicating the accent, the gestures, the way of occupying the space... are signs, verbal and non-verbal cues that define the difference of life trajectories. In many cases the preservation of native language is lacking and they do not realize that by speaking the Albanian language will avoid the lack of communication between parents and children and separation from the parental network,¹ it will allow to keep alive the culture of origin and it is the instrument through which we convey expressions, traditions, ways of living and thinking, helping second generations to recognize their own complex identity.

However, there are many parents who take a different course of life and make part of their lives the culture of the host country without telling their children anything about their country. The same families often show contradictory behavior towards language: on the one hand they take a functional approach, prompting the children to learn the new language well, on the other hand they take a romantic attitude towards the language of origin because they fear forgetting the mother tongue which could lead to the dissolution of the family and identity² If instead we consider other countries we see that the second generation preserve their culture while Albanians do not. There are many reasons why some Albanian families do not like their culture. They call it a useless culture. So these youngsters will grow up without knowing anything about Albania and when you tell them something

¹ Livia Turco, *I nuovi italiani* (Milano, 2005), 134.

² "Migra" (November 2004).

about their traditions they will begin to laugh because they do not believe that this thing is real and share it with others as it was a story. For them, the country where they were born and the culture they learnt comprise their homeland and the idea of embracing another culture which they do not know and have not experienced so far is very strange and they fail to accept it. As a result, even though the desire of many Albanian parents to return to Albania is great they do not manage to take the first step because for their children it is as if they are immigrating to Albania.

Beyond this, the dream of every Albanian parent for their children is to provide them with higher education and they strive hard to create appropriate economic opportunities and conditions for their children.

If we want to draw some comparison between the children of the second generation with respect to university attendance, (although it is still early to talk about children born in Italy) and the children immigrating from Albania, the latter have more desire to study because they come from a very difficult economic situation and their dream is to study and to have something in life. Apart from all the difficulties they had with regard to the inter-culture they managed to get a degree while many others returned to their home country to get a good job. Instead, they who were born in Italy have had the best economic conditions and do not know the difficulties and respond with indifference. There are many parents who would like to return but they say: I'll stay until my son gets a degree, because the schools are better here and so they study more at university. But we must not forget that there are students who come from Albania and are excellent in comparison with these children who were born and raised in Italy. We should say that the educational system is better in Albania but those who have the will and the desire to learn can become potential competitors anywhere.

However, apart from better conditions and being Italians as they are Italians "de facto", according to Graziella Favaro in her book "Girls and boys in migration"³ they are still confronted with racism because as some who have skin color or facial features which betrays them, you understand that they are foreigners and this can create a barrier in the work environment. Only through their professional skills and hard work they may be able to get positioned in the job they want. But the word foreigner, Albanians, will pursue them even after maybe three or four generations because it is the surname that will put them in doubt about their nationality. Maybe from the first name no, because in most cases they use Italian

³ F. Graziella, *Ragazze e ragazzi nella migrazione*, eds. Graziella Favaro, Monica Napoli (Milano, 2004), 14.

names. This is to be compared with Albanians in 1400 where the names at that time were converted similarly into Italian, for example somebody called Gjon will become Giovanni from Shkodra, Pjeter - Pietro from Durres, etc.

A more fundamental problem with regard to their rights, citizenship is a problem that continues even nowadays.

It happens just like a law from the Middle Ages based on economic interests, although born and raised in Italy, but at least at that time there was a war but today there is communication and peace. I quote some researches "To become a Venetian citizen, the basic condition was to have resided in the city of the Doges for a number of years, and during this period to have fought in the army of the city, to have paid taxes and to have been subscribed to "borrowings" and owning homes and possessions "in decima". It shouldn't be written your name to the registers of the police.

The time of mandatory permanence determined by the state varied depending on the period. To become a citizen, you had to have residue in Venice for twenty-five years. Then the law was changed in 1318 and the term imposed is increased to eighteen. After 1348, was limited to two years the period of residence required to become a citizen "de intus" and ten years after the deadline for becoming a citizen "of extras". The decision was confirmed in 1350. He was required to reside in Venice with the whole family. The new citizens had a period of three months in which to get to Venice his family, if he is still abroad."⁴ Today, however, they have to do ten years in Italy and in the end they have to wait up to three years if the documents on the Italian citizenship come or do not come out.

Despite being born or raised in Italy from an early age they are likely to become illegitimate children of the Italian Republic, in case of losing the job that gives them the "right of residence", in what they thought was their home.

"They live in Italy, in the Italian and European society, and in most cases it is Italy where they wish to build their own future and yet are perceived as foreigners. They feel and want to be Italian citizens without having to deny or resign the connection with the origins."

Now the Albanians are integrated or maybe they were integrated because the difference between the Italian and Albanian culture in general (except the culture of northern Albania especially that in the mountains which continues to be different even in the present day) is the same and it is only the economy of the country that makes the difference bigger.

⁴ Brunehilde Imhaus, *Le minoranze orientali a Venezia 1300-1510* (Roma, 1997), 262-263.

However, now with the crisis we must say that there are many Albanians that have returned and have created some business activities in Albania, bringing with them also the Italian culture, and many are those who think of returning, but most say they will return but they never do.

So it is necessary to outline the words of Beccatelli Guerrieri, *Mediating Culture, New professions between communication and intervention*

The simple naked truth is that living means cohabiting. Between human groups and individuals, the fundamental question *not to win, but to convince* is never exhausted. We are neither completely free nor completely dependent, but inter - dependent. We move according to our initiatives, which correspond to our interests. But the interest that moves us is never simple economic, or political, or psychological. It is an inter – being, standing and living together.⁵

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⁵ G. Beccatelli Guerrieri, *Mediare Culture, Nuove professioni tra comunicazione e intervento* (Roma, 2003), 13.