

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **New comers, confidence and social fragmentation in communities with strong cultural differentiation in Sicily**

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**This article is a community study carried out in a microcosm of Sicily using different strategies to defend collective identity and territory from the waves of new immigrants. It is a critical analysis of the changing of representations of immigrants, and the problems that multiculturalism poses with regard to issues of identity and confidence.**

**Key words:** Confidence, immigration, rights, citizenship, social distance.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The word, 'confidence' used in this article, invokes the meaning that T. Benedeckne gives to his works. Confidence, as T. Benedeckne suggests, including reciprocity usually involves what one has learned toward the identity of the actors, and imposing them cautiously in their behaviour.

This article intends to focus on changes taking place in the social contexts of high immigration of Western societies, changes in terms of transitions from cultural homogeneity to cultural heterogeneity. This social process that builds societies exposed to the pressures of globalization uses the policies of citizenship which tend to recognize the privileged access of citizens to public resources because they belong to groups defined culturally, making them to claim specific rights of citizenship.

This article is a contribution to a critical analysis of the process of social construction that identifies the immigrants as a product of the interaction between the point of view of national citizens, who consider themselves as legitimate owners of the territory, that is the immigrants' institutions of the countries in which they move. In particular, the analysis will focus on: (a) The social area in which the inward migration and differentiation of identity, along with the frames, operate on the changing of representations of people, and (b) the relationship between the perception of citizenship rights

and the challenges that multiculturalism poses with regard to issues of identity and confidence.

The analysis has as its basis an empirical research carried out in a microcosm of Sicily, Mazara del Vallo, that can be taken as a paradigm of a society with strong cultural differentiation. In Mazara, decades of traditional coexistence between indigenous and Tunisian communities have recently been invested by new waves of immigrants from Eastern Europe.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research, qualitative, was carried out with real life stories and in-depth interviews administered to the privileged witnesses and opinion makers of the indigenous population, to first and second generation immigrants from Tunisia and to "new" immigrants (mainly Kosovars, ROms and Romanians). It showed unusual representations of social fragmentation, belonging, and feeling of confidence.

### **Newcomers in Mazara del Vallo: Frontier land**

Mazara del Vallo, frontier land, has historical and cultural roots characterized by its similarities with the Arab World. Its economy is based mainly on fishing; it has an impressive number of vessels, and many of their crews are composed of Mazara and Tunisian people. The urban colonization of Tunisian people in Mazara occurred almost painlessly, because they have settled mainly in the oldest areas of the city center, vacated of the city's urbanization and

by the consequences of earthquakes. The architectural features characteristic of the Arab domination are still very visible and characterize the streets and squares in the center, almost symbolizing the bond of identity that the Tunisians have reached with this part of the town. Local social policies have in high regard the presence of the Tunisian community.

### Integration efforts

School projects aiming to maintain Arab traditions and culture have been tested and successfully implemented. The representation of crime was not "attached" to immigrants like the second skin today covering immigrants in the rest of Italy. From the political point of view, they ensured their voice in the city council by the appointment of their representative. Normativity and the degree of confidence are intertwined on an apparently mature coexistence. Many Tunisian children were born in Mazara, speak Italian, do not know the land of their fathers, culturally belong to a social identity that does not recognize them as either fully Italian, nor as North Africans. For decades, living with the North African community was not based on either integration or assimilation, but on "economic rationality". But two new factors changed this attitude. Firstly, the opening of the EU to Eastern Europe resulted also in Mazara the arrival of new faces, new never seen before *aliens*, new cultures, and new forms of poverty. Suddenly degraded urban spaces were occupied by Kosovars, Roms and Romanians. These, in contrast to the Tunisian community, do not have a job, struggle to have it because there is no work and because that usually is done by the immigrants from Tunisia. The new immigrants are not economically useful; indeed they increased the concern of the socio-economic wobbles under the weight of the current crisis. These newcomers are strongly discriminated by the natives and by a large proportion of Tunisians who started emulating the Italian lifestyle. In Mazara, the "Slavs" have occupied the lower part of the social stratification, raising the Tunisians to the next higher rank, "Tunisians are not the last. They have been replaced and are happy for that. Now 'the dirty, unwashed, and stealers are the Roms'", says a first generation Tunisian.

### Hierarchies, criterion of organization

In neighborhoods, relationships are built on a number of distinctive ways, according to hierarchies that constantly cross, and the reference point is external: the inhabitants of the city center are ahead of inhabitants of the suburban areas, the inhabitants of Mazara are ahead of the Arabs, the Arabs are ahead of the Roms. Thus, the space is both a condition and an ambivalent symbol that structures the interaction and produces particular configurations of social relations. Not only "space, but the articulation and meeting of its parts, which finds it as starting point in the soul, has a special meaning." As an invitation to look inside the space that welcomes people, their lives and their actions, G. Simmel shows how space incorporates the signs of social interaction. Not only space directs daily activities, as a combination between individual dispositions and environmental resources, but it expresses it in two different levels: One wider and more structured, such as the urban area, the other one closer to the contact with others. Thus, space and meaning are intertwined and determining the resulting combined society.

The space that separates us from the Chinese customs, customs of the Arabs, from Tamil traditions often results in a distance that is to be maintained by those who feel differently, but the meaning assigned to this distance becomes a criterion of organization and management of the same space. This means that the acceptance or rejection of others can lead to minor or partial knowledge of another who wants to "hold off", whether an

immigrant, a homosexual, a criminal category that cannot be considered homogeneous in appearance if not to represent another which formally designates its diversity. This cognitive dimension of the relationship with the other (know who he is really, really know their culture and ideas, etc..) acts on the perceptive dimensions that form stereotypes, prejudices and preconceptions, which in turn influences the decision to maintain intact gap between self and others, as well as to amend or cancel them. By this logic, social distance acts on the double register of territorial identification and removal of "racial" negative. The inhabitants of the suburbs are "destined" to marginal spaces in the city because they are poor or do not have the economic and social resources to get out. But they are also symbolically "immobilized" to the district because they are identified with negative and racially marked spaces from which they can not escape. This approach (Boal, 1999) continues to express its theoretical value, even for the western multiethnic and multiracial societies. But in reality, it is based on social distance that constructs social categories, values and meanings of social relations.

Secondly, because of the economic crisis, many locals in economic difficulty claim those jobs that for decades have been undertaken by Tunisians. They involve hard work; they are menial and poorly paid, but they are also precious today. There is the growing perception of the right of Italians to have a job before the foreigners brought together in an undifferentiated way, as immigrants. It no longer matters what was in the past when the column has coping coexistence, because of collapse of "economic rationality".

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interviews showed that the tension between fits of tolerance and solidarity with the immigrant, and the reactions marked by injury, fear and racism constitute a disruptive element of popular attitudes by the locals. They all marked indifference to the strong and maintenance of social distance with immigrants. One of the findings from real life stories administered is the 'soft segregation' practiced by the Tunisian that is changing shape for growing climate of hostility, because of the feeling of indifference and opportunism of the "guests" to the territory that hosts them. "They do not contribute to the common good, take the money for our needy" say two retired natives. That is the refrain of the perception of foreigners. All foreigners, "the Italian community and the Muslim, even coexist in the same territory, not share its membership as a prerequisite for collective and shared planning" says a local politician. On the other hand, this integration process is complicated by the fact that, especially the second generation of immigrants, want to recover the components of their identity, weakening the integrationist prospective that was made instead in the economic dimension.

It would appear, therefore, on the one hand, an idea of multiculturalism as a new case not qualified of all human experience. The other, the multidimensionality is a phenomenon in which the search for identity merges with the archaic-modern combination. But what works from the economic point of view does not work the same way from the social one, and the sense of belonging can become an instrument of defense against the processes of new inequalities.

In scenarios such as those described, religious affiliation also gains a renewed strength and legitimacy of the role of individual and social behavior that, if amplified fundamentalism can turn into revenge *versus* hegemonic identity on the same territory.

Today it is the growing share of Tunisian parents emigrated in Mazara that give birth to their children in places of origin, to reduce the risk (or perception) of loss of identity. Almost always perched in the community and often in Tunisian territorial boundaries of the casbah, they tend to exercise stringent control over their children, control to the limit of semi-imprisonment of their daughters. The Tunisians are therefore beginning to practice the classical strategies of "closure" to the world outside of the gated communities, which do not solve the problem of fear but rather amplify it. A second important finding revealed from in-depth interviews administered is the topic which analyzes fear, security and confidence. So, in the same space in which the concentration is high can match the effect of a high level of social isolation, with the result that increases the difficulty for residents to keep and develop social networks that allow access to different opportunities. This implies that the process of social differentiation assumes new connotations because both are new forms of reorganization and restructuring of social identities, and the specific problems that this process raises for social actor.

As in the classical phenomenology of mobility, of belonging, of "perimeter" of "way of life" urban theorized successfully by leading members of the Chicago School, by R. E. Park E. W. Burgess, in the processes of modernization, has diversified urban population and introduced new models of behavior. They are rooted in metropolitan areas for new ways of appropriation, consumption, fashion, signifying the spaces. Indeed, the very multicultural and multiracial character of the metropolis is reflected in new consumers, new cultural influences. For example, statistics on food consumption in big towns reported an increase in consumption of meat slaughtered according to the Muslim dictates (halal), even by those who are not Muslims. Cultural contagion becomes synonymous with accessibility to different-from-self, taking however contradictory trends. More heterogeneous populations, curious or willing to let "infect", to expose themselves to the foreigner and his patterns of behavior or consumption, its religious practices, would conflict with the strategies for segregation and auto segregation.

Thus, it seems to become more uncertain the possibility to categorize the "urban population" or the local citizens. In this strategy of distance, aggregation and isolation have a voluntary basis, because of social and political organization of the territory that marginalizes those entities that are functional to the division of metropolitan labor, yet "unrespectable" in the image ordered, respectable reassuring and homogeneous of the city.

## Recognition, rights and duties

There are many problems that need the recognition of the minorities involved. Meanwhile, there is a feeling that a general obligation of respect for the foreigners is not the same commitment from their side, both civilian and religious. As a result there is a vision of a cultural and religious intermarriage as a process to guide, and not a goal to reach.

'Why allowing them the freedom to build mosques in my territory when in "their" territory churches cannot be built? Why in the name of respect for religious beliefs of others, you have to remove the crucifix from public places that represent my faith?' These questions reflect the common sense of a more general principle according to which a society is recognized as a right if the right is a right holder who is also holder of a duty. And they seem to justify a legitimate demand for reciprocity in the recognition of indigenous rights, even if neither wants to live in any of the countries of the Arab world or live in a society that looks like it. The problem that remains is the social assessment of the differences, while the political-organization is in terms of interests. In summary, what kind of society do they want? A society where all groups have the same rights as nationals or a society with some people more privileged than others? This suggests a closure strategy of land to "outsiders" to which, however, ends for practicing the Gated communities strategies of "foreigners" we will see in other section of this article.

The question of recognition of collective identities due to different populations or ethnic groups is central to the debate on the definition of multiculturalism. The term of recognition is split in a public dimension, which refers mainly to the issue of rights and duties, and in a private dimension where the sphere perceptive and representational of difference prevail. The two dimensions are not strictly separated, but allow the concept of pluralism, which grows in size and private practice free expression of differences; while the public is organized by setting common rules and recognizing means to meet the same level difference.

The problem that remains on social level is the social assessment of the differences; while on the organizational political level, the problem is in terms of the level of protection of collective interests. But under what conditions is this meeting? What collective sentiments generate a comparison between different cultures?

In the normative dimension, multiculturalism aims to legitimize the demand for public actions that fall within identity policies. Essentially, it refers to attempts to establish good relations between different cultures, through rules and criteria of equality and mutual respect, based on the principle that no culture has the legitimacy to play a leading role over the others. This principle of equal dignity, in its original intent, has a high degree of heterogeneity because it counteracts gender discrimination, race, ethnicity, religion, political beliefs, than all

forms of structural differentiation, having the aim of protecting the right of individuals and groups to their social identity

On a constructivist basis, there are phenomena of multiculturalism which, leading to exclude or marginalize groups and individuals who belong to hegemonic "circles", with major economic and cultural resources, want to maintain, as well as to include individuals and groups considered to be an enrichment in the social configuration, especially when placed on higher cultural or economic strata.

As such, multiculturalism draws attention to the social relationships between different and new languages, so you do not accept the idea of assimilation or not supported by appropriate mutually constructive integration policies, nor the idea of tolerance in the same territory of cultures and different ethnic groups (Berger, 1966). The concept of tolerance evokes a sense of tolerability of someone with whom you do not feel comfortable, that you agree to avoid to fight with him on the same space. In short, a separate but peaceful coexistence, which is full of worthlessness and inferiority towards the tolerated.

The basic problem that arises in terms of the comparison of cultures is a way to maintain their own identity and the subjective group, also creating the conditions for the recognition of content and meaning of membership. Should such recognition takes place in terms of reciprocity or respect for otherness depends on the sense with which we collectively internalize the common values of coexistence and the degree to which a community will be able to perceive differences

This solution of multicultural differentiation would lead to differential risks of a multicultural fragmentation of society because of the coexistence of "homelands" self-identity groups, resulting in de-legitimization of normative codes unit, but also the evaporation of a proposed diverse and inclusive coexistence (Berger et al., 1973). It should be recognized that many minorities, especially in the cultural field, may be limited by decisions taken by the majority. Such decisions dangerously restrict the existential space of their identity in a circuit autopoietic that reproduces the representation of difference and inequalities. Differentiation on the basis of group rights can offset this disadvantage, because it reduces the vulnerability of minority cultures in relation to majority decisions. These safeguards ensure that external members of the minority have, once members of the majority, the same opportunities to live and work in their own culture. The debate thus seems to move to a theory that justifies, on the one hand, the protection of individual and collective rights, but both gives shapes of negotiation with the most anthropologically inequalities rooted in the collective imagination collective.

To avoid being accused of sociological reductionism, we must assume that every social space has provided a universe of relations of meaning between individuals, groups, classes, strata and social classes, cultural

elements that shape the generality of social relations, and specifically to the sociability. The latter term means either a) the general provision of humans to establish relations with some kind of social relationship or b) the multiple concrete manifestations of this provision as a group, association, community, mass, based on certain types of needs and interests.

### **Strategies to defend the territory**

Some terms more than others were used by the scientific community for defining the sociological debate on the underclass in social minorities, such as ethnic or economically disadvantaged. These include social isolation and aggregation, define some of the effects of social differentiation, and represent the spatial implications. For example, after the environmental disaster that followed Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, about 150,000 people migrated to Houston in search of new territory to live. Soon the police was facing a new public concern, mainly due to increases in crime. It is not just "local" gangs defending their territory against those "foreigners" if they wanted to take possession, but also following a general relational power, collective identity perceived as different populations of the same territory. On the one hand, the residents of a quiet American city are the hurricane survivors; and many of them who no longer suffer or in search of them suddenly became deprived, without a home or work or intimate relationships. Both groups shared a room but impoverished in spatial and relational terms.

In our analysis, the same strategies of rump of territory occurred in remote areas and local cultures different from each other like Houston and Mazara del Vallo. In such cases, there are specific aspects of orientation and strategies of the two social groups residing in that territory. As well as the boundaries of the mechanisms by which a community restructuring the sense of belonging become uncertain, identity and safeguard their umbrellas identity reworks its differentiation in the context of solidarity "forced" by natural events. As suggested by sociological literature (Bourgeois and Friedkin, 2001), poverty spaces are reflected in forms of space and geographical isolation in social distance from the central institutions of society, but also and above all in the way individuals interpret the processes and social structures through their lives, and where they draw the prospects for the future, planning, collecting, opportunities or they create others.

### **Conclusions**

Once again, the immigrants give us proof of these practices of segregation and auto-segregation when they meet on their days off with their compatriots in "public spaces" not used by locals.

One might think that the increasingly visible "different" behavior, clothing, lifestyles, implemented by individuals and groups not integrated in the scenarios would cause social anxiety and social alarm. Many examples are illuminating in this respect: in many cities there is a widespread demand to set up areas where prostitution is carried away by those who consider themselves "normal" and thus entitled to live in the city. In many parts of Northern Italy, the night patrols roam of political party LegaNord are ready to control the territory and to take action against those who represent the fear of the other, mostly immigrants. Still, the strand of social control or imitated in Europe also raised the so-called "Zero Tolerance" policy whose order and security, against the homeless in Manhattan, with fines, document control, arrests were in fact moved from center to the suburbs, where social distances are represented as pens of various population segments, separated by status, ethnicity and wages. Davis (1992) wonders whether the ecology of fear will become the natural order of the city of the future, assuming Los Angeles' ecological determinants such as income, land value, class and race, but also a decisive new factor: fear. You should ask, therefore, the meaning and patterns of integration, but primarily if fear is the cause or rather the effect of other phenomena, such as methodological individualism *à la* Boudon suggests. In any case it is a model city that R. Sennett defines in terms of more closures, more internal segmentation and increasing fear of strangers. In terms of social ecology, it seems that urbanization as a way of life is governed by uncertainty and fear. The combination of fear, security, and confidence seems the phenomenology of social differentiation, marking behavior of population of metropolitan cities, as well as frames which tend to organize social policy strategies. For example, the promise of greater security, among other things in many political agenda, is one of the themes that can move a significant percentage of voter preferences. That is what happened in Italy, and other European countries such as France and Holland in recent elections. But paradoxically,

the social alarm to those who are perceived collectively perceived as "not normal" as prostitutes, vagabonds, junkies, and somehow also to foreigners, that is not entitled to live as citizens of the city becomes a limit on individual freedom. The request for Social Security in fact coincides with the restriction of a slice of their rights of freedom, as in the case of testing the rules against violence in football stadiums taken following the clashes in a city of Sicily (Catania) in 2007. Multiculturalism and ethnicity have posed new questions about the scope of the recognition of citizenship rights in the present society. Instances of integration collide on the same ground with those who work silently and contribute to the common welfare, with the positions of those who see the dangers of miscegenation that would affect cultural identity. In between, there seems to be a substantial idea of citizenship of a person who, as a citizen, has the right to participate, regardless of role, gender, race, religion. The coordinates of inclusion and exclusion, that have governed the citizenship policies, show all their failure; this is when the group exclusion is numerically much larger, and has frozen in its inability to represent reality in terms of change. How do we not understand that immigrants are an important resource of the host countries?

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