

INTERVENTION*

LITERATURE AS A TOOL FOR PROMOTING THE CULTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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Italy has the advantage of facing problems concerning policies of immigration differently from other European countries with a colonial heritage, such as France or the United Kingdom.

The policy adopted by France, that is the model of assimilation, has been criticized both by the public opinion and by scholars. Newsworthy events such as the revolt of the *Banlieus* have shown the precariousness of this policy.

In the case of the United Kingdom the policy chosen, the so called paradigm of the differences, based on the community model, has been considered fallacious as well. This model has allowed the creation of areas such as Londonistan, an Arab-Muslim microcosm with no external references, situated inside the city of London. The July 7 attacks have provoked the reactions of the public opinion followed by a condemnation of such a policy.

Starting from these premises, in order to avoid the above mentioned criticisms, Italy has to develop a process of integration aimed at contrasting the phenomenon of racism. Moreover the policy for a correct integration must unfold strategies whose goal is that of constructing a correct cultural identity among the new generations of immigrants (the so-called second generations).

* The following is the intervention of Professor Ciro Sbailò held on 2nd November 2008 at the 13^e SILA (Salon International du livre d'Alger) in Algeria. The object of the intervention will be proposed by Professor Sbailò at the International Book Fair of Cairo scheduled for January 2009.

In particular it is important to foster a dialogue concerning these matters not only among governments but also involving schools, universities and cultural institutions. The introduction, for example, of literary texts from their countries of origin in the school curricula of the younger generations of immigrants could help them approach the concept of 'culture of citizenship' in the right way.

According to this approach, the so-called second generations of immigrants, mostly born in Italy, could develop both the spatial dimension of their citizenship (involving country of immigration, on the one hand, and the country of origin, on the other hand) as well as the temporal dimension of it (that of everyday life in the context they live in, involving the possibility of planning a future, on the one hand, and their roots, their past, linked to the country of origin, on the other).

By the way this proposal, concerning the cultural development of immigrants, could influence the discussion on the revision of the actual law to acquire Italian citizenship.

The process of transforming rights into laws must take into consideration the needs of ordinary people, and not be lived as an imposition: this in order to avoid any social conflict.

Culture could be the privileged tool to transform human feelings into the object of legal draftings.

Peter Haberle, one of the most important constitutionalists of our era, asserts that any State based on the Constitution needs arts and literature as they are emanations of freedom.

Racism Emergency

In Italy there is still no state of emergency with regards to racism. But this emergency could be real in a near future if correct policies for integration are not adopted. This principle is particularly valid for the younger generations of immigrants.

Both the Holy Father Ratzinger and the Italian President Napolitano have stressed the necessity of condemning any phenomenon of racism or xenophobia, following the principle of 'no tolerance towards intolerance'.

Immigrants from non European countries form a considerable portion of the whole population in our country. They are present in the fields of services, agriculture, trading, as well as in small or medium size enterprises. All the problems concerning non-

acceptance of immigrants are caused by the fact that our society is not yet ready to be a multi-ethnic society.

As a matter of fact Italy has been for decades a land of emigrants; only recently has it been transformed into a country of immigration.

Nevertheless the Italian Government is making great efforts to encourage immigrants to respect its laws, condemning any form of illegality.

But it is not possible to face problems linked to immigration only through public order or security strategies. We have to build up an 'Italian way' to allow a correct process of integration.

The actual law for citizenship does not take into the right account the real dimensions of the phenomenon of immigration.

We have already asserted that immigrants form a considerable portion of Italian population: their contribution in the economical activities is an important factor for the growth of our country.

The aim is that of facilitating the possibility of acquiring Italian citizenship and also to develop a correct policy for integration based on the principles of lawfulness.

This would allow the creation of a multi-ethnic society, avoiding any risk of racism or xenophobia.

Citizenship

A correct process of integration should include the right to vote for immigrants resident in Italy, in particular for elections in municipalities.

This is possible only if we consider immigration as a resource and not as a problem.

In Italy the question is not easy to solve as the right to vote is strictly linked to the right to citizenship.

Nowadays it is difficult to acquire Italian citizenship: our country has not yet abandoned its identity as a land of emigration.

Two years ago Giuliano Amato, Minister for the Interior of that time, proposed a regulation aiming at simplifying the acquisition of Italian citizenship.

According to this proposal it would be sufficient to be resident in Italy for a period of 5 years (and not 10) to become Italian citizens.

Children whose parents were resident in Italy, even if of a

different nationality, were guaranteed the status of Italian citizens as well.

The actual law subordinates the acquisition of Italian citizenship to the obligation to respect the principles which the Italian Republic is based on and to know the History as well as the Institutions of our country.

Truly speaking this is not a realistic approach.

Interclasses

In Italian schools there is a growing number of students who cannot communicate with their school fellows or with their teachers because they cannot speak Italian. The phenomenon is particularly noteworthy in the North of Italy.

Moreover our immigrants come from various countries: this promotes the decrease of the danger of social conflicts originating inside slum communities with no external references.

The variety of their countries of origin, on the other side, compels Italian Government to grant immigrants equal chances both for their cultural development and for opportunities to find a job.

Recently there has been the proposal of creating, inside Italian Schools, a sort of interclasses, that is to say special classes where children coming from non European countries can have the opportunity to learn Italian language, culture and habits.

This can be considered a useful tool to promote integration as it is very difficult for a child who cannot speak the language of the country he lives in to be accepted by the school community.

The danger is that of creating social isolation and marginality

In a correct process of integration roots cannot be neglected. Immigrants, and their children, must not forget their roots, their origin. Roots are not a static concept, they assume a continuous development as the country of origin is not a static reality but a reality in progress.

Immigrants' children, especially if they are born in Italy, must know what happens in their countries of origins.

This can be easily achieved through reading books by authors coming from their countries. These literary texts must be translated into Italian and read in Italian as it is the language of the nation they live in.

This way we adopt an 'inter-cultural' approach, whose purpose

is that of making differences a tool for communicating with the 'otherness' and not a chance for social discrimination

The University 'Kore' of Enna, thanks to the initiative given by its Rector, Professor Salvo Andò, is carrying on an ambitious program, the goal of which, is that of developing policies on intercultural matters as well as starting a correct process of integration and fostering a cultural dialogue among the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean area.

Thanks to this it has been possible to constitute a Scientific Board, headed by our Rector, Professor Salvo Andò, whose task is that of promoting the publication of one hundred books by Arab writers in their Italian translation. These books are addressed not only to children of our immigrants, the so called second generations but also to native Italians who want to know the reality of different countries and cultures.

The Union of Arab Writers is the prestigious partner of this important initiative, that can be considered the first step towards a new policy of integration.

This policy which gives our immigrants a full and enduring citizenship, makes them protagonists of a new era in which the countries of the Mediterranean Area, with particular regard to Italy and Egypt, play a decisive role in the construction of a peaceful, multi-ethnic society.