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## Fear, intolerance, resignation: some readings on contemporary immigration in Italy



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## Fear, intolerance, resignation: some readings on contemporary immigration in Italy

### Abstract

Several studies have shown how fear and anxiety are emotions that have marked contemporary society, with new and old triggers of these feelings affecting subjects in today's world. The other, otherness, has been an object of concern, fear, in various human collectivities over time. With regard to migratory processes, we notice how this fear of what is different has constructed stereotypes, walls, intolerance, feelings that are often hidden in the idea of 'integration,' i.e. in the search to annul what characterizes the other, within the host society. On the other hand, in the migrant person, the search for 'integration' can show – differently – a resignation that marks an effort to gain acceptance and recognition. This article aims to analyze – relying on the oral history methodology – the phenomenon of contemporary immigration in Italy, with an emphasis on people from Latin America, seeking to grasp the resources used by these individuals to be 'approved' in the context of the land of arrival. Thus, the break of a chain of distrust, built as a consequence of a socially shared fear, would enable an inclusion process, i.e. the insertion of the other in the host community, with no need to divest from oneself.

**Keywords:** Latin American migration; contemporary Italy; sensibility; memory; social inclusion.

## Medo, intolerância, resignação: algumas leituras sobre a imigração contemporânea na Itália

### Resumo

Diversos estudos têm mostrado como o medo e a ansiedade são emoções que têm marcado a sociedade contemporânea, com novos e velhos detonadores desses sentimentos os sujeitos no mundo atual. O outro, a alteridade, tem sido no tempo objeto de preocupação, de medo, nas diferentes coletividades humanas. No que tange aos processos migratórios, observa-se como esse temor em relação ao diverso tem construído estereótipos, muros, intolerância, sentimentos que muitas vezes se escondem na ideia de "integração", ou seja, na busca de anular aquilo que é característico do outro, ao interno da sociedade de acolhida. Por outro lado, no sujeito migrante, a busca de "integração" pode mostrar – diferentemente – a resignação que marca o esforço para obter aceitação e reconhecimento. O objetivo deste artigo é analisar – a partir da metodologia da história oral – o fenômeno da imigração contemporânea na Itália, com ênfase nos sujeitos provenientes da América Latina, procurando entender os recursos utilizados por esses indivíduos para serem "aprovados" no contexto da terra de chegada. Nesse sentido, a ruptura de uma corrente de desconfiança, construída como consequência de um medo compartilhado socialmente, permitiria um processo de inclusão, ou seja, de inserção do outro na comunidade de acolhida, sem a necessidade de despojar-se de si.

**Palavras-chave:** migração latino-americana; Itália contemporânea; sensibilidade; memória; inclusão social.

As Peter Stearns states, numerous recent studies claim fear as the predominant emotion in the daily life of contemporary society (STEARNS, 2006); a feeling – seen as the outcome of an emotional experience – which is perhaps less marked by the religious paradigm, as highlighted by Jean Delumeau, in the 1970s (DELUMEAU, 1978), but which – even in a secularized society – has a driving force of great importance. Even though divinity has lost strength as a trigger of fear and anxiety, an invisible world individuated by science from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards – especially observable in today's context of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic –, has taken its place. On the other hand, otherness – demonized no longer by mystical and religious criteria, but in the name of supporting a national identity and an attacked nation – remained as an element that triggers fear.

In fact, as Joanna Bourke points out, “fear is about power and resistance relations. Emotion appears as a connection between feeling or psychological experience and ‘being in the world’ or acting as social beings” (BOURKE, 2003, p. 129). That is, fear – whose dangerous object is introduced to the person – or anxiety – built through a less concrete idea of danger – are created in a process of relationship between the subjects' emotions and social experience. They do not exist a priori, but are forged in concrete, symbolic, imagined interactions that human beings produce within their communities, since, even though this is an integral part of personal living, it is also collectively elaborated. Whereas, as Stearns (2006, p. 478) says, “in behaviorist psychology, for example, with its claims that humankind possessed very few innate fears and that carefully organized childrearing could produce fear-free individuals,” what is observed in the contemporary world is a great fear-producing machine, which involves various human collectivities; an emotion often imaginary, but which acquires a real and concrete force in determining personal and collective actions.

Indeed, there is a major political use of fear, often to distract or co-opt; however, at the same time, politics itself is often driven by the same feeling:

Top-down fear has increasingly been used to motivate policy decisions, and the process is new – at least in these proportions – and decidedly alarming. Robin [Corey Robin] certainly shakes

conservatives, who divert attention from real social issues by invoking fear, but along with Shklar [Judith Shklar] he does not identify the approach with conservatives alone, but with a broader shift in the political process (STEARNS, 2006, p. 479).

Therefore, complex social issues, which involve labor exploitation dynamics, e.g. in contemporary societies, can be explained in a simple way with the building of a specific fear: job loss due to the arrival of immigrants. In this case, politics does not need to find structural solutions to the problem, but it is enough to propose the blocking of migratory flows, in a populist introduction to the nation and antination, ‘solving’ in this way – in a discursive approach – the issue. As the flows will never be completely blocked, this type of narrative will continue to guarantee the votes of voters who feel threatened by this external enemy and represented by political groups that promise an easy salvation.

At the same time, what was an anxiety – job loss –, a distress, an anguish, which remained at the level of abstraction and, therefore, did not consent to seek a solution, now turns into a fear, i.e. into something concrete that can be neutralized:

In states of fear, individuals are consciously able (or believe they are able) to take measures to neutralize or escape the dangerous object, when this voluntary action fails, they live the subjective experience of “anxiety.” However, the ability to “neutralize or get away” is a matter of power relations within historical communities – not a major difference between the object or state that causes an emotional response (BOURKE, 2003, p. 127).

In this way, what represented an uncertainty – anxiety – may be changed to something consciously identifiable, a fear, based on the process of recognizing an enemy, the one who is mainly and directly responsible for the fear. Obviously, this enemy ends up embodying the negative elements that cause anxiety-fear, he ends up being criminalized to justify a strong action of correction, control, and subordination towards this subordinate group, in this case, the immigrant:

The insecurity of anxiety can be snatched away by the process of designating an enemy (plausible or not), converting anxiety into fear [...]. In other words, debates about the fear of crime reflect the anxiety of a rather general transformation and they are used to legitimize control over subordinate groups (BOURKE, 2003, p. 127).

In the immigration context, as this article seeks to show, the idea of integration is turned into a form of enemy control, submission, and subjection, in the search to overcome the fear of otherness, as it serves to eliminate the differentiating characteristics in relation to the society of arrival. To the extent that he divests from himself, the immigrant can be accepted, even if in an always subordinate way, but less threatening, in the collectivity that welcomes him: he softens the threatening image that characterizes him, because he is going through a civilizing process.

In the wake of this discussion, this article analyzes how the growing fear of the other – built in contemporary Italy from the mass landings of Albanians, in the 1990s, until the arrival of immigrants in Lampedusa today – has created a space of intolerance and inability to accept otherness as such. Thus, it collaborates to building a strong cross-sectional discourse in the political world and in the media about the necessary creation of a disciplinarian process for immigrants, which could prevent the nation's deterioration due to vices and problems brought by them, so that the invasion could be controlled and the 'barbarian' could be tamed.

### Immigration in Italy, a recent phenomenon, and the building of fear

Even though it is a country with a long emigration tradition, the idea of the Italian Peninsula as a place of arrival for immigrants is very recent, as it was only in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that an immigration phenomenon – even if irregular – began to be noticed. Therefore, the inhabitants of the peninsula are used to departures, whether temporary, very common in the period before the mass emigration started in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or as a 'permanent' experience, such as the one that marked the displacements to the American continent, between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

As a phenomenon of political, social, and journalistic impact, the immigration experience dates back to the 1990s, when the first Albanians, during the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, began to land in Puglia (a southern

Italy region, in the Adriatic Sea, in front of Albania)<sup>1</sup>. The image of daily arrival of immigrants who threw themselves from ships and swam to the beach filled the front pages of newspapers and the central spaces of TV news. Although not at first, little by little an idea of invasion was built up, associated with the landings, and – at the same time – a narrative regarding the Albanian government, which opened the prison doors to send all the outlaws to Italy. Since then, the discourse of fear began to be built and, soon after, its political use emerged, as the invasion of these contemporary barbarians had to be blocked in order to protect the nation.

Bonifazi (2007) points out that, when the first Albanians landed in 1990, the entire city of Brindisi, together with representatives of local and national politics, rushed to receive and welcome refugees who had escaped communism. Even the following waves of arrivals from Albania, between March and August 1991, provoked great solidarity on the part of the local population, also in response to the inability shown by the public administration to receive refugees, a fact which, at that time, still aroused strong criticism from the media and public opinion. Little by little, the increase of this phenomenon changed the perception of Italian society towards these arrivals, semantically moving from Albanian political refugees to immigrants, with the consequent move from the idea of reception to that of control<sup>2</sup>. The newscasts themselves served as the first instruments in the building of fear that broke with the solidarity network: through the dissemination of a warlike vocabulary, using terms such as ‘threat’ or ‘army that invades/takes hold,’ the nation began to be represented, in the media, as a fortress that should be protected.

<sup>1</sup> Even considering that the first migratory waves date back to the 1960s and 1970s, as a result of the great economic growth experienced in that period, with the arrival of mainly Filipinos and Tunisians (EINAUDI, 2007), it was only with the arrival of Albanians, numerically and imagetically more impactful, that the phenomenon began to take on a more negative and destructive connotation.

<sup>2</sup> Although highlighting a political meaning used by the Italian community for refugees and immigrants, in the context of Albanian immigration in the 1990s, this text uses the concept of migration adopted by UNESCO, extracted from Linhard and Parsons (2019, p. 4), which identifies the phenomenon as “the crossing of the frontier of political or administrative units for a minimum period of time. This includes the movement of refugees, displaced people, uprooted people, as well as economic migrants.” As for the Italian-Brazilians, emphasis will be placed on their condition as migrants, regardless of whether they have their Italian citizenship recognized or not.

In the context of the last 30 years, a great moment of transformation can be noticed, because the Italian people are no longer, as in previous decades, those of the mass emigration at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the other in someone's home; at this moment everything changes, because now, in this passage from the land of departure to the land of arrival, it is the Italian people who welcome the other in their homes. In fact, the new phenomenon also means putting into discussion perceptions of identity, dynamics of cultural recognition, fear of the risk of losing a tradition that sees itself as immutable. Even in the land of cultural rivalries and differences between contiguous cities, which is built on the idea of great variety, also dialectal, between the various regions that comprise it, the exponential increase in arrivals ends up leading to the birth of the myth of a homogeneous nation. In this new enchanted space of an imagined community (ANDERSON, 2018), represented in the media and built on political discourses, especially those of the far right wing, the otherness that 'invades,' comes to destroy an alleged communion of values, traditions, and shared cultural dynamics.

Also, in the written and spoken press, the association between immigration and criminality, or illegality, has increasingly gained ground, in a process, theoretically demonstrated by Bourke (2003), of legitimizing control actions towards subordinate groups, which ends up creating a collective imagination that links immigrant and illegality. According to Bonifazi (2007), the terminology used to define immigrants, which contributes to building this imagination, comes from adjectives, verbs, and nouns with a negative meaning: illegal, lacking documents, or undocumented, irregular, clandestine. In various ways, these individuals who continue to arrive, in more or less constant flows, over the last 30 years, are associated with the growing insecurity, something that disturbs the legality and normality of daily relationships; something that must be stopped, prevented, hindered.

There is not only a preference – in the media – for the association of immigrants with journalistic reports of a criminal nature or with criminal justice, with almost no space for themes proposing public policies or services of public interest, but, in addition, there is a set of news that emphasizes crimes

committed by immigrants much more than those perpetrated by Italians (CALVANESE, 2011). In the ‘pages’ of the police chronicle, regarding the various types of crimes, when a crime is committed by an immigrant, the association with a national identity, i.e. with the country of origin or with the extra-community status, comes immediately. Even in cases where the person at stake has acquired Italian citizenship, sometimes as a result of being born in Italy, her/his origin or geographical origin is emphasized, as if establishing a difference between these individuals and the ‘true Italians.’ On the other hand, the same national identity rule is not applied when the criminal is an Italian, in most cases her/his nationality is silenced.

The growing fear and anxiety before this other, the immigrant, is also a direct consequence of the way the media build and narrate the news, which is received by the local population, through the written and spoken press, which become an instrument of diffusion and amplification, contributing to the building of a widespread fear. In recent years, with the advent of online newspapers and spaces for reader’s comments, this type of source has become key material for grasping the impact of news on civil society:

It was always the newspapers that told us. Provoking our reaction. Just read the comments in the articles in online issues of the newspapers: on the *Corriere della Sera* website, dozens of readers expressed disbelief, indignation, but above all fear: fear of becoming “foreigners in their own country,” “guests in our home” because of “wild immigration;” fear of having to host “all pregnant women from the Third World, coming to give birth at the expense of our community;” fear of seeing “our culture” disappear due to the arrival of numerous “Muslims” (who could make “millions of children and impose the *Sharia* on us” [and] decreeing nothing less than “the end of civilization” (FALOPPA, 2011, p. 43, author’s italics).

As we can notice, the anxiety towards changes inherent to contemporary society is turned into fear through the individualization of a wrongdoer, the immigrant. The loss of certainties and the unsafety of the present time acquire a concrete enemy against which one can fight in different ways; so, there is the possibility of doing something to guarantee the security of the present time: preventing the immigration phenomenon, controlling the landings, blocking them in Libya, helping these people in their homelands. Political speeches animate and

agitate the public debate with ideas, most of the time as magical as they are impossible, but which allow us to imagine alleged and abstract neutralizing actions that can eliminate the danger and bring anxiety to an end. However, as long as the fortress remains impregnable, integration, along with control, becomes the necessary action to guarantee protection and avoid danger.

### Integration as a limitation to internal danger

Since the 1990s, as mentioned above, when the immigration issue began, there has been a continuous increase in the perception – by public opinion in the Peninsula – of immigration as a danger to the nation. Above all, there is the political use of this negativity attributed to the arrival of immigrants, with promises of repatriation and defense of Italianity. In this regard, to the image of invasion associated with the phenomenon people added that of non-integration, of immigrants who do not want to accept the standards of Italian society and do not want to submit to its traditions, who do not use Dante's language in their daily lives, but keep their languages of origin.

Therefore, in addition to repatriation, another possible solution is introduced, which allows at least reducing the risk, activating the integration processes. In all political fields, transversally in the media, in a diffuse way in society, 'integrating' has become the word of the moment and one of the central objectives of public policies. However, it is key to ask the question of what is meant by the term 'integration' and what this type of experience can mean in the immigrant's life.

Remaining in the realm of the Italian language, the *Treccani Encyclopedia*, one of the most important in the Italian Peninsula, presents a very interesting reading perspective on the entry "integration," associating it with the idea of incomplete, of something that has yet to be concluded/finished/adjusted:

Integration: In a generic sense, the fact of integrating, making whole, full, perfect, what is incomplete or insufficient for a given purpose, adding what is necessary or supplying the defect with adequate means (TRECCANI, 20--).

Thus, deprived of those that are the mythical values of this imagined community, a concept analyzed by Anderson (2018), the need to integrate the immigrant takes on the meaning of overcoming their defects in relation to Italianity. This individual arrives imperfect and must be perfected through the action of civil society, but, above all, by the State, in order to become part – even if subordinate – of the national society. It is worth emphasizing that – at no time – when talking about integration, it is assumed that these subjects can arrive with their own culture of origin, which should be part of the process of social interaction. Consequently, in this process, there is no concern with what the immigrant contributes to the collectivity that receives him, the cultural and social enrichment that is the result of the immigration phenomenon; the subversive potential of these individuals is a matter of concern and this generates fear, the possibility that they will undermine the social fabric.

This double discourse in Italian society is interesting, and perhaps it may be associated with the Eurocentrism that historically reinforced the binomial civilization/barbarism, where the first term was linked to European nations, which set out to bring economic, social, cultural, and human progress to the realities they were aimed at. This is the narrative adopted to talk about Italian emigration, about the Italian presence in the American continent, e.g. how immigrants from the Italian peninsula have collaborated for developing the communities to which they moved.

Also, the linguistic-cultural permanence is highlighted, the habits that the descendants kept, the link with an Italy that did not disappear over time. Differently, when talking about immigrants in the Italian reality, the fact of maintaining a connection with the culture of their land of origin becomes an issue and the contribution that this subject can bring is the erasure of his previous life. Possibly, these ‘barbaric’ spaces, from which the current waves of immigrants flow towards fortress Europe (and Italy), are the representation of the process opposed to that civilization; therefore, these individuals must be restrained in order not to barbarize the country and the continent.

The same *Treccani Encyclopedia* – based on two other entries – offers another reflection, with a different look at social processes and, specifically in

the interest of this article, in relation to those who migrate: the noun ‘inclusion’ and the verb ‘insert.’ With regard to the first, it is noteworthy that it brings the second within itself, insofar as its formulation describes it as the act of inserting in a set:

Inclusion: The act, the fact of including, i.e. of inserting, of understanding in a series, in a whole: inclusion of a name on the list of winners; inclusion of some precautionary clauses in a contract (TRECCANI, 20--).

Considering the above proposition, the entry ‘inclusion’ is not indicating the action of perfecting something defective, which must be completed; on the contrary, it speaks of the act of understanding, in the sense of becoming part of a series. As shown in the quotation, the inclusion of a name in a list of selected/classified individuals does not imply a change in the name, in the subject, or in the list itself, it presupposes a juxtaposition of these different elements, without thereby being deformed.

Going deeper into the issue, as previously pointed out, when talking about ‘inclusion,’ reference is made to the act of ‘inserting,’ which suggests the addition of something:

Insert: From person, becomes part of a group, of an environment; Introducing a work (even literary or artistic), in a text, in an organic complex [...] an adding element [...]: the architect wanted to insert on the facade a decorative motif; insert an autobiographical episode in a short story; insert a quote, some notes in a text (TRECCANI, 20--).

Following the idea expressed in the formulation above, ‘inclusion’ – unlike the notion of improvement implicit in the concept of ‘integration’ – has the image of a decorative motif that is inserted in the facade of a building, something new, diverse, which is part of the frontispiece itself, but – at the same time – it maintains its original, peculiar characteristics. On the one hand, it is possible to distinguish the individuality of the decorative motif that was attached and, on the other, one can also see the whole, the series, the façade in a global way, of which the added element becomes part. However, this process of ‘becoming part of’ did not mean the erasure or transformation of the specificities of the added element; its intrinsic qualities were maintained and used to enrich the totality represented by the façade.

At this point in the analysis, the idea that integration becomes an instrument for neutralizing some fear – on the part of the society of arrival –, the instrument of subversion brought by the immigrant, is clear. However, it ends up turning itself into the search for a solution to another fear, that of the immigrant, of not being recognized and accepted in the community he wants to see as welcoming. In order not to be perceived as ‘the other,’ the consubstantiation of the negative adjectives that give meaning to the immigrant and turn him into the incarnation of danger, the immigrant ‘chooses’ to allow himself to be completed with the shared cultural codes that this imagined community sees as his: integration becomes an almost mandatory path. In fact, we may say that the process is even more complex, as there is diversity in social acting and it will be useful for immigrants to produce a kind of camouflage, which aims to make their presence invisible in the country where they landed, ensuring acceptance, eliminating the sense of danger and restricting the space of fear.

### Integration as social mimicry: a solution to fear

On the one hand, there is the individual who left the land where he was born to seek a better life, or even the possibility of survival in another country, leaving behind him affections, experiences, landscapes, cultural codes, what used to be his world, on the other hand, a society that expects him to behave in a way that corresponds to those accepted by the local culture. In short, a collectivity that intends for newcomers to allow themselves to be completely shaped, integrating themselves into the new reality, in accordance with the process explained above. For the migrant, the only possible solution – to be accepted by the new national community in which he lives – is to build some acting that is in tune with local expectations:

Confronting people or situations that destabilize some aspects of their own identity, the person gets in trouble. He seeks the comfort of a mimic identity<sup>3</sup> that decreases the disadvantages, reduces the conflicts of

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<sup>3</sup> The term in Italian is kept because the possible translation into Portuguese – to imitate – does not fully respond to the meaning of the verb *mimare*. The idea of “representing through mimic” (*mimare*) brings with it a greater depth of the overlapping of the relationship established between imitator and imitated, which is not restricted to cats, but seeks to penetrate their deeper meanings.

simply *being oneself*. Then, in order to mimic oneself it is not enough to imitate. It is not enough to look at the other and be the reflection of their image, and reproduce it. It is also necessary to notice, to grasp how the other sees us. Creating, because what is imitated is known, but it is never apparent, it adapts to situations, relationships, the individuality of each interaction (ROMANIA, 2006, p. 7, author's italics).

So, there is a destabilizing situation, as mentioned above, between the immigrant's expectations and those of the society in which he wants to settle down; therefore, it is necessary, in order for acceptance to take place, to *mimare* the local identity. The idea existing in *mimare* goes beyond simple imitation, because it requires an adaptive acting that can respond to the various everyday stimuli of the community in the land of arrival; it is related to behaviors that change in specific interactions with each person, something that must be built beyond simple mirroring.

In order to respond adequately to the need for integration that comes from the new community, an immigrant must produce representations of himself that are acceptable in the land of arrival, and build his behavior in relation to the expectations of the group in which he is living. This process makes him put into practice some acting that is strategically functional to his goal of being accepted, regardless of his culture of origin and his personal way of interacting with people and everyday situations. The 'good immigrant' will be that person capable of producing the most adequate and adjusted acting to each circumstance of social dynamics.

Romania (2006), when talking about social mimicry, about 'pretend to be someone else,' also has a plausibility assumption as a basis, i.e. the immigrant who has acquired greater linguistic ability and who has physiognomic characteristics more easily assimilated to the host society. Acting also presupposes the ability to reproduce certain accents or even dialectal linguistic features, going beyond the way of dressing and everyday habits. This becomes even more important to the extent that an immigrant must seem to be alien to those degrading stereotypes that are associated with the group to which he belongs, which may be the representation of a thief, a transvestite, a prostitute, in any way, always linked to some type of behavior close to some type of illegality.

Social acting may be represented by the use of a kind of toolbox, within which an immigrant will look for the appropriate behavior to each situation:

We can imagine each individual as a subject who moves between different situations, carrying a box with different cultural tools. These are non-active instruments, but potentially activatable. Therefore, depending on the situation, he extracts the most useful elements from his box, then he activates and uses some of them, with the Schutzian aim of solving the problems of everyday life (ROMANIA, 2006, p. 26).

According to Vincenzo Romania, it is an “instrumental and situational process of concealing one’s own cultural peculiarities, a heritage that still survives in the intimate sphere” (ROMANIA, 2006, p. 8). According to the author, there is not a total conformation to the new society, but the search for practical advantages and privileges in the public space. Reference is made to a rational agency of identity, a calculation of the relationship between cost and benefit in negotiating parts of one’s identity. The main problem, taking into account the fear of non-acceptance, as we analyze later, is that in some cases this process goes beyond the public sphere and produces a series of deletions of behaviors and habits, including the use of the native language, which involve the private sphere. The struggle for recognition and acceptance ends up going beyond a rational agency in the public sphere, leading to cultural transformations involving family life and the immigrant’s self-representation: the more dead the pre-immigration subject, the more advanced the integration process.

### A look at sources in working with oral history

Before analyzing how sources illuminate the theoretical discussion and how they give us clues about the impact of fear on immigrant’s behavior, it is worth pointing out some important reflections on the selected oral documents and on the type of interviewee. First, the interviews analyzed here were carried out in the regions of Tuscany and Veneto, as well as in the province of Trento, between 2005 and 2014, with two specific groups of subjects: a) women from Mercosur countries; and b) young Italo-Brazilians, mostly college students, living

in northeastern Italy<sup>4</sup>. In the use of oral sources, it was decided to use semi-structured interviews, taking into account two strategies: thematic history – in which the immigration phenomenon was the central object – and life history, because the processes that involved the migratory experience are intertwined with the narrative of the lived<sup>5</sup>.

When talking about oral narrative, it is assumed that the moment of the interview is also the space for modeling the source, which will later become the document to be analyzed. In the act of telling her/his experience, the interviewee deletes, emphasizes some aspects of her/his experience, rereads specific moments of the past, builds a readability of personal and collective events she/he experienced. In a certain sense, one can glimpse a process of transliterating the personal and collective past, because memory, as Maurice Halbwachs suggests, is built at the intersection of memories, in which the individual experience is affected by the collective one, in a feedback process (HALBWACHS, 1994).

Another important phenomenon that marks the making of oral sources, based on the interview, is related to building the narrative logic. Assuming that memory consists of fragments of the experience and that no individual is able to recall the totality of events experienced in the past, the interviewing act also becomes the moment of providing these fragments that characterized the personal and/or collective experience with discursive linearity. Thus, during the narrative act, the interviewer interferes as little as possible to avoid blocking the mnemonic flow, leaving the interviewee free to weave the threads of her/his experiences.

In this way, there is a process of estrangement with pastness, because the subject who remembers is not the same person who experienced the past experience. As stated by Marcel Proust, reliving the past is the encounter with

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<sup>4</sup> More than 50 interviews were carried out in various projects, including: “Return to the roots? Gender, identity and integration in contemporary Brazilian immigration in Italy,” funded by the CNPq (Notice MCT/CNPq/SPM-PR/MDA No. 20/2010) and “The small starting points: from the immigration colonies of southern Brazil to Italy at the beginning of the 21st century,” funded by the CNPq (Notice MCT/CNPq/SPM-PR/MDA No. 20/2010). In collaboration with the UDESC colleague, Ph.D. Prof. Gláucia de Oliveira Assis, who coordinated the second project.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the discussion on oral history as life story or thematic story, see: ALBERTI, Verena. *Ouvir contar: textos em história oral*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2004.

different ‘selves’ who inhabited those times/spaces (PROUST, 2002). Therefore, at the moment of the report, the interviewee revisits her/his life in the skin of another person, because time has left only the traces of that ‘self’ who inhabited pastness and has now been turned into narration and representation.

In this sense, it is clear that the past exists in function of the present and that the second builds the narrative structure of the first. As we can notice in the reading offered by Koselleck (1993) about the relationship between past, present, and future, mnemonic dynamics are anchored in the present time of the person who remembers, but also in the goals that he has defined for his future: memory becomes an intersection space between three temporalities. As the person’s present time undergoes a process of change and his project for the future is affected, the fragments of the past end up being grouped according to a new logic and with the purpose of producing a different narrative, which conforms to the new reality.

### Between anxiety and fear, feeling like an extra-community member

In a quick reading of the *Treccani Encyclopedia*, the extra-community entry is shown as both an adjective and a noun. In the first case, it indicates a geographical condition, referring to individuals who do not belong to the European Union, also called ‘European Community.’ In the second case, as indication of a subject, the term acquires a negative connotation, being associated with immigrants from “economically disadvantaged countries” (TRECCANI ONLINE, 20--). In the media and in the State bureaucracy, it is this second meaning of extra-community that is mostly used, bringing with it the ideas of illegality, criminality, or invasion of barbarians. This term is used as the main representation of the bad immigrant, the one who should be excluded from the life of *civitas*.

Latin American immigrants<sup>6</sup>, the group of interviewees presented in this article, are very clearly aware of the negative framing they receive as extra-

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<sup>6</sup> For the analysis of this article, three interviewees were chosen (Pilar, Helena, and Mateus), in the universe of more than 50 interviews available. It is considered that these subjects offer a panoramic view of the problem and that their narratives are emblematic of the way in which immigrants face these issues. Also, they are representative of origin and age group, with regard to all interviews.

community members. It is very clear – mainly in interactions with the State bureaucracy – and especially in the procedures necessary to be granted permission to stay in the country. In addition to the huge queue (which most often starts to form at night) and the risk of not being able to get the day's password and be received, the attitude of police officers (not to mention cultural differences) produces an even greater feeling of non-humanity, of inferiority, which end up giving a greater negative connotation to the term extra-community member.

In this sense, Pilar's say<sup>7</sup>, an Argentine immigrant who had been living in Italy for eight years when the interview was carried out in 2005, in the province of Arezzo (Tuscany), is very clear in defining what made her feel exactly as an extra-community member. Since the search for a home, she had to rethink her identity, building some acting that could be functional towards her goal: finding a house to rent. She had been looking for a long time for a location, as she reports in the interview, and – even though the sum of money she was willing to offer ever increased – she could not find any residence available. When she realized why she couldn't find “*even a hole*,” as she put it, for rent, she changed the way she had been introducing herself: she omitted all evidence that might identify her as an immigrant<sup>8</sup>, therefore, an extra-community member. Pilar, who had left her position as university professor in Argentina, then introduced herself as an Argentine professor, specialist in the History of Art, who was looking for a residence for a study period in Tuscany. As the interviewee herself emphasized, from mansions to palaces, there was no lack of rental offers (PILAR, 2004).

However, the central issue that Pilar wants to stress is related to her experience with the *Questura* (police force), i.e. handing over the documents necessary to be granted permission to stay. According to her account, this is the place *par excellence* in which the immigrant feels to be an extra-community,

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<sup>7</sup> The language agreed upon for the interviewee was Italian, which was a common vehicle of communication between the interviewer and the interviewee, whose mother tongue was Spanish.

<sup>8</sup> As discussed in relation to the “extra-community” person, the migrant also bears a negative connotation forged at a low-level economic, cultural, and civilization stereotype. Introducing oneself as a university professor meant leaving this ‘social place’ and entering that of the ‘foreigner,’ the latter associated not only with rich regions of the planet, but also with a wealthy social status.

according to the meaning that the encyclopedia attributes to the noun. In particular, the *Questura* becomes an immense obstacle that must be overcome, a test one is required to pass in order to enter this new society with everything according to the law, legally:

If the problem was the immigrant, we saw each other very badly, you know. Because, even if a person tried very hard and managed to do everything, every time she/he went to the Questura, to be granted the blessed permission to stay, we felt very bad, personally attacked. A very, very difficult situation to tackle. And, of course, there are people who abandon everything and return [to their country], because they fail. Just to “play the game” takes a lot of courage [...] (PILAR, 2004, our translation)<sup>9</sup>

The *Questura* is lived as an experience of aggression, because – even with all the personal effort, even with all the distress to get to the window, even having respected all the steps of the procedure – the treatment was still derogatory. In fact, the Argentine interviewee regards herself as belonging to the group of the brave, the strong, those individuals who manage to overcome the *Questura* obstacle, because, despite all the difficulties, they managed to succeed and be granted permission to stay. On the other hand, there are those who – differently – end up succumbing to this ocean of bureaucracy, distrust, and aggression, then making the decision to return to their countries of origin<sup>10</sup>.

Even recognizing that the existence of national legislation is natural, regardless of the fact that a person may or may not agree, Pilar sees it as another exclusion instrument: “but, okay, these are the laws, a person can disagree with them, but, in fact, they make you feel much more like an immigrant than before, don’t they? make you feel extra-community member”<sup>11</sup> (PILAR, 2004). So, in Pilar’s

<sup>9</sup> Wording in original language:

“Se il problema era l’immigrante, noi ce la siamo viste abbastanza difficile, eh. Perché nonostante mettere tutto l’impegno e riuscire a fare tutto, ogni volta che si andava in Questura, a fare il benedetto permesso di soggiorno, noi ci siamo sentite sempre molto, molto, aggredite. Una situazione molto, molto, difficile da risolvere. E, certamente, c’è gente che abbandona e se ne torna, perché non ce la fa’. Soltanto a seguire questo gioco, bisogna avere un gran coraggio.”

<sup>10</sup> It is worth noticing that all respondents were legally living in Italy, with a regular residence permit or with recognized Italian citizenship. Also, all of them had completed university education or this was in progress at the time of the interview. Finally, for privacy reasons, only pseudonyms are used instead of any interviewee’s name, in order not to allow them to be identified.

<sup>11</sup> Wording in original language:

“Però, va beh, queste sono le legge, che uno non po’ andare contro, però veramente ti fanno sentire molto più immigrante che prima, non. Ti fanno sentire extracomunitario.”

reading, an extra-community member is the negative otherness, the excluded, the one who struggles to be part of the community in the land of arrival, but who faces a constant non-recognition. Thus, she/he experiences a continued anxiety of not being able to, of not overcoming the obstacle, of not going through the entrance door; an anxiety of not being accepted in the new land. Having identified her/his enemy, who is recognized as being her/himself, as the ultimate responsible for her/his exclusion, she/he seeks to neutralize the danger, in order to eliminate fear, through integration.

### The neutralized danger: integration and invisibility

In a context where this other, the immigrant, is the native's negative otherness, the solutions that some individuals choose are related to invisibility, which regards integration as an erasure of themselves, and to acceptance of non-recognition, strategies to neutralize the danger that they see to be brought about by themselves. In Helena's interview<sup>12</sup>, the Brazilian immigrant who has lived in Italy since 1986, this dynamic of abandoning her former life to fully immerse herself in the role she is called to play in the land of arrival is very strong<sup>13</sup>. In fact, the discourse on integration is fully incorporated by Helena, even if she sees a positive connotation in the experience:

One thing I never liked was going to or building ghettos. It doesn't seem fair to be in a place and ghettoize, i.e. foreigners or Brazilians [...] people who ghettoize convey a negative idea, i.e. I don't like the things I experience here, but I must stay here, in this place, and do these things (HELENA, 2004, our translation)<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Despite being Brazilian, and sharing the same language as the interviewer, Portuguese, Helena preferred to use Italian as the language for the interview. She said that she had a better command of her new language, and that her Portuguese suffered a lot of interference from Italian. Her choice is pretty emblematic, regarding the search for integration and recognition, in a situation marked by fear of the different, a central theme of this article.

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noticing that Helena arrived in Italy even before the great increase in the migratory phenomenon and its impact on the media, with the arrival of Albanians in the Puglia region. The perception of an immigrant in the 1980s did not yet have the strong negative connotation acquired later, since the last decade of the century, a consequence of the strong boom in the arrival of Albanians. In this sense, she still remembers the freedom experienced in Italy at the time, with the possibility of walking the streets without any documents, without a bank account, and without existing for the Italian State.

<sup>14</sup> Wording in original language:

“Una cosa che non mi è mai piaciuta, è frequentare e fare ghetto. Non mi sembra giusto stare in un posto e ghettizzarsi, cioè, gli stranieri o i brasiliani. [...] Le persone che si “ghetizzano” propongono un'idea negativa, cioè, non mi piacciono queste cose che vivo qui, però, devo rimanere qui, in questo, e fare queste cose.”

Like so many individuals from the land of arrival, the immigrant woman Helena is also unable to see the difference and the fact of cultivating the country of origin's tradition as key in the process of taking root in a new society and culture. Forming groups with compatriots who have lived similar experiences of expatriation, in her opinion, is a mistake, because this produces what she calls *ghetizzazione*, i.e. a ghetto is built, which is regarded as a close and self-referential place. These *enclosures*, according to the interviewee, become spaces for criticizing interactions, behavior, and how things were done in the community where they were living.

Helena reports a very positive experience in her search for acceptance in the community where she lived/lives, talking about the insertion/inclusion strategies that were employed by her:

Staying longer in San Giovanni, I started to live it, i.e. to go and spend some time downtown, to have contact with people, to look for opportunities to insert myself in the lives of others, and one of these things I did was working as a volunteer: volunteer work to care for hospitalized people. Then, I volunteered to work at animal protection associations: in the beginning, I took in kittens abandoned on the streets, which were brought to the association [...] (HELENA, 2004, our translation)<sup>15</sup>.

However, these social works along with institutions and associations in the town where she lived are part of a search for recognition and acceptance, which actually ends up leaving behind that Helena who existed before immigration. The community insertion itinerary (which looks more like a path towards integration), in Helena's view, means erasing her previous life – that of her homeland, in Brazil – in order to better fit the environment where she lives today:

I tried to experience what takes place here, this environment, this culture. I mentally ripped my old life away from me. [...] there is a wealth of different experiences that don't let me think about what I once lived (HELENA, 2004, our translation)<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Wording in original language:

“Rimanendo più tempo a San Giovanni, ho cominciato a viverla, Cioè, ad andare un po' in città, a cercare le persone, a cercare cose per inserirmi e una di queste cose che ho fatto è stato il lavoro volontario: il lavoro volontario per l'assistenza alle persone in ospedale. Dopo, il lavoro volontario presso associazioni di protezione degli animali – all'inizio raccoglieva i gattini abbandonati per le strade, che erano portati all'associazione [...]”

<sup>16</sup> Wording in original language:

Even by taking a positive view, emphasizing how the wealth of different experiences replaces one's previous experiences, the actual meaning is related to the need for cancelling oneself in order to be part of a new community. In the case of the interviewee, as we can notice in the quotes used, this process was so profound that it led her to progressively lose her mother tongue, which is Portuguese, speaking Italian with a heavy local accent. Considering that the Brazilian immigrant arrived there as an adult woman, with higher education and having left a teaching role in southern Brazil, the linguistic loss becomes an emblem for this attempt to erase one's past life.

The idea of integration as a way to neutralize the fear of non-acceptance and recognition becomes even clearer when later, during the interview, Helena says that she ignores or denies her own interests – in the public sphere, even though they continue to exist and take her time in the private sphere – in order to share with others only the interests of those people:

My interests are still my interests, but individual ones, I don't share them with others. Like the others, I share their interests. Surely I bring my baggage with me, this contains all my interests, etc., etc., but I try to share those of others (HELENA, 2004, our translation)<sup>17</sup>.

In the immigrant's view, her personal and cultural baggage has nothing to add in the society where she lives, because it is not regarded as something positive in order to succeed in a process of acceptance, recognition, and integration. Differently, according to her, sharing the interests of those with whom she relates in the province of Arezzo means starting to be part of daily life in that community, being accepted by the natives, starting to belong to that group.

In another geographic and age reality, in the case of Mateus<sup>18</sup>, a young Brazilian immigrant from Espírito Santo, who went through a dramatic situation

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<sup>16</sup> "Ho cercato di vivere le cose di questo spazio, di questo ambiente, di questa cultura. Ho strappato di me, mentalmente, la mia vita di prima. [...] c'è una ricchezza di vissuti diversi che non mi fanno pensare a quello che una volta ho vissuto."

<sup>17</sup> Wording in original language:

<sup>18</sup> "I miei interessi sono ancora i miei interessi, ma individuali, non li condivido con gli altri. Con gli altri io condivido i loro interessi. Certamente, porto con me il mio bagaglio, con tutti i miei interessi ecc, ecc, ma cerco di vivere quelli altri."

<sup>19</sup> The interviewee – a Brazilian man – preferred to use the Portuguese language for the interview.

of labor exploitation, in the Trentino Alto Adige region, acceptance, recognition, and integration are an impossible reality to be achieved. In his opinion, it is not just a legal issue, considering that he has Italian citizenship (even though he was born in Brazil), according to the criteria of the *lure Sanguinis* adopted in Italy, but the cause must be sought in the great cultural difference that is not accepted in the new land community:

You're never going to be one of them, you're never going to be, no matter whether you have citizenship, no matter whether you have their name, never, because maybe you have an accent when you speak, so they'll notice, they'll ask you, your life story, you know, it doesn't change (MATEUS, 2013).

In Mateus's view, effective integration is an unattainable goal, because an immigrant will never be completely equal to a native, he will never be able to fully share the cultural codes of the land of arrival, there will always be something that unmasks his acting and shows the community that he is the other. Helena herself, during the interview, stated that when she said she was Brazilian (after the question that followed some grammatical mistake or some unusual word pronunciation – where are you from?), the conversation took another direction and the dialogue ended up being sexualized.

## Final remarks

In this article, we sought to analyze, in the context of contemporary Latin American immigration in Italy, the fear of the other as a starting point for intolerance – of an intransigence towards the different – and how integration is a 'remedy' that produces resignation, as a symptom of a search for recognition and acceptance in the land where one wants to live. Whether as a representation conveyed by the media, as an object of political discourse, or as an imagination that has taken root in the community that receives she/him, the other is identified with the fear of a negative change, with the destruction of what the imagined community recognizes as its unchanging tradition.

If integration emerges as a neutralization of the subversive characteristics of otherness, it prevents this disturbing action, because it seeks to cancel its past,

its culture. Also for the immigrant, in the context of prejudice towards her/his group of origin, integration neutralizes her/him as an enemy of the society of arrival, making her/him constantly anxious about the possibilities of acceptance and recognition. Therefore, a transversal idea is created about integration, that it emerges as the definitive solution to the 'issue' of the other in the national community, turning the death of her/his cultural specificities into the nation's salvation.

However, as Mateus says, but also as Helena observes, commenting on how a perceived foreign accent leads to the question about her/his origin and, consequently, the use of the stereotype of the Brazilian woman, which leads to a change in the topic of conversation, there will always be something that unmasks this belonging to the land of arrival. At that moment, despite the efforts for a total integration, to mimic the new reality, pretending to be someone from the place, the image of otherness comes to the fore. The person is no longer someone in the group, with or without recognized citizenship, but becomes part of another set, that of otherness.

Thus, even if integration is initially imagined as an effective and definitive solution to neutralize the danger of the other, the threat will always be latent. Immigrants, especially, are constantly afraid of being discovered in their condition of otherness, with the risk of not being accepted and recognized as community members. Thus, the idea of inclusion – which presupposes inserting a person into a community, without de-characterizing her/him – could be a better response to the immigration phenomenon, especially considering that integration, in addition to becoming a process of erasing the other, does not produce the effects of full acceptance and recognition within the community where the immigrant settles: at some point, the negative stereotypes that characterize national immigrant collectivities will surface. Unlike the idea of integration, which – by seeking to erase the experiences of the homeland – does not allow enriching the community with diversity, the notion of inclusion alludes to the maintenance of the immigrants' cultural specificities, potentially generating a possibility of collective growth, with what is specific to each group.

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Luís Fernando Beneduzi

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Luís Fernando Beneduzi

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