

REALITY AND / OR PREJUDICE THE EMIGRANT AND HIS IMAGE REFLECTED IN PIECES

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Abstract. This study aims to verify three research dimensions. The first one recognizes image/ representation as a central feature of contemporary debates, with an enhanced degree of cultural applicability, providing the analysis coordinates needed to position the subject / individual within a specific reference group. The second concerns the way in which, as individuals, people exhibit physically, ethnically and religiously significant differences, stereotypes and prejudices triggering and emphasizing social dissent. The third reaffirms the paradoxical effect that image reporting indicates the phenomenon of a vague and secondary interest in the persons of migrants as people, so that image of the migrant presents to the world a suspect refugee from the Middle East, with the main interest in the economic, social, political and security consequences, recognising the phenomenon of migration as one that characterizes and defines the contemporary society. Therefore, the study will reaffirm the relationship between migration and imagology, insisting - theoretically, conceptually - on realities, prejudices and distorted images.

Keywords: images, representations, migrant, identity, reality, prejudice.

Imagology Goes Global: the emergence of visuals

This study continues the subject of license dissertation research (*European perspectives on migration*, with a case study focused on *the political impact of Islamic migration in the European space*, 2017), insisting on a triple investigative approach.

The first recognizes the image / representation as the central feature of contemporary debates with an intensified degree of cultural applicability, providing the analytical coordinates needed to position the subject within a specific reference group.

The second concerns the way in which, as individuals exhibit physically, ethnically and religiously significant differences, stereotypes and prejudices these are crucial in triggering and increasing social dissent. When a collective defines the identity of a different community, it inevitably relates to the coordinates of its

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own identity, highlighting the similarities, but, especially, emphasizing the differences thus perceived as problematic and, potentially, threats.¹

The third reaffirms (without setting as the point of interest the assimilation and quantification of the image, but setting rather a focus on its integration into a *moving phenomenon*) the paradoxical effect it sustains [in this case] *the reporting of the image of the second wave migrant to the phenomenon* described by a vague and secondary interest in the individuals forming the group of migrants, placing the accent on the image of the migrant as a refugee from the Middle East representing a potential threat, the analysts having as the main interest the emphasis upon the economic, social, political and security consequences, as well as upon the identification and recognition of the valences of the phenomenon that characterizes and defines contemporary society.

With regard to the theory and method of imagology, Joep Leerssen² proposes adjusting the domain to a series of particular realities, a dossier with a double reference to the image: on the one hand, highlighting the decline of print studies and the emergence of visual, cinema, TV, internet as the main media narratives, and, on the other hand, the occlusion of various ethno-types, whose reporting is characterized by a dormant or ironic accreditation with meta-image valences.

The global perspective / openings of the image mark the route from the film director (referring to *Casablanca*, the one that appeals to the refugee-actors prologue *interpreting the role* of refugees in the simulated space of a Hollywood-studio) to *reality*, the latter being either in a hard way or in an absolutely ironic way (the use of ironic-parodist ethno-types – as present in *French Kiss* or *European Vacation*, 'Allo 'allo, Tarantino style etc. – which all disputed the effect of both cliché and provocation brought to the fore by imagology).³

Joep Leerssen insists on the relation established in film-making among *frames-triggers-latency states*, thus deepening the relationship *image-political representation* the revaluation of constructions that form and set in motion “the mental repertoire” and which give preference to specific *patterns, cultural experiences* and *narrative schemes* adapted to the current conditions / realities.

Not at all by chance, Shaun Tan's⁴ graphical approach can be considered the standard of permutation, animation, or reorganization of visual frames that reward the status of *image language*, whose sign / sense is projected, exposed, transfigured. The art of image corresponds [here] to the art of folding the paper,

¹ Oişteanu Andrei, *The image of the Jew in the Romanian culture*, Iaşi, Polirom Publishing House, 2012, f.p.

² Joep Leerssen, “Imagology: On using ethnicity to make sense of the world”, in *Iberic@l, Revue d'études ibériques et ibéro-américaines*, no. 10, autumn 2016, pp. 13-31.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 23-24.

⁴ Shaun Tan, *The arrival*, Art Publishing House, 2016.

origami, in hiding and showing preferentially and selectively facets of meaning, in favouring the particular purpose of the forced immigrant / refugee, in manipulating the artistic time of the film employing rewritten and visualized clues in certain film frames, which become metaphors and metonymies enhancing meaning for instance a piece of origami, or a watch, hat, pot, naive drawing, or a jar, a trunk, or a family portrait.

All these cuts, frames and close-ups are intended to mark in film a destiny – with starting points and arrival terminals – potentiating with the substantial meaning and feeling the interior, the familiar, the domestic, and then exposing the context, the exterior. The essentialised presentation of the graphic novel reaffirms (also for the Romanian edition) the status of "silent tale of every immigrant, refugee"; in itself, the picture raises a story too its entirety, tragically voiced through the image it is displaying / exposing.

The realities of a phenomenon: migration and imagology

Localized (historically) in the context of intra-European population movement (from Southern Europe to the North) or episodic journeys outside Europe (North Africa, Asia and the Middle East) with a modified configuration after the World War II (in terms of structure, determinants and the evolution of migration flows between "supplying" and "beneficiary" countries) the phenomenon of migration cannot be accredited with a novelty status. However, its new forms maintain an innovative configuration of the phenomenon, with consequences that individualize and characterize it on its own historical path.

The subject and object of the steps of clarification and repositioning inside the coordinates of an open world (a free movement), the phenomenon of migration is Huntingtonian⁵ invested with the effects of *the collision of civilizations and the restoration of the world order*, has a prospect that affirms the cultural primacy, multi-polarism and multi-civilizationism accepting, on the one hand, the impossibility of overlapping modernization, westernization and migration, and on the other hand, the inability to understand migration solely through the patterns of universal civilization or through the Western lenses.

The thesis invalidates Fukuyama's prescriptions: the dominant-winning ideology does not celebrate too much the victory – similarly to the Huntington's view, where a conflict is replaced by another, and so on, incessantly – and the end of history does not sustain the diagnosis of *endism*, but migration seen in relation to the adaptation to liberal democracy, to the emergence of recognition the accumulation of social prestige, the rise of curtains and the fall of walls, all these are entertaining their status of events, not of stories, as agonizing extensions of the

⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Antet Publishing House, 1997, pp. 189-193.

narrative of marginality and heterogeneity within the human race. Moreover, the Christian Occident with a secular system does not remain without competitors; the Muslim world produces the main threats, challenges to the capitalist social order, realities that impress upon Huntington's theory the need for updating: what we are witnessing are not only inter-evil forces conflicts on the global agenda, but also intra-civilizational ones.

Often reduced to a simplified and uncomplicated relationship, the *migration-image* relationship is loaded with reactive-pragmatic valences, with ample manifestations, blocking the visions in clichés and reducing the impact of tolerance sustained by liberal and democratic theories and representing a very difficult point on current agenda of our world. The topic of tradition⁶, but with anew concern, imagology (ethnic imagology) justifies its status as an emerging field in the Euro-American academic circles of recent decades. The image of the Muslim becomes, in the current context of the challenges of globalization, an essential tool amid the interpretation of interculturality. The economic and political configuration, the geographic location, the different values and principles are fuelled by global development tendencies, exacerbating new *clashes*, gaps and conflicting relations between different parts of the globe, but also reaffirming the signals of events announcing another (!) *end of history*. *Genetic adaptation*⁷ is doubled, in the context of free movement, by *cultural adaptation*⁸, a potential accomplishment that is complicated by inappropriate or unacceptable migrant attitudes that affect the overall image of the entire culture they are part of.

The values, ideals, aspirations and different behaviours are a trigger for debates concerning the current theme and the associated conflicts. For example, the conclusion of the majority of Muslims in the UK, and generally, in Europe, is that liberal democracy, with its political and cultural specificity, is only a way of organizing good life, but it is neither the best and the most rational one, nor the only universally-valid form of good society.⁹

Within a non-static analytical approach, the perspective is resumed in the context of current realities of the above mentioned dialogue between Huntington and Fukuyama. If the first one¹⁰ (prophetically) warns about the hybrid cultural policies, accentuating the dimension and the impact of the crucial issue of the 21st century, migration, Fukuyama is conceptually starting from the same

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Collective author, *Sociology of Culture, Anthropology of Foreign Authors*, Beladi Publishing House, 2010, p. 24.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Encyclopedia of Fundamental Writings of Political Philosophy. The Contemporaries: 1971-1989*, Institute of Political Science and International Relations Publishing House „Ion I. C Bratianu”, Bucharest, 2016, p. 663.

¹⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, "Politics in a World of Hybrid Cultures: Migration is the Central Issue of the 21st Century", in *New Perspectives Quarterly*, vol.18, no. 2, 2000, pp. 22-24.

framework: there is no doubt that the Muslim world is a dysfunctional one with specific flaws in various ways and that Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have become the sources of an extremist and hateful ideology of Western values.¹¹

Any culture or ideology cultivates a series of answers directed against the set of values and the mentalities that are significantly different. The border (of nation states) is an essential concept, an ideological quintessence that influences the majority of aspects, with a wide range of interests (from legitimate authorities to various terrorist organizations)¹², both subject and object of current debates.

On July 30, 2015, David Cameron drew attention to “migratory clusters crossing the Mediterranean Sea in their search for a better life,” a picture attached to the new and unfamiliar experience facing modern Europe.¹³ Like a battle scene where frontal interests are faced first, following the directions of a war movie, Fukuyama interprets the current context through the *battlefront*¹⁴ term, equating Europe to a battlefield, recognizing the expansion of the phenomenon globally and individualizing a particular context of this historical *clash* between the Radical Islam and the Liberal Democracy, each assuming exemplary roles.

The scenario is the expansion of global-hybrid conflicts, with changes to security policies, as well as the perceptions and attitudes of the civilian population. Given that the European space is assimilated to a mosaic of values and principles, by its own attitude towards facilitating free movement, the European attitude is one of dissatisfaction with the changes that have occurred. The intensification and expansion of terrorism is no longer seen as coincidence, isolated act or sporadic reaction; hence, the correlation of the anti-terrorism strategy and a security strategy with the modalities and formulas of eradications that conform and respond to the multifaceted crisis.

In the context of the destabilization of the international scene, Islamic ideology represents the origin and source of the destabilization, but the core problem is the manifestation of modern erroneously managed policies rather than the assertion of traditional Muslim culture. The European citizen adopts a general sceptic attitude toward the migrant integration, even when they have only the direct experience of migrants who comply with the host country by learning the language or assimilating basic cultural information, deepening the contrast among the first generation of migrants from Guatemala and Vietnam to the United States of America and the next ones or among the first generation of Islamic migrants, in Europe, and the next ones.¹⁵

¹¹ Francis Fukuyama, *Identity, Immigration & Democracy*, University Press, 2006, p. 5.

¹² Gordana Deric, *Spatial demarcations*, Institute of European Studies, 2016, p. 17.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

¹⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

The art of film resorts at occasions to comedy, as it happens in the German film *Willkommen bei den Hartmanns* (2016)¹⁶ where the creators project a “comedy about the crisis of refugees in Europe”, which is combining the current political issues and uncomplicated, direct and simple humour with a tremendously serious, life and death topic.

It is the seriousness behind comedy, it is the directing, production and placement of the film in the German space, its theme associated to the view of Chancellor Angela Merkel’s “open door policy”, that render the *plot* as eloquent as it is for the present state of affairs: a wealthy family Munich decides to receive Diallo refugee from Nigeria. On the one hand, the film insists on serious problems – with bureaucratic issues, racism, terrorism – but it also sets a key stake in scoring clichés and presenting them a comic key.

The alternative that the title itself proposes – *Willkommen bei den Hartmanns - Welcome to the Hartmann Family* – proposes a metonymy for Genamy and its relation to migration, which sends to the overlapping of the individual German space (the idyllic space in which the family lives, the comfort and the banality / the commonality of a wealthy existence, the middle – with an allusion also to the third age issue) facing the problem of refugees, the policy and the solutions used to manage the phenomenon, the interaction and the fair integration of the refugees, without avoiding to address the extreme reactions – Pegida organization – or the lack of homogeneity of the European response to the crisis.

Thus, the story insists on the data of exposure to a *moving world* (with all the tragedy he feels impregnated in the chosen solution, migration – as Diallo is the only survivor of a massacre of Islamists), which is confronted to a *well-established world* (that has its own problems, even though these problems are at other levels and manifest themselves to a different extent of dysfunction). Relevant remains within the so-called context of the European migration the cinematic approach equating Diallo with the prototype *ideal immigrant*, challenging the idea that any immigrant is a potential threat and establishing that each story is *required to be viewed differently*.

Prejudices and distorted images

Both European and Islamic philosophy of good, in general and good society, in particular fail to explicit the distinction between what unites them and what separates them, resorting to image management, to an interplay of distortions, influencing as well the (a)typical image of the Christian and the

¹⁶ The film directed by Simon Verhoeven and produced by Wiedemann & Berg Filmproduktion, Sentana Filmproduktion, Seven Pictures, has benefited from a positive reception, translated by cash receipts and house success in German space.

current perspective upon the Islamic migrants. The conflicts and lack of effective integration of migrants and refugees into Western societies find their explanations in *homo Islamic* phenomenology, but whose particular mapping deepens the need for a counter image indicating that there is no unity of Christianity.

The Middle East faces radical situations prior to the Arab spring (the revolution of the Zingas triggered by the numerous social and economic discrimination or the revolution of the Qarmads aimed at establishing a socialist regime).¹⁷ When religious, economic or political interests interpenetrate, the result is in a fragile, unbalanced situation and gives the most distorted image (perspective).

The details of the context are also reaffirmed by the Adonis dialogue (Ali Ahmad Said Esber - Houria Abdelouahed), which aims to portray Muslims through the violent manifestations in the Muslim world (and beyond). Released from the constraints imposed by the society in which he was born, being himself a migrant, Adonis highlights the specific characteristics of the Arab world, establishing that the hastily grasp of the world and its affairs has the effect of generalization and confusion, Europeans approaching an offensive attitude towards the refugees, their image being attached to the economic interests and to a perception of migrants as constant threats to Europe's security.

On the one hand, there is an attempt to resist and downplay the anti-migration feeling within the population of the host country provided the attitudes and policies of authorities, and, at the same time, a hyperbolising effect that the media spread nationally and internationally. The media framework often distorts the event, attaching to it obvious prejudices and distortions.¹⁸ The effect of media consumption on building stereotypes promotes and serves the public an alternative reality that is consumed as such, as a mediated and manufactured reality, encouraging simulation and theatricality, instead of genuine information. Relevant in this respect is the imposition of a firm demarcation line between prejudice and reality.

All these perspectives converge towards *a picture reflected in pieces* of the European crisis, whose clues are uneven. Migration (Islamic migration, in particular) has the atypical status of a phenomenon situated and developed at the border between confrontation and cohabitation. The role of the image is all the more important as the individual citizen is assimilated to a consumer of images, overwhelmingly sensational, guided by excessive and hyperbolised prospects. The image of the migrant media report has the power to influence the collective mind and to cultivate alarmist attitudes. Stereotypes and prejudices are to be

¹⁷ Houria Abdelouahed Adonis, *Violence and Islam*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2016, p. 10.

¹⁸ Nicolle Etchegaray, Teresa Correa, *Media Consumption and Immigration*, Diego Portales University, Santiago, Chile, 2015, p. 3.

counterbalanced through more serious requirements of intercultural education, providing the only serious means able to adjust both social and political policies, and the differences of perspectives.

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