Riace

The Laboratory of a New European Identity?

My research deals with the microreality of Riace, a little town in Calabria, become in the last years a laboratory of something more than an ordinary integration process. To define this phenomenon, we can use the neologism “intelligration”: if integration and melting pot are hinged on an economic-centric subjectivity, based on the contractual relationship and focused on cultural assimilation in separated spaces, intelligration means that the other is invited to be part of a fabric which must be recovered (Ricca 2010). This way, the pressure on the borders by worldwide migration flows becomes an opportunity for the local rebirth. Migrants are called to translate themselves into physical and symbolic spaces of the country landing (Sedda 2003).

In 1998 this village welcomed a boat with Kurdish refugees: from that moment everything changed, and many migrants has arrived from all around the world: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ghana, Mali, Togo, Nigeria, Somalia, these are just some of the countries of origin of the new inhabitants of Riace. This region has been plagued for centuries by emigration, but now lots of migrants are being accepted in the human and demotic fabric. Here they can have a house, a job, education and health care (Bennis 2009). The major's goal was to redeem depopulated buildings, engaging a transformation prospect marked by intercultural coexistence (Guarracino 2016).

This is a successful attempt to naturalize globalization, starting from the ancestral predisposition to reception that people of the South of Italy have inherited from archetypal Greek ancestors and Basilian monasticism (Aria 2008). As it is demonstrated by the authors cited, convinced by this example, the region Calabria has signed a law after the intuition of Riace's mayor, funding each project of refugees' reception which aims to promote handcrafted production, local traditions, responsible tourism and solidarity economy (Zolin 2015).

My research aims to understand the role played by cultural identities in this meeting: if Calabrian culture is the instrument that encourages refugees to ward off painful memories, and to plunge themselves into a totally new tradition; in a long-term perspective is it possible to think about a new identity not only for these refugees, but for natives too?

Through field interviews in Riace and in the neighboring towns, I try to answer to this question. Very important for my research it was the study of the young students' situation, mostly from migrant families. The study may be useful to review the ministerial school programs, not only in Italy but in Europe, to be able to create a real school for the future European citizens.