

CONNESSIONI E DIFFERENZE: RITI DI PASSAGGIO E VIAGGI “RADICALI”

CONNECTIONS AND DIFFERENCES: RITES OF PASSAGE AND “RADICAL” JOURNEYS

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Abstract

A travel experience is a formative tool, which for second generations is an opportunity to get to know themselves and their roots. While on the one hand, the "radical" journey by the children of parents with a migration background represents a sort of *rite de passage* and cultural transformation, on the other hand, this type of journey is not just a rite of passage but takes on characteristics of its own.

The contribution, therefore, aims to bring out the characteristics of both situations, showing the interactions and differences that make the dynamics distinct.

L'esperienza del viaggio è uno strumento formativo, che per le seconde generazioni è l'occasione per conoscere se stessi e le proprie radici. Se da un lato il viaggio "radicale" da parte dei figli di genitori con background migratorio rappresenta una sorta di *rite de passage* e di trasformazione culturale, d'altra parte, questa tipologia di viaggio non si limita ad essere solo un rito di passaggio, ma assume caratteristiche proprie.

Il contributo si prefigge dunque di far emergere le caratteristiche di entrambe le situazioni, mostrando le Interazioni e le differenze che rendono distinte le dinamiche.

Keywords

Radical journeys; rites of passage; second generations; migration background.

Viaggi radicali; riti di passaggio; seconde generazioni; background migratorio.

*Tell me, Grandpa Dembo,
tell me what colour Africa is. [...]
Africa, little Chaka,
has all the colours of life.
M. Sellier*

The journey as a formative human experience

The journey lends itself to depicting the unfolding of life as a 'displacement' from its point of origin to its conclusion, even if the dictionary definition of the term presupposes a vision exclusively related to space, eluding the temporal one. According to various authors, the journey stands as a metaphor for human existence (Widmann, 1999). This is because such an experience represents something more than mere 'transfer' in space. It always constitutes a vicissitude of the individual, thrown like a bridge between space and time, between past and future, between subject and world.

Man's life is always linked to movement, it is at the origin of life, indeed it can be said that the very need to travel was born and grew with man. It is a need that enters deep inside man, therefore not limited to the search for knowledge of what is different and what is new and unknown: this is not just an escape from the boundaries of reality and its construction, but an opportunity to learn and get to know oneself. In choosing to set out on a journey, the subject is willing to face dangers and traumatic experiences that take him away from his affections, and then return to the context of departure. A journey that goes beyond the mere formal similarity of a path that winds between birth and death, rather it speaks of an experiential journey, of a conceptual journey, of formative itineraries and initiatory paths, of the path of existence and the course of illness as well.

It is in these 'journeys' that one can identify how the experience of travel is «an agent and model of transformation, an experience of continuous change familiar to all human beings from the moment they acquire locomotion in early childhood» (Leed, 1992, 14), indeed it is in this regard that Leed refers to travel as a «paradigm of experience» (1992, 14). The deeply rooted and repeated idea is precisely that travel is an experience that tests and perfects the traveller's character, bringing about «transformations of character to the extent that it is chosen and chosen for its own sake, not for extrinsic purposes or goals» (1992, 79).

The set of events that the subject faces to reach the destination constitutes the specific warp of his or her journey, where the plot is unique for everyone. The characteristics of originality and unrepeatability of the journey define that learning from it is not consequential to the experience but requires work of reflection and reworking.

In particular, the formative value of the journey is recognised because it «brings to completion a cultural process, reaffirming in re an ideal process (with the direct experience of the Classical World, its vestiges, its footprints), a path of autonomy (with the detachment from the family and the local community, with the submission to risks, trials, unforeseen events, etc., which require the ability to intervene, initiative, even if the journey is always planned and, very often, not carried out in solitude), a process of socialisation, acquiring "world practice", experiencing different situations, among different peoples: it produces a more complete humanisation, individual, cultural and social (Cambi, 2011, 157-158). This is also the case for 'radical journeys', such as journeys that second generations make in their own or their parents' context of origin (Raccagni, 2022, 73-75), thus different from the place where they live.

The articulation of rite de passage and radical journeys

Radical journeys, albeit in the uniqueness that characterises them for each young person who undertakes one in the contexts of their parents' or their cultural origin, find some points of contact with the *rite de passage*, identified by Van Gennep (1909), but at the same time their characteristics.

If the latter has the function of supporting the individual in transit, preventing the subject from becoming unbalanced or lost in the phases of change and at the same time activating social relations, in the *rite de passage* «second generations enter a relationship with what their parents' experience represented. Particularly for parents of foreign origin, the past refers to the history of

life in the country of origin, where they grew up, assimilated culture and customs» (Raccagni, 2022, 72) and thus fundamentally seek to answer the question '*Who am I*'.

The structure of the rites of passage reproduces in symbolic terms a physical articulation: Van Gennep defined the first phase as "separation", since there is a real and physical estrangement from the context in which one lives; the second phase as the "margin" or "liminal" phase, with the use of the Latin word *limen* "threshold, the passage" and finally a final phase of the rite of passage is constituted by the rites of "aggregation". An articulation that we also find in radical journeys, where the young person with a migratory background first undertakes a journey, which represents his or her detachment from the original situation from the context in which he or she lives; this is then followed by a placement in a state of experience and suspension, where he or she concretely comes into contact with the socio-cultural context of his or her parents, which is different from the place where he or she lives; and then concluding the experience of the journey with its introduction into the context in which it lives, not so much with physical differences, but with the possibility of a change of a radical kind, of acceptance concerning the culture of origin or denial.

In radical journeys, the separation phase occurs now when the second-generation young person feels the need to undertake the journey in the context of the parental background and therefore decides to undertake the experience. This moment consists of a preparatory phase, a time in which the subject tries to find as much information as possible to experience the journey to the fullest. This entails an investment of physical and mental energy aimed at learning various notions relating to culture, lifestyle, but also language, and customs, along with a more logistical organisation aimed at accomplishing the trip in the time and manner set by the traveller.

At the same time, this phase is charged with emotional involvement, dictated by the need to 'nurture' hypothetical ties that the young person may have woven over the years with their parents' family of origin. The relationship with different generations offers the opportunity to cultivate ties, as well as being able to access memories, which are «mobile and porous, available to trace continuities, characterised by intermittent presences and affective feelings of co-presence» (Cima, 2017, 50-51).

Contacts that are elements of intergenerational transmission that not only offer a feeling of filiation but also allow the second-generation young person to draw an imaginary genealogical line that is elsewhere. A broader concept that Vertovec defines as *bifocality*, as the co-presence, simultaneity, and complementarity of the here and there that characterises the experience of migrant families and thus of its members (2004, 970-1001).

The second phase, that of the margin, is the moment when the young person comes into direct contact with the place of origin, that is, by making the journey and thus spending time in their parents' country of origin.

Through the acceptance of its immersive component, but also of estrangement, the encounter with the other culture takes place, which is the exercise of an anthropological gaze, which Cambi says acts according to «a perspective of detachment from the us that we are, from that us that we incorporate, and promotes attention to otherness, to what is different. In this encounter, it is the understanding that must be activated, as happens to anthropologists who participate to understand and who construct themselves to participate» (2001, 107).

Here the subject enters a direct or indirect relationship with all the components that characterise and represent landscape and place. On the one hand, the food marks the welcome, but at the same time shows the links with the land and its production, on the other hand, the climatic component could condition physical well-being. At the same time, a 'culture shock' could occur, in the light of the psychological disorientation resulting from a hypothetical conflict between the cultural values of one's context, deeply rooted in the subject, and the social behaviours with which one is instead confronted in the foreign country. In this regard, Myron Loss identified in his text *Culture Shock: Dealing with Stress in Cross-cultural Living* (1983) some phases euphoric, from the moment one is attracted to everything that is different; hostile, from the moment novelty disappears and differences begin to annoy, from the moment the subject tends to judge those he or she meets in the light of certain stereotypes and prejudices; then follows a phase of adjustment, in which one begins to feel at ease; and then ends in a phase of adaptation, characterised by the loss of the feeling of separation between what is me and what is other than us.

In addition, of his or her own volition, the subject might decide to meet the other, whether a member of the extended family or not, in a time of exchange. If in the first hypothesis the encounter occurs indirectly, the other, in this case, bursts into the subject's existence through the epiphany of the face (Levinas, 1990, 48-49), an element proper to the physical encounter.

The relationship that is formed, thanks to interpersonal relations, allows the individual to know and discover himself. This knowledge about oneself is a consequence of having known the 'you', which is not an 'alter ego', but allows one to discover oneself as an 'alter you'. The moment the 'you' is recognised as being listened to, the foundations are laid for the construction of a dynamic and vital 'we' that makes it possible to escape the prevarications of the impersonal. The willingness to acknowledge the other, the other person one encounters, his or her ontological dialogue, offers the traveller the opportunity to avoid subjectivism and collectivism, which homologate, in some cases even giving rise to correspondences, contacts, exchanges, understandings, such as to generate a frank and productive coexistence and regenerate human relationships that were instead devitalised or emptied of meaning.

The last phase, that of aggregation, is finally a phase dictated by the return, where radical journeys it takes place in the relationship with the parents who are 'waiting for the return', but also with their own identity that needs 'identification'. The first dimension is related to the expectations that parents may have developed concerning this journey, which is for their confirmation of belonging and confirmation of wider family ties.

The second questions the intimacy of the second-generation young person, since it interrogates his identity, which in this case could be identified in multiplicity, thus needing to be defined as the multiple identities of the subject. This refers to the positions of Morin who speaks of «poly-identity» (2001), but also of Moravia who uses the expression «multiple identities» (1996, 14), as the richness of the human being, who possesses an articulated and differentiated identity, since no subject that identifies itself exclusively with one culture presents itself as pure and free from contamination, such that it is mestizo (Amselle, 1990, transl. it. 1999).

This eventuality, however, requires work of reworking and reflection, such that the subject must be able to accept the questions that the radical journey has raised in him or her. By also giving themselves time, they accept that the answers are not so obvious and simple, in fact, they may require suffering and acceptance, even of uncomfortable or not obvious truths. Eventually, the answers may also require making other journeys. In this regard, Maalouf, referring to his own experience and the need to re-read plural identities, in people with a migration background, asserted that «each of my belongings unites me with a large number of people; however, the more belongings I take into account, the more specific my identity is» (Maalouf, 1998, transl. it. 2021, 27). This supports that the radical journey, although it may have similar counts among different second-generation subjects, remains an expression that marks the uniqueness of the subject.

Radical journeys a new form of rite of passage?

While in symbolic terms radical journeys and *rite de passage* has a physical articulation that allows them to be paralleled, it is also considered important to recognise some actual distances from the considerations Van Gennep made during the years in which he wrote about rites of passage.

First, radical journeys are invisible, lacking the social participation characteristic of rites of passage. On the contrary, they are journeys that are not incorporated into a shared social meaning, because the young person makes the journey many times alone, but above all does not share this choice with the entire community in which he or she is inserted, even though this is the place where he or she lives the dynamics of society, interacting, being formed, and contributing positively to its well-being.

The community, on the other hand, could support the young person's choice both pre-departure and upon return. In particular, the desire for storytelling is linked to the need to be recognised and to recognise oneself at the same time, thus through the competence of listening, the community exercises proximity, if the young person decides to share his or her radical journey through narration. If, as Xodo (1990) states, the narration is the imitation of action in the concrete events of experiencing the journey, the formative interest arises from the awareness that narration is a privileged way of elaborating this type of knowledge. The skills of narration can be different and qualify narrative knowledge as formative and the telling of one's own experience as an instrument of

formation, in the proper sense of *bildung*, an action aimed at promoting human formation in which a cultural community can be identified. The very act of telling oneself generates meaning in an epistemic form, such as interpreting, understanding and recall.

Moreover, in traditional societies, rites of passage involved arduous trials both physically and psychically, and the task of guiding the youth through the transit was controlled by elders or adults (as the *limen* force). In contrast, radical journeys are solitary experiences, such that the young person of the second-generation experiences these experiences without having professional educational figures to support them, thus risking not understanding the value and transformative power of the journey. This is a central and vital issue, since knowing how to return indicates and implies the ability to re-elaborate what one has experienced by internalising and making one's own experiences and encounters, which are certain foundations of formation for the traveller.

The question, therefore, is to identify what skills the professional might need to better accompany a young person going through this experience. This is because his educational task is to support those who have made the radical journey of making an 'x-ray of experience' (Arendt, 1970). Re-elaborating one's experience often allows one to understand transversal elements, accentuate secondary elements, and review the very contextual reality of which one is narrating. It is clear, therefore, how both the community and the figure of a guide could be fundamental in analysing, understanding and attributing meaning to the radical journey.

Conclusion

In sum, despite the differences between radical journeys and rites of passage, both have a transformative value for those who undertake them. Particularly for the second generation, travelling becomes a moment of physical and mental experimentation, a moment of overcoming borders and mental limits, which allows a humanistic understanding of the diversity of life, through a cultural and anthropological approach that makes the experience of encountering and feeling a global subject possible. The journey becomes one of discovery and encounter with the other, but also immersion, inner provocation, and hypothetical conflict of identity. Through radical journeys, the subject is called upon to answer existential questions to become fully himself, in the acceptance or rejection of the multiple identities that characterise him.

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