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STEREOTYPES AND MIGRATION

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***Abstract:** Romania has so far eluded the migration flow that crosses now the "Balkan route" to Western Europe and is waiting for the first refugees who will be hosted in specialized centers. The problem of integration of these refugees and others to come was approached so far only in economic terms, without exploring its psychosocial implications. In the absence of a genuine cultural exchange, the knowledge about populations that migrate in new territories only summarizes the most common stereotypes. The paper aims to examine these stereotypes and identify ways in which they can be managed, in order to facilitate the integration of newcomers into the Romanian society.*

***Keywords:** stereotypes, human migration, community*

1. INTRODUCTION

Perception of groups (including refugees) is subject to three categories of interference sources that can act whenever the perception of a group occurs (Crider *et al.*, 1985: 420):

- stereotype ("a set of beliefs about the characteristics of the person belonging to a group, a belief that is widespread in almost all its members");

- prejudice ("the attitude towards a person or a negative evaluation of the person based only on their affiliation to a group");

- discrimination ("the expression of prejudice in behavior") or, in a more complete form, "any behavior oriented on people because they are identified as being members of a group" (Brehm & Kassin, 1993).

The groups of refugees now crossing the "Balkan route" to Western Europe are frequently subject to the stereotyping process, which consists of "applying a stereotypical judgment to members of a group, making them *interchangeable* with other members of the same category (Leyens *et al.*, 1996 *apud* Stănculescu 2013:30).

The importance of knowing how the stereotypical perception of these migrants (future residents in the EU, even potential future citizens) is being done, doesn't only refer to those who produce stereotyping, but also to the migrants themselves; there are already numerous studies of social psychology that describe the phenomenon of

"stereotype threat" (Steele, 1997 *apud* Cracker & Quinn, 2003: 248-249):

stereotype threat theory predicts that although members of stigmatized and non-stigmatized groups may be in the same situation, such a standardized test, the situation has different meaning for the stigmatized and the non-stigmatized, and, consequently, different outcomes.

The "stereotype threat" explains a whole series of behaviors that minorities referred to by a stereotype get to confirm it, unintentionally.

2. ORIGIN OF STEREOTYPES - A PSYCHOSOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

The origin of stereotypes concerning groups (including ethnic groups) can be traced from several points of view:

- historical (seeking an historic event that would substantiate their existence);

- political and economical (seeking the reasons for which those who have the power "offer" and maintain various stereotypes);

- socio-cultural (seeking their origin in differences between various social groups, seeking thus "the kernel of truth" of these unilateral and rough ways of perceiving the groups).

All these perspectives of approaching the stereotypes bring with them the viable elements in identifying the genesis of stereotypes, but given the fact they are approaches at the macro-social level,

they fail to explain the ways in which stereotypes, once produced at this level (in a specific cultural context) act on the person.

Social psychology explains the emergence of a stereotype by two interrelated processes: social categorization and out-group homogeneity effect. Categorization is the tendency to select objects in the perceptual field in groups rather than considering them each one as unique. Categorization occurs naturally in the act of perception, and in the case of perception of people it takes the form of social categorization - classifying people into groups based on their common attributes. Social categorization is needed in social perception, as it allows the person concerned to form a quick impression (in real time) and to use previous experience to guide themselves in new interpersonal interactions. In addition to the aforementioned benefits, social categorization has a major disadvantage, leading to overestimation of the differences between different social groups and the similarities within (between individuals composing them).

The second psychosocial phenomenon that promotes stereotypes is precisely this effect of groups homogeneity obtained as a consequence of social categorization. Social categorization being made based on personal experience, is strongly conditioned by its manifestations within the group of affiliation, a group where people find at least some of their individual attributes ("in - group"). Out-group homogeneity effect - represents to "tend to assume a greater homogeneity between out-group members - than among members of the in-group" (Brehm & Kassin, 1993).

This trend affects the relationships between different groups whose members have characteristics that are clearly distinguishable and who delimit each other easily based on them (as is the case of relations between the peoples of Europe and refugees). The emergence of this bias in the perception of refugee groups could be explained by the scarcity of contacts with the "out - group" - contacts which occur in a limited number of cases and with a limited number of out - group members.

3. SURVIVAL OF STEREOTYPES

Regarding the ways in which stereotypes are perpetuated, several theoretical explanations have been issued; they cover, for example (Brehm and Kassin, 1993): (1) Illusory correlations, consisting in overestimating associations between variables that are only weakly correlated or not correlated at all; (2) Under-categorization: stereotypes sometimes survive and even though constantly refuted by those perceived in relation to the object of

stereotype, which raised a series of questions about their explanation only with the help of illusory correlations. Unlike the classical vision on stereotypes that identifies the subject of a stereotype with a large category of people, nowadays it is recognized the fact that many stereotypes refer to groups of people more limited in terms of numbers and presenting a number of features more specific, to subcategories of people.

The main conclusion of this explanation of stereotyping would be that, in order to better understand the characteristics of a stereotype, we must know, in the most precise manner, the nature of the group to which it refers – a process where identifying the precise different subcategories that may occur is a necessary element.

4. POSSIBILITIES OF CHANGING STEREOTYPES

Elena Stănculescu (2013:128-132) describes the variables that contribute to changing stereotypes, which can be classified into two categories: (1) interpersonal and intergroup (direct contact, transforming conflicting / competitive relations in relations of cooperation); (2) intrapersonal or intrapsychic (cognitive complexity, reviewing categorical beliefs, individuation, subgrouping vs. under-categorization). Regarding migration flows that cross Europe today, of immediate concern seems to be especially the research that aims to change stereotypes by conditions favoring a proper direct contact. Bar-Tal (1994, *apud* Stănculescu, 2013:129) listed the conditions in which stereotypes may change through direct contact:

1. Contact is established between individuals of equal status;
2. The contact takes place in a social climate in which authorities and rules are supportive for intergroup interactions.
3. Interaction is close and not formal and superficial;
4. Having a pleasant interaction in a comforting, rewarding context.
5. The contact occurs in a context of cooperation with a common purpose of a higher level.

These ideal conditions are at the opposite pole to the reality largely reflected by the media on the contact between Europeans and refugees, capturing an image of a severe limitation of intergroup contacts, primarily for security reasons.

4. CONCLUSIONS

How the European authorities manage the issue of migration is in obvious contrast to the ideal

conditions of intergroup contact aimed at changing stereotypes, including those about migrants. As we all know, the European states have been allocated the shares to receive a number of refugees on their territory, with the hope that they will find the appropriate arrangements to accommodate and integrate them.

The discussions about the groups of refugees to come are worn now in terms of resources to be allocated, hosting space, etc., so solely in economic terms or logistics. This speech is present in decision makers especially in countries that have been bypassed by the main migratory flow, as is the case in Romania. At least at the level of political and public statements, the research on stereotypes (briefly presented in this article) and its importance in managing intergroup relations are ignored. Therefore, there are created prerequisites which are extremely favorable for a widespread stereotyping of refugees, with negative consequences on them (the phenomenon of "stereotype threat") and on those who will produce the stereotyping of migrant groups.

In other words, the risk is that instead of hosting and integrating, prerequisites for the radicalization of newcomers might be created.

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