

Rituals in Transition: Migration and Cultural Transmission

NIKI PAPAGEORGIOU

ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI

Faculty of Theology, Makriyianni 19, Thessaloniki

Email Address: nipap@theo.auth.gr

Abstract: Over the last years, a series of political and social changes have turned the research interest regarding the migrational phenomenon towards the issue of migrants' culture. A set of factors, such as the enlargement of the migrational phenomenon during the last decades of the twentieth century as a result of the ongoing globalization, the emergence of ethno-cultural heterogeneity resulting from the variety of migrants' origin, the emphasis on the issue of migrants' cultural identity rather than financial parameters, all indicate that culture constitutes a strong factor of the multifaceted and multidimensional migrational issue. At the same time, it becomes clear that migrants are not merely defined as work force or consumers, but as carriers of a distinct ethno-cultural identity and culture related to a community or ethnicity and they bear all the special characteristics of this culture. An important dimension of the migrants' culture is religion, which acquires a crucial significance for tackling the traumatic experience of migration and contributes essentially via religious institutions in the incorporation of migrants in host societies. The researchers confirm that, regardless of the confessional or ritual differences, religion many times defines both the individual and collective identity of migrants and that religious institutions offer their premises for the realization of ethnic assemblies, celebrations and traditional customs, while at the same time offer help for practical issues such as employment, accommodation, education and migrational documents. At this point the role of rituals acquires particular significance, as they constitute one of privileged "places" of transmission, reproduction and conservation of the cultural and religious identity of migrants. In this paper, we investigate the role of rituals and religious celebrations in the migrant experience. Which are the functions and the dynamics of the rituals to the passage from one world to another? In which way are those reproduced in the host society? Do they have the same significance as in the home country? Are they reproduced in the same way or are they adapted in the new environment? What is the role of the reinforcement of individual and collective identity of migrants and does this affect the reproduction of their particular culture? As a case study we have used the community of Sikh immigrants in Greece.