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Quaderni di Sociologia

Preface

Giulia Marroccoli, Roberta Ricucci e Siniša Zrinščak

Testo integrale

1   The relationship among immigration, citizenship, integration, and participation in host societies has been for quite some time central to the interest of scholars (Cesari, 2017). But the issue is not key only to the academic debate. In fact, according to the latest Eurobarometer poll, immigration represents the most important issue facing the EU for 38% of European citizens: it is the pivotal concern in 21 Member States, and the second in all the remaining countries[1].

2   From a general perspective, migration patterns have become quite complex: migration from Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe has intensified and traditionally emigrant countries, particularly in Southern Europe, have also become destination countries. Meanwhile, we are also witnessing how the flux of refugees and asylum seekers, associated with what has been usually termed as the "Mediterranean Crisis", have prompted a profound social and political crisis across different European countries, contributing to anti-immigrant feelings (Castles and Miller, 2014). Furthermore, and probably more importantly, political parties and governments implementing unfavourable policies to immigrants are increasing in several states.

3   In this complex panorama, the diversities brought by migrations are particularly visible and of necessity vast: squares, buildings, shops, events, debates, habits, and exhibitions emphasise the co-presence of new cultural and religious requests, organizations, personnel, and practices. At the same time, those diversities are more and more questioned and debated from different angles, from everyday life experiences to various ideological positions. The pivotal issue is that of integration (or clash?) among different cultural, religious, and spiritual traditions, in an increasingly multicultural social context that, however, often fears the immigrant (Foner and Alba, 2008).

4   Although migrations have experienced substantial changes in their extent and kind over time, one fact remains constant: they are inextricably entangled with religions. When different flows of immigrants reach the host societies, they clearly bring with them different religious beliefs, habits, needs, and this can impact on the way in which destination countries have to deal with the new populations. For instance, the increase in the number of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and believers of other religious denominations and groups has re-directed the studies of scholars to the question of whether strong religious traditions (leading to convinced behaviour) favour a better process of integration of immigrants – and, above all, of their children – in the host society. What is more, when it comes to second, and

following, generation, the religious issue is of primary importance: if the identity construction of the immigrants' children is certainly a paramount topic, the role that religious beliefs play in shaping it is universally acknowledged. Furthermore, it can be said that the intertwining between migration and religion lead to consider the close interrelation of other topics, such as a peculiar attention to the job market (for example, are Muslims discriminated against compared to people with other religious affiliations?), education (does the increase in students other than Christian give rise to requests for secularisation and other changes?), school time-tables, and spaces in the city, as for instance requests of places of worship, and areas for burial.

5   In this complex landscape, we cannot fail to consider that often, when it comes to religious affiliations, identities, and practices the integration issue becomes more complicated. In this regard, religious and cultural identities represent a relevant part of the current discourses on diversities within the European context, at both international and national level (Pastore and Ponzo, 2016). Of course, this is not something new, but the strong relationship between religious affiliations and migratory backgrounds is again at the forefront of the debate. To give but a few examples, we can mention the controversy that revolves around the construction of mosques in Italy, the debates about wearing the veil in public spaces in France, or the dispute about Sikhs carrying their ritual dagger in England. These situations clearly illustrate the complexity hinging on religious diversities, and the difficulties different societies can face in managing the cohabitation between dissimilar cultural and religious practices. Thus the topic is of undeniable relevance, and studying how societies and individuals cope with diversity in general, and the religious diversity in particular, has become more and more necessary.

6   In this special issue, we will present three articles that address the issue from different perspectives, showing reflections and empirical findings that can help to shed light on different angles of the topic.

7   Firstly, the article by James Beckford proposes a theoretical reflection on the entanglement between religion and migration. The author starts by showing the different ways in which migration movements and religions are strictly related to one another, considering how migration has in some cases religious motivations and causes, as well as how the religious dimensions of migration and settlement in new locations can be significant. Likewise, in the paper relations are illustrated between formal religious organisations and the support and resources they provide for migrants long after initial settlements; furthermore, these organisations can also orient public opinion and influence policy-makers. The core of the essay is represented by the indication of two less-known entanglements between religions and migrations, which the author pinpoints as subjects needing more research. On the one hand, Beckford illustrates the phenomenon of "forced" migration and child migrants: he retraces how, until the Sixties, various religious organisations were involved in facilitating children's forced migrations, on the pretence that they were orphans or living in privation. In many Commonwealth countries, and with the support of some important Christian churches, thousands of children were forcibly displaced on both sides of Atlantic. On the other, the article stresses the role of prisons in England and Wales in being a point of intersection between religions and migration, still a topic poorly analysed. The article pinpoints how prisons host inmates belonging to several religions, and thus different chaplains are present there, offering their services and trying to manage the evident religious diversity. Particularly interesting is that the actions put into effect in order to combat discrimination, racism and inequality in prisons, have had an impact on the rest of British society. Lastly, the author reflects on the present challenges posed by the interplay between religions and migrations, especially those related to identity policies and legal principles which could respond appropriately to religious diversity, in particular identifying adequate systems and practices for religions other than Christian.

8   The essay of Esra Aytar and Peter Bodor, as well as that of Stefano Martelli, are more specifically focused on the topic of Muslim integration in European countries. It is worth noting that among the different religious groups that are now present all over Europe, Muslims are probably facing the most intense prejudice, as Islamophobia is increasing in several countries (Cesari, 2004; Triandafyllidou, 2015). In this respect, these articles present two different observations concerning Muslim girls' integration: in one case reflecting on challenges associated with wearing the hijab in the Hungarian context; and in the other with

regard to practices that could help, or not, the integration pathways of this specific segment of population.

9   The essay by Esra Aytar and Peter Bodor revolves around what the authors have called the "Hijab Paradox". Assuming that the original function of the hijab is to avoid unwanted attention from strangers, particularly from men, to wear it in a non-Muslim country, as Hungary is, can lead to the opposite effect. Based on data from qualitative research in which several Muslim women have been interviewed, the authors analyse what type of tensions, conflicts, and emotional hardships Muslim women face in Hungarian society. Furthermore, the article reflects on the intersectionality of prejudice that this population deals with, considering that they are in a more vulnerable position as women, as a part of a religious minority, and finally as migrants. The paper shows also how the interviewees have to cope with a set of norms and values coming from the in-group, that depending on gender stereotypes and that are not generally related to the religious sphere. Lastly, the authors pinpoint a typology of methods and strategies of coping, showing the different ways in which Muslim women actively manage stereotypes and demands from both the host societies and their in-groups. Particularly interesting is the reflection about the role of Hungarian women converted to Islam, who are also part of the sample. The article shows how these women can be of concrete help in elaborating fruitful strategies of coping: leveraging their knowledge of Hungarian society, and language of course, they can actively advocate in demanding a more rightful treatment for Muslim women.

10   Lastly, the essay by Stefano Martelli reflects on the impact of sport and physical activities on Muslim girls' integration pathways. Assuming that young Muslim women are one of the most vulnerable categories with regard to the risk of discrimination and prejudice, Martelli examines the role that sports activities could have in sustaining or, on the contrary, undermining their process of integration. The author presents a secondary analysis based on research carried out in some European states (Denmark, England, Norway, France, and Germany). More precisely, the paper takes into account three different levels of analysis: a micro-level in which the author reflects on the practices that Muslim girls put into effect when it comes to sports activities. For example, it shows the complexity that revolves around following religious prescriptions on clothing and at the same time doing physical activities in environments where it is prohibited to wear the hijab. On a second "meso" level, Martelli examines the matter of the construction of Muslim girls' identity: is it more influenced by the families' traditional culture, or rather shaped on religion fundamentals? Lastly, the paper presents a reflection on the macro-level in which are analysed the effects of different kinds of social policies addressed to cultural and religious rights. In the final section, some best practices in sports and physical activities related to integration are presented.

11   From different perspectives, all the essays describe the various facets of the interplay of religion, identity and social cohesion through the lens of migration.

12   Giulia Marroccoli, Roberta Ricucci, Siniša Zrinšcˇak

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14   Castles S. and Miller M. J. (2014), *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, New York, London, Guilford press.

15   Cesari J. (2004), *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and in the United States*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

16   Cesari J. (2017), *Religion and Diasporas: Challenges of the Emigration Countries*, in Weinar A., Unterreiner A. and Fargues P. (eds), *Migrant Integration Between Homeland and Host Society*, Vol. 1, Cham, Springer.

17   Foner N. and Alba R. (2008), *Immigrant Religion in the U.S. and Western Europe: Bridge or Barrier to Inclusion?*, «International Migration Review», 42, n. 2, pp. 360-392.

18   Pastore F. and Ponzo I. (2016) (eds.), *Inter-group Relations and Migrant Integration in European Cities*, Dordrecht, Springer.

19   Triandafyllidou A. (2015), *European Muslims: Caught between Local Integration Challenges and Global Terrorism Discourses*, Roma, IAI.

Note

1 See *Standard Eurobarometer 89. Spring 2018. First results – Public Opinion in the European Union*, European Commission. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/218c (last access: 23-11-2019).

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Autori

Giulia Marroccoli
Department of Culture, Politics and Society – University of Turin

Roberta Ricucci
Department of Culture, Politics and Society – University of Turin

Articoli dello stesso autore

Religione e politica nell'islam territoriale [Testo integrale]
Differenze tra le prime e le seconde generazioni
Religion and politics in local Islam. Differences between first and second generations
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Siniša Zrinščak
Department of Sociology, Faculty of Law – University of Zagreb

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