

# Migrants, Families, and Religion: An Intriguing Research Agenda. Book's Content and Introduction

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**Abstract.** This chapter introduces the collection of essays presented in the book, starting by describing the challenging and exploratory meaning of the relationship between family, religion, and immigration. In the European landscape, only recently has the religion of migrants started to be investigated in new ways, that are careful to grasp the complexity of the religious experience and to avoid pre-conceived and stereotyped readings: a sort of “normalisation” in the approach to the topic, fed by both migration studies and religion studies. The chapter presents a reading of a selected sample of recent studies, adopting an approach based on the de-instrumentalization of religion and on the re-humanization of migrants, enabling them to express their subjective outlook on their own experience and on the significance of religious belonging. Lastly, the contents of the following chapters are presented and discussed.

**Keywords.** immigration, family, religion, interreligious relations, diversity, European identity

## 1. Introduction

Once confronted with immigration, both the realm of the family and the realm of the religion reveal all their challenging and exploratory meanings: the relationship between family, religion and immigration represents a prism allowing to explore and shed light on a few significant features of today's European societies.

On the one hand, the conceptualisation of immigration as a “family process” [1] has extraordinarily enlarged our understanding of migratory choices, strategies, and developments. The “discovery” of the immigrant family has completely changed the impact of immigration and its perception by European societies, in a context strongly marked by the illusion of an immigration made up of temporary [2, 3].

On the other hand, the religion of migrants, while questioning the assimilationist imprinting of integration models and integration policies, has imposed the issue of interreligious coexistence, urging the construction of a system of governance of religious pluralism [4]. What is more, it has strongly defied the concept of secularization, encouraging a reflection on the role of religion in the public sphere [5].

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## 2. Migrant families as an unexpected and “disturbing” phenomenon

In contemporary Europe, the ample presence of families with a migrant background, originating from both EU and non-EU countries, can be understood as an “unexpected” phenomenon, due to the permanent settlement of migrants initially selected as *guest workers* and to other unplanned processes –from decolonization to the influx of asylum seekers. Moreover, family reunification has been the main channel to enter Europe for a long time and continues to represent an important portion of new arrivals even in the most recent years, which have seen an increase in entries for work reasons (with a significant share of seasonal entries) and for requests for international protection (Table 1). Indeed, entries for family-related reasons constitute the most stable component of immigration and are often oriented towards definitive stabilization.

**Table 1.** First Permits issued by the EU 27 countries, by Reason, 2013-2020<sup>2</sup>

Reason	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Family	576,544	583,887	670,295	688,996	736,667	814,911	810,275	621,391
Education	280,743	299,606	296,755	328,419	353,779	396,556	400,038	249,183
Employment	425,662	456,599	589,552	737,478	905,330	983,742	1,197,786	904,078
Other	350,649	419,749	434,877	739,590	705,218	594,734	547,242	484,007

In its 2019 edition, the *OECD Migration Outlook* provided interesting data which confirm the familial character of immigration in Europe: for nearly 95% of married migrants, the spouse was present in the same household in the destination country (ranging from 66% in Lithuania to 98% in the United Kingdom), and 44% of married migrants arrived in the host country in the same year as their spouse. Initially, slightly more than half of married migrants lived with their children; this share, then, had risen steadily over time and reached a peak with 15-19 years of stay, attaining 75%.<sup>3</sup>

Considering this, the migrant family has become not only an unescapable theme for both family and migration scholars, but also a “lens” to analyse many topics connected with the present and the future of European societies.

It was after the restrictive turn in the possibility of economic migrants’ legal entry (dating back to the ‘70s), that, for a sort of historical nemesis, European societies started to acknowledge that they had turned into immigration societies, even if the process of “metabolization” of the implications of this transformation is still ongoing [3]. The emblem of this transformation is precisely the appearance on the public scene of immigrant families; particularly when these families belong to “other” religious traditions, even more so when they are Muslim. By no coincidence, all the main issues that have been animating the European public debate on inter-ethnic coexistence call into question the family and, within it, the relationships between genders and generations. Despite the initial adoption of a regime based on the importation of temporary workers, European countries have been soon obliged to recognise the right to family reunification, due to the obligations which derive from their regime of *embedded liberalism*.<sup>4</sup> This

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat, *First permits by reason, length of validity and citizenship*, [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr\\_resfirst&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_resfirst&lang=en), migr\_resfirst, extracted August 5, 2022, last updated August 3, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Oecd – International Migration Outlook 2019. Paris: Oecd Publishing; 2019. [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2019\\_c3e35eec-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2019_c3e35eec-en)

<sup>4</sup> With this expression we mean a legal and cultural context which strongly influences the decisions on both the volume of arrivals and the treatment imposed to migrants (Cornelius WA, Martin PL, Hollifield JF. Introduction: The Ambivalent Quest for Immigration Control. In: Cornelius WA, Martin PL, Hollifield JF, editors. *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspectives*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; 1994. p. 3-41).

recognition, in turn, marked their definitive transformation into countries of settlement – that is, into multi-ethnic and multi-religious countries. Following the initiative of several States, the EU Directive 2003/86<sup>5</sup> states the absolute right to residence to the sponsor’s spouse and minor children, and some EU States have also extended this right beyond these categories, including parents, adult children and, in exceptional circumstances, dependent relatives.<sup>6</sup> After these legislative developments, family members have become one of the major components of new entry flows, with about 600-800,000 entries on a yearly base.

**Table 2.** First entry permits for family reasons in the European Union, by country of entry, 2010-2021<sup>7</sup>

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Spain	141,891	148,061	119,863	107,051	101,025	102,454	115,143	125,637	134,196	143,860	119,738	159,249
Italy	180,391	141,403	119,745	108,358	99,051	109,328	101,269	112,607	121,930	100,939	62,274	120,520
France	85,593	80,284	84,747	91,707	92,272	99,312	94,345	94,247	97,664	98,174	80,240	93,278
Germany	52,172	46,782	75,928	82,492	91,661	133,893	136,982	156,973	190,856	167,443	130,701	70,812
Sweden	33,552	35,934	43,999	43,156	46,262	46,354	47,697	60,358	60,229	48,922	41,899	39,482
Others	156,930	149,698	137,478	143,780	153,616	178,954	193,560	186,845	210,036	250,937	186,539	226,653
<i>Total</i>	<i>650,529</i>	<i>602,162</i>	<i>581,760</i>	<i>576,544</i>	<i>583,887</i>	<i>670,295</i>	<i>688,996</i>	<i>736,667</i>	<i>814,911</i>	<i>810,275</i>	<i>621,391</i>	<i>709,994</i>

In addition to the new entries, the growth of the residents with a migratory background is due to the births to immigrant parents, thereby creating the so-called *second generation*. Since 2015, in the EU-28, the number of births to foreign-born mothers has been more than 1 million per year (including the United Kingdom in the calculation) and in any case over 800,000 per year even after the United Kingdom’s exit from the Union.<sup>8</sup>

Focusing on 2020 (last available data), in the EU-27 as a whole, births to foreign-born mothers’ amount to 855,426 out of a total of 4,071,484 births and are particularly numerous in Germany (227,558; 29.4% of total births), Spain (95,949; 28.2%), France (178,099; 24.2%), and Italy (95,019; 23.5%). Most of them are from mothers born in a non-EU country (664,541), which covers 16.3% of all the births in the EU, and even 23.4% in Spain.

Because of these developments, over the past three decades, migration has become the main driver of population growth (or the main counterweight to its decrease) in many EU countries. Although it represents the least predictable component of population change, its contribution to contain the risk of a demographic decline has been repeatedly acknowledged, even by EU institutions.<sup>9</sup> Migration is expected to have a significant

<sup>5</sup> Council Directive 2003/86/EC of 22 September 2003 on the right to family reunification, *Official Journal L* 251, 03/10/2003 P. 0012 – 0018.

<sup>6</sup> EMN – European Migration Network data. Family Reunification of Third-country Nationals in the EU plus Norway: National practices – Synthesis Report. Brussels: European Migration Network; 2017 [https://emn.ie/files/p\\_201704190426462016\\_family\\_reunification\\_synthesis\\_report\\_April2017.pdf](https://emn.ie/files/p_201704190426462016_family_reunification_synthesis_report_April2017.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Our elaborations on Eurostat data, “First permits by reason, length of validity and citizenship” (*migr\_resfirst*, [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr\\_resfirst&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_resfirst&lang=en)), last update 9<sup>th</sup> August 2022, extracted 29<sup>th</sup> August 2022. Data on Croatia for the years 2010-2012 are not available and they have been estimated by a linear regression compared to 2013-2021 data.

<sup>8</sup> Eurostat data, “Live births by mother’s age and country of birth”, *demo\_facbc*, [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=demo\\_facbc&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=demo_facbc&lang=en), last update 22<sup>th</sup> June 2022, extracted 29<sup>th</sup> August 2022.

<sup>9</sup> The most influential communication through which the European Commission started to overtly encourage more economic immigration in order to counteract the demographic ageing dates to 2000: COM

demographic impact also because migrant populations have different levels of fertility and mortality, due to a different age structure and different fertility patterns.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, differences in fertility levels tend to become more evident when we concentrate on religious (Muslim) minorities: although official statistical sources are not disaggregated by religious origins, the few available studies on the topic [6] show that being from an Islamic country tends to be associated with higher levels of fertility, but this does not apply to all national groups and the effect of religion can be strongly offset by other variables, such as migrant women's levels of education and employment.

Alongside the quantitative dimension of the phenomenon under consideration, its significance for European societies must be considered. In traditional settlement nations such as the US and Canada, the migrations of the modern age have taken on a familiar connotation from the beginning. To realize this, it is enough to look at the photographs exhibited in the Ellis Island Museum, which are teemed with children (who sometimes wave an American flag, as if to materialize the expectation of rapid assimilation). In Europe, on the contrary, post-war immigration was predominantly made up of individual workers who had left their family of origin or of choice behind them. In the less frequent cases in which children migrated with their parents, they often had to live segregated in the parents' home (as in the well-known Italian film "*Pane e Cioccolata*", set in Switzerland in the 1970s) or were encouraged to attend schools set up and financed by the governments of the country of origin, to which they were supposed to return someday (this was the case of, many Italian children living in Germany [7]). This explains why, in the experience of many European countries, the growing presence of families with a migratory background had the effect of transforming an economic issue –just as the importation of temporary workers– into a political and an identity one.

First of all, *family reunification called attention to the gender issue*, as it implied the arrival of many women who depended on their husbands/fathers. Even the (real or presumed) higher fertility rates of migrant women have been sometimes perceived as a deviation from the norm, or as a demonstration of cultural and social distance, particularly when they come from non-EU nations and from Islamic-majority societies [6]. In the context of the debate that developed after the fall of the assimilationist paradigm [8], the gender perspective has offered a notable contribution to the study of the integration paths of migrants (just as the feminization of economic migrations has stimulated attention to the gender structure of migratory networks, institutions and cultures). In addition to detecting the specificity of the female condition, scholars have progressively incorporated in their analysis the relationship between gender and the other dimensions that structure migration processes and influence the outcomes of integration paths –including the ethnic-racial characteristics [9]– and have paid attention to the impact of migration on gender roles and orders in immigrant communities (but also in the sending countries). Moreover, the presence of women has given rise to a strand of research aimed at investigating their role in the relationship with services, emphasizing their function as mediators between the constraints of the culture of origin –for example, in terms of conducts imposed on women– and the behavioural expectations of the institutions of the society of settlement. Their experience is illuminating with respect to the need to reflect not so much in terms of difference (of gender or culture), as of *differences* [10], placing itself almost as a link between feminist thought and the themes

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(2000) 757 final, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on a Community Immigration Policy*.

<sup>10</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/41896.pdf>

of multiculturalism [11]. In recent years, in the context of the “integrationist turn” of migratory policies [12], migrant women are looked at with particular interest, both for the strong symbolic and political value of issues that directly involve them (such as those of the veil or of arranged marriages), and because their crucial role is recognized, more or less explicitly, in the education of their children as future “new citizens” loyal to the nation and to the values of Western culture. In this regard, the low participation in the labour market of women with a migrant background that is registered in many European countries<sup>11</sup> is a phenomenon to be watched with particular attention, both for its implications on the vulnerability of families of immigrant origin, and for the risks of social isolation that inactivity brings with it.

With the appearance of the second generation, a further line of research finally took shape, dedicated to *the choices and paths of young women born to immigrant families*, with particular attention to those belonging to communities more faithful to traditional gender roles. The studies concern topics such as marriage behaviours, school careers, and participation in the labour market. With regard to the latter, it is observed how the family and family responsibilities exert their influence both for the difficulties in reconciling the role of mother with that of worker (especially for those belonging to groups that tend to have children at an early age, or to have a greater number of them), and due to the influence of the maternal model (considering that the activity rates among first generation migrants are quite variable between one group and another). However, this influence can be largely offset by parental education levels (the higher they are, the more the daughters will be pushed to have a paid job) and by welfare systems that support working mothers; if this is generally true for all women, in the case of immigrants this effect is even amplified [13]. However, decades after the emergence of a “female issue”, the condition of (Muslim) women with a migratory background continues to fuel the academic and political debate. Suffice it to remember how, even recently, an influential scholar like C. Joppke [14] claimed that Muslim attitudes on women and sexuality are illiberal and therefore pose significant challenges to the secular, liberal European democracies.

Over time, the problem of the *vulnerability of families of immigrant origin* has also emerged. In line with their historical imprinting, many European countries have been traditionally attracting a “poor” migration, predestined to concentrate in the bottom ranks of the professional hierarchy, earn low salaries and generate disadvantaged families. A consequence of these phenomena is the high exposition of migrants and migrant families to the risks of poverty and of social exclusion. According to the latest available Eurostat data (2020),<sup>12</sup> among the people living in the European Union, 19.6% of nationals, 29.6% of foreign EU citizens and even 48.6% of non-EU citizens face this kind of risks. Besides feeding the perception of the immigrant population as a “burden” for society and for the welfare system –to the point of constituting one of the main drivers of contemporary xenophobia and racism– migrants’ structural disadvantage encourages the *perception of social distance*. Indeed, it is precisely this collocation within the social stratification that, by limiting the opportunity to get in contact and share experience with native people, prevents the dilution of this perception and of its discriminatory effects [15].

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<sup>11</sup> Eurostat data, “Activity rates by sex, age and country of birth (%)” (lfsq\_argacob, [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsq\\_argacob&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsq_argacob&lang=en)), last update 27th September 2022.

<sup>12</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC\\_PEPS05/default/table?lang=en&category=livcon.ilc.ilc\\_p](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC_PEPS05/default/table?lang=en&category=livcon.ilc.ilc_p) (Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2023)

What is more, *it is precisely through families that migration manifests itself as a phenomenon capable of changing the very constitutive features of the European society*, affecting the somatic, ethnic, and religious characteristics of the population, to the point of undermining the presumed “original characteristics” of the native population and its cultural and religious heritage. This is especially true for the nations involved in deep demographic changes, therefore making the incidence of the population with a migratory background increasingly important [16]. But *it is above all the appearance on the public scene of the so-called second generation that has drawn attention to the challenges of inter-ethnic coexistence*, as well as to the “failure” of the various national integration models. The emblem of this epochal transition is the *affaire du foulard*, exploded in France in the late 1980s, which condenses all the main issues connected to the association between family, migration, and religion(s): from the relationships between genders and generations in immigrant families to the “ostentation” of religious symbols in the public sphere, up to the role of the public school in a pluralistic society.

Lastly, in many countries, family law issues often rank among the most sensitive arguments in the governance of interethnic coexistence, particularly when they call into question the relationship between gender and generations. This last point deserves to be briefly described. In general terms, *any law or policy has a normative* (in the sociological sense of the term) *content*, since it involves and mirrors values and visions. This is particularly evident in the case of family law, which reflects the very nature of the family as both a *social construct* and a *moral order* [17]. For example, the rules governing the right of family reunifications reflect –with some ambiguity [1]– a “European” idea of family, that is a nuclear family, defined in legal terms, thus disregarding the concept of kinship according to the cultures of origin of the migrants;<sup>13</sup> by no coincidence, these rules explicitly prohibit to reunite more than one spouse, in cases of polygamy (an institution that the common European imagination tends to identify with Islamic culture). Indeed, once analysed from the perspective of the family sociology [18], immigration reveals all its challenging character. *Migrant households defy the “normal” configuration of family structures and behaviours* [8] and make the family’s patterns and styles of functioning even more heterogeneous, not only through the appearance of disputable practices (such as polygamous cohabitations), or past practices (such as arranged marriages), but also of new family models that take shape in the context of transnational communities and circuits of migrants [19]. According to some influential scholars, these models even represent new ways of making a family, thus possibly supplanting the traditional family model made up of members who share the same nationality and live under the same roof [20].

The most striking example of the challenging character of the values and institutions connected with the migrant family is provided by the phenomenon of arranged marriages, given the risk that –once imported into a Western cultural context– it may easily morph into forced marriage. Undoubtedly, arranged marriages constitute a disturbing phenomenon for modern European democracies, as they become almost a symbol of cultural distance –if not of cultural incompatibility– and a source of delegitimization of migrants’ religious traditions within a context marked by the “ethnicization of sexism” [21], which, for instance, associates Islam with gender violence and female subordination. However, as suggested by the few in-depth existing studies on the topic [22, 23] this kind of phenomena should be analysed in the context of migrants’ transnational links and of

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<sup>13</sup> These rules also disregard the common trend which see most children of age who continue to economically depend on their parents, particularly in Southern European countries.

their migratory cultures and strategies. Adopting a perspective that analyses forced marriages from an external point of view (i.e. not that of the spouses), reveals how complex it may be to strike a balance between the protection of individual choices and rights and the risk of imposing rules based on so-called liberal values. In any case, this issue emblematically mirrors the potential conflict between the first and the second generation: on the one hand, the arranged marriage can have a positive meaning within the parent's culture of origin, where it is defined as consensual; on the other hand, the processes of acculturation to which that children of migrants experience in their daily lives lead many of them to reject this custom and ask for the authorities' help [24].

In any case, it would be misleading to reduce the religion-family-migration nexus to phenomena such as that of arranged/forced marriages. Much more than through behaviours and values that accentuate the perception of a cultural distance and interethnic/intergenerational conflict, it is through their simple presence that "religiously different" immigrants challenge a (post)secularized European society. That is what the next section is about.

### 3. The religion of migrants in (post)secular European societies

In the last decade, with the multiplication of asylum seekers' arrivals, the religion of migrants has risen to the core of the political and media agenda [25] in the wake of nationalistic upsurge and representations of immigration as an identity threat. At the height of the refugee crisis (2015-2016), religion has even been identified as a useful filter to select those individuals who should be able to cross the symbolic and cultural boundaries of European national communities.

On the one hand, the influxes of asylum seekers solicit (or would solicit) European societies to become aware of the tremendous religious-based violations and persecutions which characterize the current global scenario and turn into a root-cause of contemporary migrations [26]. On the other hand, since they are perceived as more and more unpredictable in their dimensions and internal composition, new arrivals force Europe to come to terms with the full and long-standing legacy of its relationship with immigration and with the "diversity" –including the religious one– that immigration brings with it [27].

Indeed, the appearance of the immigrant family on the European public scene was not the only unexpected phenomenon: their cultural and religious identity, too, was unforeseen and unlooked-for by cultivating the illusion of the temporary nature of migration and defining it as a pure economic phenomenon, the European migration regime (unwittingly) underestimated immigrants' power to change the political and identity borders of European national communities [3]. In other words, the stable settlement of immigrant families –especially since they have been progressively included in the community of citizens– constitutes a disavowal of the *principle of isomorphism* on which European democracies have historically been founded [28], i.e., the overlap between the population of a country, the territory in which sovereignty is exercised –in turn delimited by state borders – and the membership defined by citizenship. In terms of the famous expression suggested by A. Sayad [29], immigrant families *disturb*, because they reveal the arbitrary and contingent nature of the boundaries of nations, both political-geographical and cultural-religious boundaries. Lastly, the transformation of an economic process –as immigration was originally conceptualized– into a political

process has catapulted issues and problems related with the “identity” (including the “religious identity”) of European societies at the core of the political agenda.

First of all, the main European societal institutions have been put in question by the settlement of people with different cultural and religious background, and even more so when these people not only expect to be treated as “equals”, but also ask to be acknowledged as “diverse”. National school systems, invested by the task of socializing new generations to the role of future citizens, have been profoundly challenged by the growing presence of students with a (minority) religious background, and it is no coincidence that some of the episodes that caused most discussions –such as the aforementioned “*affaire du foulard*” in France or the Italian controversy concerning the affixing of the crucifix in classrooms– occurred at school. At the same time, the introduction of an intercultural approach has enriched the school curriculum of all students, whether they are native or immigrant. Health services have been urged to deal with different experiences and conceptions regarding disease, health, the body, as well as with unusual requests, such as being examined exclusively by a doctor of the same sex. Finally, among the other consequences, the permanent settlement of migrant families and migrant communities, by transforming European States into multi-religious societies, has offered them *the opportunity “to test” the principles of religious freedom and religious rights in all their declinations*. And, to cite another example, work organizations had to face the difficulties of managing multi-ethnic and multi-religious staffs, but also had the opportunity to exploit the “diversity dividend” linked to the workers’ migrant background [30]. Precisely civil society organizations have been drawing the characteristics of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Europe through their daily choices—conscious or not—in the management of diversity. However, as we have already observed, *the metabolization of the transformation into a plural society, far from the myths of homogeneity that fuelled the patriotic and nationalistic rhetoric, is a process yet to be completed*. It is enough to remember that it is not only “anti-migrants” actors that make an open and sometimes violent use of religion to endorse securitarian and selective approaches in the management of migratory flows: even more embarrassingly, the “pro-migrants” narrative sometimes evokes the low percentage of Muslim migrants as a supposed reassuring argument for the public opinion, thus implicitly reaffirming the problematic character of religious diversity. However, this in line, with the historical European approach to the topic, traditionally shared by both policy makers and social researchers.

Two other reasons have concurred to make the “religiously different” migrants a challenging presence: the European society self-representation as a secularised society and the condition of structural disadvantage suffered by migrants and their families.

Starting from the first reason, it is useful to remember that the concept of *secularization* –which has significantly received a strong impulse from the European sociologists since the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, – benefited of an undisputed hegemony, even in recent times [5]. The theses of a progressive decline (and of an eventual disappearance) of the religious phenomenon have strongly influenced both the scientific and the political approach to the issue, particularly encouraging religion retreat from the public sphere. What’s more, *this assumption has deeply affected the way both social sciences and politics have approached the issue of migrants’ religiosity*.

Indeed, in the context of migration and intercultural studies, the relationship between religion and integration has been approached in Europe according to a set of assumptions decidedly different than that which has traditionally characterized the American context [31]. In the latter, religion has been intended as a factor fostering migrants’ integration



and sense of belonging to the host society. In the European context, *religion has been more frequently intended as a source of cultural distance, social disadvantage, and even potential conflict* (as well as a “consequence”, when it favours the development of reactive identifications). This different approach certainly has to do –according to the prevailing interpretation– with the hegemony long exercised, in Europe, by the theory (and ideology) of secularization, which has confined religion to the private sphere and has ended up considering any manifestation of religiosity in the public sphere as dysfunctional. Equally important is to consider that the large presence of Muslim migrants (or immigrants from countries with an Islamic majority) has largely influenced the way in which social scientists have approached this topic.

To understand this phenomenon, it is useful to consider another reason that has concurred to make the “religiously different” migrants a challenging presence. Once more, we have to deal with the legacy of the European migration regime and its economic imprinting. As a “natural” inheritance of a model which has traditionally attracted a “poor” migration, *the immigrant families’ condition of structural disadvantage has amplified the perception of a social and cultural distance between migrants and natives*. In other words, it has fed the anxiety for the “diversity” embedded in the population with a migratory background, starting exactly from their religious diversity. Religious affiliations, particularly Islamic affiliations, have come to be viewed as an element of vulnerability, if not as a barrier inhibiting the integration process and the relations with the native population. Not to mention that, according to available data, low levels of socio-economic inclusion tend to be correlated with a higher involvement in religious practices. This kind of phenomena has even led «religion to gradually become the defining category for diversity-related issues. This conceptual shift is best manifested in a semantic change in naming immigrants. Ex-colonial subjects and guest workers (a social category) first turned into Asian, Turks, or Arabs (an ethnic category) and then into Muslims (a religious category)» [32].

What is more, this condition of disadvantage gives birth to second generation members who suffer from a weaker starting position in the competition to accede to social resources and opportunities, and sometimes are (or feel they are being) clearly discriminated. If not because of the quantitative importance of migrant offspring, this issue has gained a great attention at both the academic and the political level. Alongside with their school careers and professional success/unsuccess, their attitude toward the society and their sense of belonging, their participation in or exclusion from civic and political life, and their involvement in deviant and criminal conducts, the religion of migrant offspring has, too, gained a place in the research agenda.

Although the tendency of researchers is to grasp specific elements pertaining to young people with a migrant background, it would be useful to understand their condition in the framework of both a process of social construction of migrants and their children and a process of social construction of age and intergenerational relations. In other words, it is useful to remember that young people with a migratory background experience both a “generation effect” –linked to their position towards their parents and grand-parents– and a “cohort effect”, connected to being a young boy/girl with a migratory background in the present time. *All this makes the condition of young people with a migratory background doubly paradigmatic* [33]. On the one hand with respect to the repercussions, generated in the long run by the processes of social construction of the role of migrants that reverberate –as we have already illustrated– in a condition of structural disadvantage often transmitted to the second generation. On the other hand, with respect to the processes of social construction of age and intergenerational relations, which today

would seem to penalize the very young, forced to deal with a polarized labour market, subject to the risk of being downgraded with respect to their parents, prone to perceive themselves in competition with adults and the elderly in accessing resources and social opportunities, starting from job opportunities.

Given this picture, according to existing studies, *the religious affiliation of migrants' children can translate into a cause of "ethnic penalty"* which persists even after considering the differences in schooling, skills, and social origins [34], and which has to do also with a clear religious hostility [35]. Since it frequently becomes a symbolic marker, the religion of migrants' children (particularly in the case of young Muslims) is at the base of the so called "paradox of integration"<sup>14</sup> and feeds the possibility of choosing reactive forms of identification. Not incidentally, particularly after the episodes of religious radicalisation occurred in various European nations, scholars have directed their attention to the aspects that make immigrants' offspring feel either socially included or socially excluded [23]: the migration regimes historically adopted by European States, the social marginality of some migrant families, the characters of citizenship regimes (particularly when they mirror an ethnic conception of the nation), the social prejudices towards given migrant communities, the identity choices and strategies developed by some minority communities, the role of religious affiliations and the manner in which they are acknowledged in the different political and institutional contexts. In sum, *it is the association between the "inequality" suffered by migrant families and their "diversity" from an ethnic, cultural, and religious point of view that largely shapes the relationship between them and European societies* [18].

However, a new scenario has been today emerging, and it proves to be particularly promising for rethinking not only the "meaning" of the religion(s) of migrants, but also the "meaning" of religion(s) in the current European landscape. Indeed, although a vast literature from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had announced the imminent end of the religious phenomenon, in Europe –as well as in other regions of the world– a different scenario has been unfolding: religion is still present, even if it is in crisis, as it has increasingly been relegated to the intimate sphere and set free from institutional set-ups, reinvented in its contents and contaminated by secularization factors [5]. *This "post-secular" society constitutes the socio-cultural context within which migrants enter when arriving in Europe*, often bearing forms of religious belonging considered significant for the construction of their identity in interconnection with the other actors of society, whether it is a peaceful or conflictual interconnection.

As a matter of fact, religion is closely connected with cultural and social transformations involving today's Europe, but it is also the borderline where contradictory pressures and, in some cases, thorny questions concerning the coexistence between people with different religious traditions interweave. In this scenario, the religion of migrants promises to be one of the relevant themes in the debate on what we have defined post-secularized society. Already now, a renewed attention to the role of religion, even within the public sphere, characterizes the social sciences and encourages civil society's activism. Across European countries, both institutions (at different levels) and civil society have started considering religious leaders and communities as potential allies in facilitating integration and in promoting social cohesion, thus possibly getting past the idea that religion is intrinsically an obstacle to integration. This, in turn, may

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<sup>14</sup> With this expression we mean the phenomenon whereby the more immigrants and their children are integrated/assimilated from a cultural point of view, the more they feel the frustration of being victims of discrimination and prejudices.

open further directions for research, producing a rapprochement with the American experience [31], traditionally more attentive to the bridging function carried out by religion and religious organizations, that is, to the role that the latter can play in support not only of individual empowerment, but also of participation in the economic, civil, and political life of mainstream society. Perhaps we are witnessing a “normalization” in the approach to the religion of migrants, the results of which are surely promising.

#### **4. An emerging research agenda: towards a “normalisation” in the approach to migrants’ religious diversity?**

As we have discussed, in the context of a secularized society, since religion suffered a strong decline in its role as a pillar of the transmission of values, it is easy to explain the “malicious” interest with which social scientists have looked at (religious) families with a migratory background. When not considered an obstacle to integration, the religion of migrants was appreciated exclusively for its bonding function, as a balm for the soul, just as places of worship and religious organizations were at most considered a refuge and a meeting place for migrants of the same origin, underlining their attitude to self-segregation. In the current (post)secularized European society, thanks to the contribution of both migration studies and religion studies, the religion of migrants is getting investigated in new ways, careful to grasp the complexity of the religious experience and to avoid pre-conceived and stereotyped readings.

According to our proposal –already tested on the occasion of an ample multi-disciplinary study [36]–, in the face of dominant narratives and of their ethical ambivalence, scientific research must first set itself the dual goal of *de-instrumentalizing religion* –in order to analyse the real, multidimensional role of religion and religiosity in migrants’ and refugees’ experience– and of *re-humanizing migrants* –that is enabling them to express their subjective outlook on their own experience and on the relevance of religious belonging [37]. As we will observe later, based on the contributions collected in this book, this approach may also help to produce the political effect of creating a public space in which the religion of migrants (and not only that of migrants!) can express its generative power. Here, we want to suggest a reading of the results of the most recent research from this perspective. In this contribution, we will limit ourselves to citing some works published in the last years, in order to offer some examples on the new perspectives of analysis of the religious phenomenon, without any claim to be exhaustive. Once again, it is above all the second generation’s members that mainly attract the attention of researchers, due to their peculiar condition of “double belonging” which makes them the ideal subjects to investigate these phenomena.

A first aspect that deserves our attention, contrary to a widespread prejudice which represents migrants as strongly linked to their ascribed religious affiliations (or, possibly, as subjects who were able to free themselves from the religion of their fathers and integrate into a secularized society), is that *their experience cannot but reflect all the complexity –and ambivalence– of the religious phenomenon in contemporary society*. Even the life stories of migrants escaped from their countries for reasons linked to their religious belonging [36] testify to the spread of the phenomena of “spiritual nomadism” and syncretism are. Furthermore, these phenomena are variously intertwined with individual and family migration strategies, well beyond what suggested by the official data on displacements for religious motives [26]. In many ways, these are phenomena that can also be traced in the scenario of European societies, characterized by the advent

of a “religious market” that overlaps with long-term institutional affiliations [5]. In other respects, these phenomena appear intertwined with further factors of complexity, which refer to the intricate religious geography of the countries of origin, in which several phenomena coexist: ancestral beliefs and myths, processes of radicalization, neo-colonialist thrusts that foment inter-religious conflicts, practices of commodification of faith often mixed with the interests of the immigration industry. While much of the research conducted so far has focused on the religion of immigrants after their arrival in the country of destination, these phenomena illustrate the interest in further investigating the role of religion where the decision to migrate takes shape, especially in its intertwining with the family and the system of family obligations.

This introduces a second aspect to take into consideration: even though migrants have been traditionally represented as “more religious” than native Europeans (as it is also confirmed by few available evidence), *it is by no means certain that a “conservative” interpretation of religion prevails among them.* For some of them, in search of identity anchors, religiosity is experienced in a more severe and dogmatic way. For others, a “use” of religion as instrumental to the needs of adaptation and emotional compensation may prevail; once these are satisfied, a greater laxity in religious practice can take over. For some others, adherence to a specific religion –perhaps following a conversion– can correspond to spiritual needs or be functional to an acceleration of the integration process. Finally, to cite another example, contact with post-modern European society can encourage a different way of living the faith, within a quest for greater authenticity. And as far as the intergenerational transmission of religious values is concerned, coherence, persistence, visibility, and the social acceptability of the religious message appear crucial in a process that does not appear linear, but multi-faceted. It is exactly this new way of looking at the religion of migrants that prevails in the most recent season of research, as it is demonstrated also by various contributions to the present book.

This type of approach makes it possible to *reduce the specificity factors concerning the religious minority par excellence –the Muslim one–* and to grasp the analogies with the wider religious phenomenon as it manifests itself in contemporary European society. A good example is the contribution of T. Müller, A. Taleb and C. Moses [38] dedicated to probing the manifestations of Islam in the European public space. These scholars observe that the encounter between religion and secularism is not an unprecedented challenge posed by Islam, but something in continuity with the claims of religiosity, non-religiosity and secularism that have co-existed in the European space for decades. At the same time, cities have always been the place of transformation of European society and of its value systems. If anything, as M. Grier and M. Burchardt [39] suggest, it is necessary to consider the greater control exercised by the authorities over Islamic (and Sikh) processions, which has to do with the fact that these groups are more “racialized” and “religionized” –with respect for example to Catholics and Buddhists. And yet, as shown by another study [40], the limitations imposed on the use of public space for Islamic rites can paradoxically turn into opportunities for communication with the local community, conveying a new sense of citizenship understood as a way of belonging to and enjoyment of the urban space. As can be deduced from the study just cited, the most recent phase signals a progressive convergence with the American research, traditionally interested [41] in grasping *the bridging function performed by religions and religious organizations.* This is another promising aspect to take into consideration.

Finally, the analysis of the behaviour and performance of religious minorities reflects the general evolution of the interpretation of integration processes through “post-assimilationist paradigms” [8]. In particular, it reflects the idea of *integration as a*

*relational process* –influenced by the attitudes of mainstream society towards the different minority groups– and whose outcomes are strongly influenced by the structure of opportunities available for socio-economic success; it also reflects the idea of *integration as a transnational process* [42], shaped by the material and immaterial links with the left-behind family and community, and possibly by the salience of *diasporic identities*) [43].

Within this new and encouraging landscape, a growing number of researchers have been approaching the relationship among migrants, family, and religion, with a special focus on the experience of migrants' offspring. This focus follows the general shift of the research attention to the so called "second generation", that we could witness from the '80s onwards.

As already underlined, the analysis of this theme must be framed in the light of two processes of social construction: that concerning migrants and interethnic relations, and that related to the age and intergenerational relations. Moreover, it is useful to keep in mind that, unlike their parents, children –whether they were born in the country of immigration or arrived there as minors– usually did not choose to migrate. Indeed, they have often experienced the decision of the parents, to whom they feel bound through a strongly ambivalent relationship, with surprise and [44]. All this implies that, although migration is a process that concerns the whole family, the different generations involved resort to different strategies to preserve-while-changing [45].

Given this picture, a first group of studies reinterprets the relationship between religiosity and integration by identifying the original ways in which migrant offspring "use" their religion to support the adaptation process. Reflecting the general tendency, these studies, too, mainly focus on young Muslims. These are qualitative investigations that highlight *the will and the ability to keep together individual empowerment/success and care for the religious-spiritual dimension*, thus definitively disavowing the idea that there is incompatibility between (Islamic) religiosity and the lifestyles and values of modern European society.

Of great interest is the analysis provided by D. Bouzar and L. Bouzar [46] in the context of a collection of articles devoted to the relationship between religion(s) and organizations. Their article analyses the relationship between professional identity and Muslim identity, as it has been defined thanks to the reformulation of the relations between Islam and the French secular context which has resulted, through the action of Muslim associative movements, in a "social" declination of Islam. Unlike their fathers, young people born in Europe try to establish the modalities for "their Islam" to be translated into a participation in the society to which they feel they belong; this also implies the choice of no longer hiding one's Muslim references or one's "Muslim ethics" in the world of work, but to look for something in Islam that gives meaning to work and reasons to behave in an ethical and rigorous manner. Reversing the prejudice that has long shaped the reading of the relationship between religion and integration, the authors affirm that the visibility of their beliefs can be considered as proof of the integration and internalization of the democratic values embodied in European law. Moreover, based on the evidence gathered through interviews with Muslim workers and executives, they affirm that these young Muslims no longer place themselves in the spirit of claiming a right to difference, but want to live their modernity without the feeling of a conflict of loyalty towards their religion. These workers use Islamic symbolism not to oppose their non-Muslim colleagues, but to join them based on common values, inspired by the past experience of Christian faithful and intellectuals. In this context, not only does (Muslim) religiosity appear to be a factor supporting individual career and business' results; what

is more, the world of work has also proved to be a constitutive element of a new European Muslim theological production, which has been elaborating a sort of “Muslim social thought” open to pluralism.

Another emblematic example is provided by the study conducted by J. Rana [47], which examines the participation of young Muslim women in kickboxing courses in the Netherlands, highlighting how their sporting activity is a source of freedom which—contrary to what is commonly assumed by the public opinion—does not in any way imply a search for emancipation from their religious community. On the contrary, young women perceive this sporting activity as an opportunity to work on themselves: on the one hand, they contest the prevailing narrative that represents Muslim women as submissive; on the other hand, they find an opportunity to experiment with self-care and self-confidence practices. In other words, personal improvement through sports is not in contrast with improvement as a faithful, thanks to an intentional accommodation of the setting: women who chose to attend these courses reconfigured the gym as a *halal* space, ensuring that the environments were reserved for women only, darkening the windows and eliminating the music. In doing so, they challenged the secularized conception of kickboxing, transforming a secular space into a place to share information and advice on how to become better Muslims and achieve a new awareness of one’s faith. As the author points out, these women break the stereotypes that represent the Muslim woman as submissive and passive and use sport to reflect on their being Muslim, thereby forging their own identity and renegotiating the link between gender, ethnicity, and religion.

A second group of studies understands the religion of migrant families as a “symbolic boundary”, able to mark the borders between “us” —the mainstream and secularized European society— and “them” — the (religious) migrants, where religious is often synonymous of Muslim. However, differently from previous studies, which substantially tended to look at religion as an obstacle to integration (since being religious meant being distant from the culture and role models of European societies), today’s researchers tend to *interpret religiosity as an ethnic marker that activates discriminatory behaviours towards the descendants of some immigrant communities*. Therefore, religion is not in itself an obstacle to integration (and can indeed convey positive values and an orientation to the common good), but becomes one, “in spite of itself”, every time it activates stereotypes and prejudices towards minority groups (and towards the members who are assumed, sometimes without any verification, to be part of these groups).

In the analysis of social scientists, these phenomena find reason in a process of “racialization” that has affected religious minorities, and especially the religious minority par excellence, made up of Muslims, especially following the phenomena of radicalization and terrorist attacks that have affected various European countries, leading to an accentuation of Islamophobia. Researchers denounce how, especially in those countries that repudiate the classification categories of race and ethnicity, Islamophobia —by associating ethnic-national origin to religion— allows us to re-propose these categories under other guises but with the same result: to paint Muslims —regardless of their actual level of religiosity— as a social problem and to support the practices of exclusion against them [48, 49].

It is above all in field of the labour market that young people with a migrant background have to face such processes, when they meet the prejudicial and negative attitude of employers, with the consequence of performing worse than their peers. Suffice it to remember that, in today’s “progressive” Europe, wearing the headscarf exposes young Muslim women to high risks of discrimination in hiring processes. As for all young people, that between school and the world of work is the most delicate transition,

which can jeopardize their professional future in many ways. Among the several studies on the topic we can mention that of T. Roth [50], which investigates the condition of young people with a migrant background born and educated in Germany. Although the initial hypothesis contemplated the probability of a negative influence of religious belonging on the resources useful for finding a job (in particular, on the social capital that can be activated to get in touch with companies), the results of the study identify the employers' prejudices as the main penalizing factor. What is more, while the private dimension of religiosity seems to have no influence, it is the public one that produces discriminatory responses; the paradoxical result is that even a pro-active engagement in a voluntary faith-based association has the effect of reinforcing exclusionary barriers to job opportunities, since it makes the religious belongings of migrant youths visible.

Together with employers' prejudicial attitude, another penalising variable is represented by residential concentration/segregation. The influence of the latter on academic performance and professional careers has been highlighted by many studies (albeit with the cautions suggested by the segmented assimilation theory). In the study conducted by S. Carol and B. Schultz [51], the residential factor helps to understand the non-linear relationship that binds religious affiliation to academic performance. On the one hand, religiosity seems to favour commitment and scholastic results; on the other hand, it seems to cushion the negative influence of residential segregation, especially for those who take part in devotional and community practices; furthermore, religious identity can be a source of comfort –but also of reactive identification– for those who experience setbacks and failures.

Here, again, it is possible to grasp a less prejudicial posture with respect to religion than in the past. Alongside a conceptualization of family religiosity as potentially able to crystallize reactive identification strategies and anti-social behaviours, *family religiosity is now also seen as a factor of resilience*. A good example is the study conducted by T. Sohel [52] who found that, even in a country like France –the paradigm of a secularized nation– for those who grow up in religious Muslim families, it is precisely the family environment that constitutes a protective factor against negative experiences suffered in the school context. Although equally exposed to discrimination –according to what was declared during the interviews– compared to peers living in unreligious families, young people raised in observant families are less likely to be discouraged in the face of unfair treatment. From another point of view, this study confirms how, for those who live in France, being Muslim continues to constitute a strong social boundary regardless of the level of individual and family religiosity. As the author himself points out, it is Islam as such –not “religion”– that constitutes a significant symbolic boundary and a marker of social distance, and this speaks volumes about the link between religiosity and the success in the adaptation process.

In this regard, of particular interest are those studies that aim to *deconstruct the salience of ethnic-religious markers and the stereotypes associated with them*. Paradigmatic, in this sense, is the study by K. Van den Bogert [53] dedicated to Muslim girls who play football in Dutch parks. The author's purpose is to abandon religion as a prism through which to read the Muslim presence in Europe, emphasizing the very insignificance of the veil worn by footballers. The latter, in fact, aim to exhibit their sporting skills, and not their religiosity. In the same vein, a study by E. Ekström, P. Bülow and M. Wilinska [54] discusses the practices of renegotiation of one's religious affiliation by a rather singular group such as that of unaccompanied minors.

Finally, a very interesting set of recent contributions is devoted to the *various forms of religious-based public engagement, at political and economic level*. Regarding the

political field, a suggestive example is provided by the study of E. Degli Esposti [55]. It investigates the activism of the Shiite minority in Europe and the discourse on the “rights of the Shiites” as a way to convey a new Muslim identity, more akin to the European context, intertwining its own religious tradition with the Western concept of the universality of inalienable rights. This discourse is an example of the way in which the governance of religious pluralism by European States has produced new and strengthened Muslim identities capable of combining two apparently competing discursive systems. Therefore, the themes of the discourse of secularism –equality, justice, representation of minorities, human rights– have entered the discourse of European Shiite Islam which claims the recognition of its own space and shows that it has internalized and shared European values.

Equally interesting is the research conducted in London by W. Barylo [56], which investigates the motivations behind the voluntary commitment of young people involved in the Muslim Youth Helpline, a mental health service born in response to the lack of capable public services to consider the different cultural and religious sensitivities. Regardless of the level of individual religiosity and the prevailing motivations (which may be, from time to time, purely religious or altruistic), the commitment to serve the community and particularly the most fragile takes on a religious significance and corresponds to the duty of the “good Muslim”. Therefore, a different image of Islam emerges from the prevailing one and denies the discourse on volunteering as a secular practice, inspired by liberal principles and as such incompatible with Islamic values. On the contrary, the commitment in favour of the most vulnerable, in addition to allowing the acquisition of specific skills, has triggered active citizenship practices and strengthened the motivation to support the needs of the community, possibly even through their own professional choices.

As can be easily guessed, the forms of individual and associative commitment and their objectives strongly depend on the structure of opportunities. For example, it is a question of ascertaining how the recognition of the religious and spiritual dimension in the workplace is by no means taken for granted: precisely the transformation in a multi-religious sense of the company staff can indeed encourage (or at least should encourage) the recognition of this constitutive dimension of the human being and its strategic potential for individual well-being and the achievement of collective objectives [57]. Concerning opportunities for civic and political involvement, a crucial factor is represented by the attitude of local administrations, which can significantly affect the opportunities for inclusion and the ways in which religious origin can shape the civic activism. As can be inferred from a comparison between cities, a different degree of openness to the requests of a religious (Muslim) community determines dissimilar opportunities for participation, contributing to a different construction and self-construction of the group of young Muslims [58]. This leads to understanding how religious-minority identities are continually constructed and reconfigured also by virtue of interactions with local institutions. In more general terms, the ability of the context to manage religious pluralism is an extremely important trait, even in smoothing out any incompatibility between the values in which individuals recognize themselves.

In this regard, a further line of study concerns *the processes of identification of young people with a migratory background with the country of residence within which religion is often considered by scholars as a crucial variable*. In the line of the suggestive contribution of R. Alba and N. Foner that dates back few years ago [23], we can point out the study by L. Leszczensky, M. Rahsaan and E. Bleich [59] aimed at investigating the sense of national identification of young resident Muslims in England, Germany, the



Netherlands, and Sweden. Religiosity is counted –together with citizenship, contacts with the native majority and perceived discrimination– among the factors that influence the sense of identification; however, there are no significant differences between Muslims and other young people with a migratory background, a circumstance that leads the authors to predict that the degree of identification will increase not so much through the abandonment of religion, but thanks to improvements on the other variables.

Finally, a set of research focuses on the *intergenerational transmission of religious values and on the differences between parents (the first generation of immigrants) and children about religious beliefs and practices* and their relationship with the main indicators of integration. Among the many examples we can quote the study conducted by M. Beek and F. Fleischmann [60] in the Netherlands. In the intergenerational transition, belonging to Islam does not weaken, but takes on a more symbolic dimension linked to the community. Furthermore, both for the first and for the second generation, a greater degree of religiosity is related to a more traditional view of couple relationships. In a previous study, two of the authors of this volume carried out a comparative analysis of the patterns of religious transmission of the three largest immigrant groups in Italy – Romanians, Albanians, and Moroccans– [61]. The starting hypothesis, substantially confirmed, is that these models are influenced by the interaction between the contexts of origin and those of destination. Although “more religious” than others in all dimensions considered (religious practice, personal prayer and the importance accorded to religion), Muslim parents (from both Morocco and Albania) are less inclined to pass on to their children public practice, probably because they fear that the public manifestation of their faith could expose them to discrimination. Regarding the transmission of the private dimension of religion and the belief in its importance, Moroccans prove to be much more effective than Albanian Muslims, probably driven by the desire to preserve their religious identity in a Christian country (while this identity is weakened among Albanians, coming from a secular country). Also in Italy, the study by L. Bossi and G. Marroccoli [62] allows us to grasp the changing character of family religiosity, in relation to a multiplicity of aspects –cultural, psychological, relational, and social– that influence the process of intergenerational transmission. Furthermore, religion responds to the needs of the different phases of the migration project and can correspond to the need for connection with the country of origin (in the initial phases), the search of a “refuge” in the stabilization phase, or even to a means to establish stable relationships in the new context when return expectations fade. Moreover, efforts to transmit religion can fail precisely because of excessive attachment to tradition. The figures of grandparents are also crucial, whether they are also present in the country of immigration or whether they live in the country of origin. Religious leaders and friendly circles play an essential role too. Finally, achieving a certain level of well-being can lead to a withdrawal from religion, as well as from the community in which it is practiced. Contrary to a rather stereotyped view, parents are not the only agents of religious socialization. Just as for their native peers, extra-family relationships and the types of acquaintances are very important in influencing religious feelings and practices of adolescents with a migrant background [63].

Lastly, while research on these issues has tended to be hegemonized by the attention to the Muslim component, more recently several studies have investigated the religious experience of young descendants from immigrant families of Christian (and Catholic) religion. Like those concerning Muslims, these studies are very rarely based on numerically relevant samples, so that their results cannot be considered statistically significant. However, they make it possible to appreciate the different “functions” carried

out by religion and the possible differences between first and second generation, as well as to deepen our knowledge about the role of faith-based organizations and, in the case of Catholic migrants, of the so-called “ethnic chaplaincies”. The latter, as is well known, are privileged places of aggregation and points of reference for many first-generation migrants. However, the study by R. Ricucci [64] on a sample of migrants’ descendants of Filipino, Romanian, and Peruvian origin, documents how some of them choose to distance themselves from these places –possibly limiting themselves to cultivating the private dimension of religion– because they feel their negative influence on the ways in which Italian society perceives them, or because they no longer consider them adequate to their needs, when they are well integrated into the immigration society. At the same time, the least integrated among these youths, both from the linguistic point of view and from the point of view of friendship networks, are those who constantly attend their ethnic churches and remain strongly anchored to the community of compatriots. Even more significant are the in-depth studies dedicated to young Copts of Egyptian origin contained in the afore-mentioned research on religion in migration processes [36]. In the experience of this group, which has a completely unique history, religion plays a crucial role in all phases of the migration process, in forging their collective identity, in configuring their relations with the host society, conditioning their daily behaviours and the relationships between parents and children [65, 66]. Consistent with what is suggested by international literature [67] about socially disadvantaged religious minorities, the maintenance of a strong religious identity and assiduous religious practice can be interpreted as a response to marginalization. In the case in question, however, these characteristics also respond to a strong desire for identity recognition, forged by the experience of discrimination suffered in the country of origin –a discrimination that assumes the traits of martyrdom– and disregarded in the everyday life of a country of destination, plagued by a sort of “religious illiteracy”. As this analysis demonstrates in an emblematic way, *it is precisely through the filter of the family and intergenerational relationships that it is possible to grasp the reasons and meanings of living religiosity, but also of its outcomes –not always positive– in terms of individual well-being and social cohesion.*

## 5. Book Content

Adopting the same approach tested in a previous and already mentioned study [36], we encouraged the authors of the present book to investigate the religion of migrants through the lens of the family. A selection of essays mainly focused on integration processes has emerged, with a special attention to the experience of migrants’ offspring which reflects the contemporary focus of European social research.

More in detail, the book is composed by this introductory chapter and four thematic sections.

The First Section discusses the typical topic represented by the role of religion in the process of adaptation. The issues under observation concern the “compatibility” of migrants’ values and behaviours –as based on their religious belongings– with the cultural context of the destination society.

Giuseppe Gabrielli, Germana Carobene and Salvatore Strozza (chapter 2) illustrate the results of a quantitative analysis using the data from the multipurpose “Social Condition and Integration of Foreign citizens survey” conducted by the Italian National Institute of Statistic in 2011-12. Although the data date back to a few years ago, the study

still maintains an interest, also from a methodological point of view. The size of the sample allowed the researchers to investigate the heterogeneous composition of the Muslim migratory universe –on which the analysis focuses–, due to the variety of countries of origin, migratory histories, versions of Islam to which one adheres. The study has also the advantage of focusing on one of the most critical and crucial issues in the analysis of the integration/assimilation processes of migrants from countries with a Muslim majority: gender equality in family-related attitudes and behaviours among first-generation adult migrants. Indeed, according to the reported results, gender equality attitudes widely differ depending on the country of origin: they are highest among migrants coming from Albania and former Yugoslavia (regions which represent an example of the “European Islam”, more open to Western values linked to modernization and gender equality); middle among Moroccans, Tunisians, Algerians, Senegalese, and Burkinabe; and minimal (that is characterized by the higher gender disparity attitudes) among migrants coming from Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh (particularly linked to patriarchal codes). As could be expected, there are higher gender-egalitarian behavioural levels among migrants coming from urban areas, who bring with them a more modern cultural heritage. Migratory seniority –intended as a proxy as the distance of migrants to the values and beliefs of their origin country– and the acquisition of Italian citizenship allow to highlight the role played by the acculturation process, which is however weakened by the individual migrant’s level of religiosity. For our present purposes, the most interesting results are exactly those that indicate that the more religious people are opposed to gender equality in family-related attitudes; however, the gradient of religious communal integration on this issue is more strongly significant than that of subjective religiosity. This result is in line to the international literature. Beyond the limits recognized by the authors themselves –in particular the size of the sample, which does not allow for a breakdown by gender– the results of the study help to understand why the gender issue continues to represent one of the most “insidious” variables in the construction of interethnic and interreligious coexistence. As clearly suggested by the authors, Islamic cultures usually show a strong gender inequality, legally structured, codified and defined at the social level, albeit to varying degrees. However, by opposing the tendency to understand Islam as a monolithic block, the authors assumed that Islamic community in Italy is significantly diversified and gender roles in the Muslim couples are heterogeneous according to the origin and selected characteristics. Therefore, they contextualise the analysis according to the socio-normative schemes of the origin countries. Understanding these dynamics is very important also for the Italian society since Muslim migrants increased significantly during the last decades (and they will continue to grow over the next few years).

In chapter 3, Lorenzo Ferrante illustrates the results of a study on immigrants’ integration in Palermo, the capital of Sicily. By combining qualitative data and ethnographic observation, the author analyses the role of religion in the construction of the sense of belonging through the phenomenon of “doing family” in the local community, choosing as independent variable the degree of freedom enjoyed by immigrants in the public expression of their differences. Considering the impact of religion and family as origin cultural values on public and private expression of differences, the contribution focuses on their role in the integration process and reports the emergence of specific forms of “multiculturalism” through religious syncretism, new models of family migration, the genesis of transcultural, interreligious, and mixed families, the reconfiguration of religious practices in the identity system of immigrants.

The analysis centres on the most numerous immigrant communities at territorial level: the Islamic *Ummah* and the Indian *Dharma*. The focus is placed on the factors that influence family habits and the public and private religious practices, with a particular attention to changing roles and family hierarchical relationships, which are guided and inspired by religious values, in the land of origin. What emerges is a process of integration which has been declining through syncretism and cultural contagions. In this frame, family is the place of behavioural contradictions in which individuals find subjective answers to the tensions of integration: innovation and preservation of identity traits coagulate in a symbolic space that is strongly subject to change. Striking a balance between cultural coherence and the redefinition of identities puts a strain on family roles and the degree of family cohesion.

Discussing the results, the author observes that immigrants, while expressing their religious and cultural differences, tend to reduce their perception of minority and take part in the construction of a local integration model. As a matter of fact, the role of religion is decisive in the reconstruction of a moral order and social practices that gradually give meaning to daily life. These results support the hypothesis that immigrants tend to lean toward faster integration when there are wide spaces in the expression of religious and cultural differences. Finally, migrants' (segmented) assimilation process has reshaped cultural and religious differences, no longer connoted by their divergence from Western tradition: this brings the author to conclude that in a socio-political climate of low pressure to integration and a substantial freedom of expression of differences – such that of Palermo– immigrants do not need to claim their identity spaces.

In the Second Section of the book, the attention is focused on two different institutions –forced marriages and the kafala system of child foster care– both rooted (or perceived as such) in the religious belonging of the families with a migrant background. The analyses provided by the authors –both law scholars– illustrate the need to “accommodate” the legislative framework of destination countries to the new realities posed by migrant families and their transnational links.

In chapter 4, Germana Carobene develops an analysis of the phenomenon of forced marriages. The starting point is the observation that, in the genesis of this phenomenon, religious affiliation can play a role, although not exclusive: marriage can be seen as a tool to maintain a strong link with the culture of the country of origin, or even as a way to “protect” girls from certain open lifestyles, especially in relation to sexuality.

In line with the Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe (2011), Italian law considers forced marriages an illegal act, made so by the imposition on the spouses and above all on the bride. The reference legislation is represented by the art. 7 of the so-called “Red code”, approved in 2019 and dedicated to the protection of victims of domestic and gender-based violence. However, a regulatory intervention limited to the qualification of the case as a crime based on some external morphological aspects runs the risk of not grasping, in a truly inclusive and intercultural dimension, the plurality of meanings that behaviours could assume, in compliance with the law constitutional and the variety of values they contain. This question, from a strictly legal-positive point of view, must be correctly framed among the limits to the freedom of individuals, in particular of women, determined by habits, customs, systems of collective and relational values that overshadow subjectivity.

This phenomenon involves many aspects of interest in the analysis of intercultural dynamics, not only with reference to the juridical concept of free consent and dignity of the person, but also in consideration of the philosophical and juridical elaborations on the concept of “gender” and its relationship with intrafamily relationships. Forced

marriages can be understood in terms of intercultural conflict, i.e., highlighting the process of reworking and reinterpreting gender roles following migration experiences and the profound divergence between external marriage dynamics (of the host society) and the logic adopted by the group of belonging. Just to give an example, the adoption of an intercultural approach could lead to a different categorization of the behaviour of the actors involved (such as the girl's parents) who could be convinced that they are acting for her good.

This repositioning of formal profiles could provide useful tools for a regulatory qualification/translation that best contextualizes these practices, tracing "other" meanings and, in relation to them, emancipatory solutions that do not bring into play the subjectivity of the "victim" and his isolation from social groups to which he belongs. In this perspective, the new rights can become translation interfaces between traditions renewed in their potential sense, so as to promote processes of intercultural redefinition of subjectivity. A true intercultural right must not, therefore, be dedicated exclusively to penal protection (even if this is absolutely necessary) but must be more integrated into an articulated system of support and prevention. It is therefore necessary to rethink and recontextualize the theme of respect for human rights, not as a theoretical entity assumed in an abstract universalistic key, and to focus attention on the theme and on the dignity of choice. In the dialectic between universally valid rights, in all contexts and/or space-time coordinates, and an absolute relativism of human rights, the author concludes that we must find a *modus operandi* able to mediate between these opposites.

In chapter 5, Alessandra Abis provides an interesting analysis of the Islamic child foster care called *Kafala*, investigating how domestic legal systems of Western States (particularly European ones) deal with it—principally with reference to the right of family reunification and to intercountry adoption. The analysis constitutes a good example to grasp the concept of family as a social construction and a moral order discussed above, as well as the transformative potential of migratory flows, which bring with them also institutions mostly obscure in the destination country in terms of marriage schemes, parenting affiliations, forms of cohabitation. As a consequence, not only does immigration produce the circulation of different models of family shaped by religious tenets; what is more, it implies the need to deal with the new institutions transplanted by people with a foreign background, since immigrants often claim for the recognition of relationships and obligations born under the legal system of their country of origin.

In the case under examination, the most recurring issue in hosting States has concerned the right to family reunification since the child under *Kafala* is not considered as a family member of the *Kafil* (that is the person who looks after him or her). Indeed, *Kafala* is consonant with the religious prohibition to establish a parental relationship beyond the biological filiation (as it happens in the case of adoption) and with the religious obligation to educate in Islamic religion the child in custody. Jurists are thus called upon to find a legal accommodation for these unusual family structures through dynamic solutions—able to reconcile this institute with the principles deriving from the values of the host society, thereby meeting the needs of a multicultural society. The essay reviews the solutions adopted in different countries which demonstrate how this institution is going to become a part of Western legal system.

Furthermore, this contribution highlights the consequences of a possible recognition of the *Kafala* institution on the religious education of children in the host country. Since *Kafala* is not just a simple custody, but involves a deep religious dimension, it is necessary to investigate its consequences in the field of the right to religious freedom, about both the child and the adult caretaker. As suggested by the author—following the

international literature on the topic— even if today there is a lack of agreement over what constitutes the best interest of the child (an issue which ultimately evokes the same aims and values of life), it is possible to identify a core of the concept in the rejection of any forms of abuse and violence. In this way, the special guardianship of kafala may be able to find an accommodation among the values of the western legal orders.

The Third Section of the volume explores the process of intergenerational transmission (and negotiation) of the religious identity from different disciplinary perspectives.

Chapter 6, authored by Elisabetta Musi and Alessandra Augelli, provides the results of their study based on focus groups and interviews to women who experienced migration with their families. This choice is motivated by the intimate connection between the maternal role and the transmission of religious values belonging to the culture of origin.

In line with the results of the other studies presented in this volume, they found continuity in the importance of religion from one generation to another. However, the non-Islamic context in which young Muslims grow up inevitably influences the way they inherit their faith, thus leading to transformations and original re-elaborations, which also reflect contemporary tendencies privileging self-expression of consciously chosen identities.

Especially during their adolescence, many second-generation youths go through the complex process of reinterpreting and making sense out of the religious norms of their family or completely give up their religious affiliation. More often, they come up with progressive visions of synthesis, where the conflictual cultural elements are contaminated in various ways, up to the point of creating a personal vision of the world. This can result in a growing gap between the practice and the real sharing of their meaning, but also in an “essentialization” of the religious practice.

Finally, an interesting aspect of this study is the focus on the relationship that migrant families keep with relatives abroad: these may amplify cultural distances and cause intercultural misunderstandings, especially as far as emotions, sense of belonging and identities are concerned.

In chapter 7, Cristina Giuliani and Camillo Regalia, further developing the analysis carried out in a previous study cited above, discuss the results of their research on Coptic families living in Milan. In the first section of the chapter the authors describe the factors which have contributed, particularly within psychological research, to neglect the role played by religion in the integration of the migrant families. Subsequently, they provide the results of an inquiry which has explicitly adopted a family perspective, by collecting and comparing narratives of both first-generation parents and second-generation adolescent children.

For the purposes of our present reflection, the main merit of this contribution consists in focusing attention on a non-Muslim religious minority, that often gets confused with Muslims in the common perception, due to the circumstance that the families involved in the research come from a country with an Islamic majority. As a matter of fact, Christian Copts can be viewed as an emblematic example of “double minority”, since they were a minority in their origin country and continue to be such even in the country they migrated to. This condition influences their process of integration and feeds a diasporic identity intentionally transmitted to the second generation.

Independently from their age and generation of immigration, interviewees consider religious faith and religious experience as an essential part of their private and social life. The two latter dimensions are deeply intertwined: the families involved in the study

acknowledge the centrality of the faith as a personal resource, and the salience of their attachment to the Churches and clergy (perceived as guide and point of reference, also involved in family decision-making), as well as the fundamental role they play. Intergenerational religious transmission emerges as shared responsibility of adults – parents, priests, bishop– toward younger generations, also in order to ensure loyalty to a sacred tradition and obedience to what the Mother Church preaches to diasporic Churches.

For both generations, self-identification as migrant Egyptian Copts and the belonging to the Coptic community are central elements of the personal and family identity. However, for the parents the main contents of their religious identity concern the themes of diaspora and of martyrdom –thus proudly underlying the continuity with their origin and the history of their Church–, and religious identity is closely intertwined with the ethnic identity. For their offspring, religious identity draws on a comparison with the Italian society: stressing the relevance of religion in everyday life, they highlight the contrast with the outside secularized world and their Italian peers. At the same time, both parents and children represent the Italian society as a monolithic, threatening, and negative context, and describe the Church as a safe and quiet refuge. Hence, even if it is based on a selected sample composed of families highly involved in religious activities, the study raises questions on the risks that could result from such a juxtaposition to the Italian society, depicted as anomic and dangerous. The marginalization of the community appears, at the same time, a “choice” aimed at reaffirming its distinctiveness, and the consequence of the “invisibility” suffered by Orthodox Copts, despite being Christians in a “Christian” country. In the end, to achieve the goal of a full and “loyal” integration, both the Coptic community and the Italian society must accept the challenge of crossing their respective borders.

In chapter 8, Iraklis Dimitriadis and Francesco Molteni develop an interesting analysis on Greece, chosen because it differs from other Western European countries due both to its historical background and its geographic/cultural position (between East and West), but above all due to the role of the Orthodox Church in the construction of the national identity and its politics. Moreover, some social, institutional, and political characteristics have contributed to a different evolution than the secularization widely occurred in other European countries.

In general terms, as noticed above, Muslim migrant families and their offspring show higher level of stability in religiosity, whereas Christian migrants report a decline across generations. On the contrary, in Greece the empirical evidence discussed by the authors illustrates a different trend: due to the higher religiosity of natives (compared to the majority of immigrants), but also to the strong link between Orthodox religiosity and Greek identity, religion serves as a potential resource that immigrants can mobilize to facilitate their integration.

Relying on data from the *European Social Survey*, the authors compare first generation immigrants, second generations and natives and find that Greece is the only country in which higher levels of religiosity for the second generation are observed, if compared with the first generation. Furthermore, even second-generation immigrants coming from a non-Christian country tend to declare an Orthodox denomination according to what previous research [68] called a “strategic assimilation”: a sort of “functional conversion”, which probably does not translate into practices and beliefs, but that is considered instrumental for integration and social acceptance.

The large presence of migrants originating from Albania (a secularized society) among those coming from an “Islamic” country must be considered in order to explain

the “exceptional” case of Greece. Having said this, the study is interesting above all in giving an account of how there are no deterministic laws: beyond the religiosity of individual families, many different variables affect the ways in which religion is transmitted (or not transmitted) to new generations. Therefore, while most studies corroborate the continuity in religious values and practices across generations – particularly in religious (Muslim) minority families–, broadening the spectrum of the analysis allows to find unexpected results.

Focusing more closely on the experience of migrants’ descendants, the Fourth Section of the volume illustrates the results emerged from three studies, two of them addressed to the experience of young Muslims living in Italy, and the third one to the dramatic phenomena of (religious) radicalization.

In chapter 9, Giulia Mezzetti and Roberta Ricucci illustrate the process of “becoming” Muslim in a country traditionally represented as the cradle of Catholicism. Their study offers an overview of religious socialization within Muslim families in Italy, from the perspective of the parents (the first generation) and the children, on the base of more than 80 interviews. In line with what has been described above, these young descendants from Muslim immigrant families have some characteristics common to their native peers and others specific to them. On the one hand, they are equally exposed to globalizing influences and open to experimentation with a view to the search for the “true self”. On the other hand, they have parents who often feel a heightened responsibility in educating them on religious values and behaviours.

Growing up in a non-Islamic context, these young people are therefore driven to find their own way to appropriate the family religion. In this process, their behaviours sometimes display a positive contamination with the host context: for example, when they undertake to create places of faith more like Catholic parishes, that is more open to the organization of social and philanthropic activities. In a specular way, faith communities may succeed in attracting young people when they speak the language of youths, by offering activities centred on the social, relational, and material dimensions of religious life. As a matter of fact, while the parents attend the place of worship but prefer to be less visible in the public sphere and are less interested in structured forms of participation, their offspring take the mosque and its activities as a springboard to claim recognition for Islam and for themselves as citizens. Moreover, they show a typically post-modern search for “authenticity” in the manner of living their faith and for vowed identities, thus demonstrating a crucial role played by the post-modern and globalized cultural context.

Furthermore, in their attempt to not to be reduced to their religious identification, they strategically adapt their behaviour and their “Muslimness” to varying degrees, depending on contexts and situations (for example by accommodating the dress to the employer requests and by “switching the code” and resorting to different repertoires of actions, according to the situation and to the interlocutor). Parents, for their part, are very sensitive to the judgment of their compatriots and of the extended family that has remained in the country of origin, so that they demand more traditional and observant behaviours when they feel the pressure of social control (for example, during holidays in the country of origin). These are just some examples, among those discussed in the chapter, which tell us of the changing, negotiable, constantly evolving character of the ways in which migrants and their children experience religiosity.

Similarly, the analysis presented in chapter 10 by Paolo Branca and Antonio Cuciniello on the experience of Muslim youths is based on a non-conventional methodology which has also included the researchers’ participation in the periodical



meetings of these young people and informal conversations with them. According to what they affirm, this approach has allowed the emergence of aspects that rarely come to light with more conventional methodological choices, and even more so in the media debate.

The interest of the study lies in having highlighted what we could define a condition of “embeddedness” in the immigrant community and, in certain respects, in the same society of origin, which continues to influence the young people from Muslim countries intercepted by the authors. Although they were born or raised in Italy, second generation Muslims may maintain a very structured relationship with their identity of origin, through the mediation of the family. As a consequence, their transition to adulthood is influenced by parental concerns to preserve the boundaries of the in-group also –for example– by encouraging intra-community marriages. Emblematically, it is not uncommon that, when they establish a relationship with a partner of the same community, they are pushed to marry as soon as possible, even before having concluded their educational career. Another illuminating example is provided by the praxis of the Egyptian government to send commissions to Italy in charge of examining students of Egyptian origin through tests in Arabic, useful for a possible –but quite unlikely– return. This practice translates into significant costs for students of Egyptian origin and their families (even for private lessons) and is sometimes experienced with a sense of rejection.

In more general terms, particularly in coincidence with the most delicate transitions (such as the choice of the partner or the decision to wear the veil), youths have to come to terms with the expectation of their parents –frequently experiencing conflicts and divergences of opinions– by adopting strategies to succeed in pursuing their goals without losing the confidence of the adults. Taking on attitudes of defiance or addressing adults with disrespectful expressions is simply unconceivable within a system of relations, inside and outside the family, based on a clear hierarchy where the group comes before the single individual, as well as the man before the woman and the adult before the young.

The last section of the chapter is devoted to describing the artistic production of some emerging names in the field of fiction and music, young –and not so young– members of the second generation.

Finally, the analysis provided in chapter 11 by Giovanni Giulio Valtolina on the issue of radicalization can be inserted within the context of growing concern for the role of Islam in second-generation cultural isolationism. In this context, the originality of this contribution lies in focusing attention exactly on the role of the family, both as an agent of prevention and protection, as well as a driving factor that leads an individual to become radicalized.

Until now, these two sides of the same coin have been largely disregarded by both social research and initiatives to contrast this phenomenon. Despite a growing number of research on radicalization, as well as a higher awareness of the complexity of factors under this phenomenon, studies focusing on family’s incidence are still at their initial stage. After giving an account of the main bibliographic reviews dedicated to this topic –and of their limits– the author discusses the most interesting results of the studies carried out so far. As pointed out by this review, family members can have both a direct and an indirect influence on the process, in strict connection with other risk factors. However, families can also be a protective environment against radicalization and enhance the rehabilitation of individuals who have been radicalized. Persons reconnecting with their family are more likely to be successful in the de-radicalization

process, and in some countries de-radicalization programs have started to give a special support to the families involved.

## **6. Concluding remarks**

In the current European landscape, marked by a dramatic decline of “native” Europeans who define themselves as Christians, a new equilibrium in the religious composition of the resident population has been arising. In this context, as we have discussed, the concept of religious identity risks to be reduced to a cultural construct and to an instrumental argument used to endorse security responses in the governance of the flows of migrants and asylum seekers, both represented as an “identity threat”. What is more, the “culturalization” of (majority) religion, or the tendency to resort to the “state religion” as a bulwark of identity in the face of the challenge represented by Muslim minorities is impacting on the very foundations of liberal secularism [14].

It is precisely in conjunctures like these that scientific researchers are called upon to offer their contribution to the knowledge and understanding of social phenomena, to dilute prejudices and weaken the “moral panic” that winds its way through an easily exploited public opinion, but also to identify critical situations and open problems, encouraging the search for equitable and sustainable solutions.

According to some scholars, the theme of the governance of inter-ethnic coexistence has even become largely superimposed on that of the governance of inter-religious coexistence (if not on that of coexistence with the Muslim minority). Governing a clearly plural society from the religious point of view implies a radical revision of the consolidated models based on a separation between State and Church(s) –and also dealing with their criticalities and the questions that have remained historically open. At the same time, it implies rethinking the role of religion in the public sphere, if only because it is prompted by the requests for “visibility” coming from minority communities but also, for example, by the theme of religious education in public schools and by that, even thornier, of the recognition of “special” rights (so-called ethnic rights) to (religious) minorities. All this calls into question not only State authorities, but the majority Church itself, urged to rethink its role within a more plural society. Finally, governing a society made more heterogeneous by the migratory flows that have followed one another over time implies dealing with the limits of methodological nationalism, recognizing the importance of transnational ties and practices, as well as the influence that States and communities of origin of migrants continue to exercise over their lives and decisions. Once again, all these issues are reflected in an exemplary way in the experience of families with a migratory background and it is certainly not accidental that these issues emerged after the transformation of an immigration of (single) workers into an immigration made by families.

In Europe, a widespread ideological bias has traditionally inhibited the possibility to adequately analyse and grasp the role of religion within migration and interethnic coexistence, despite its relevance, thus contributing (unconsciously?) to a stereotyped representation of migrants’ religiosity and to its instrumentalization at political level as well as by the media-system. However, in recent years, the religion of migrants has finally begun to gain a growing space in the research agenda and above all it started to be analysed through approaches less influenced by the ideology of secularization. European scholars are more and more involved in the investigation of the multiple ways

though which migrants and their offspring give meaning to their religious affiliations and live their religiosity in daily life, dealing with a (post) secularized society and often also with the stigmatization that affects members of minority religions, especially if Muslims.

By joining this promising line of study, this collection of essays looks at the religion of migrants through the filter of the family, acknowledging the challenging and exploratory meaning of the immigration-family-religion nexus. Following the suggestions coming from a previous ample study on the role of religion in migratory and integration processes [36], the following chapters are based on a clear option toward both the de-instrumentalization of migrants' religion and the re-humanization of migrants. In analysing the concept of religious identity, they systematically deconstruct religious markers and ascribed religious belonging –as in the emblematic example of “converted” Orthodox analysed in chapter 8– and point out the risks and costs (at individual, familial, and societal level) of both their *invisibility* –as in the case of Christian Coptic teenagers presented in chapter 7– and their *hyper-visibility* –as occurs to the offspring of Muslim families who are the object of chapter 10. At the same time, these contributions allow to grasp the limits of the *neutralization* of religious differences (possibly in the name of “political correctness”, in line with a radical understanding of the principle of secularization) that prevents us from grasping cultural distance on critical aspects –such as the principle of gender equity, as the analysis proposed in chapter 2 shows. Moreover, they show the limits of *hyper-emphasis*, which leads to reducing every other difference and individual specificity to religious ones –as in the case of the people who experience to be restricted to his/her “Muslimness”, discussed in chapter 9, thus neglecting the relevance of many other variables [69].

To take religious differences seriously also implies recognizing the conflictual dimension inevitably present in the confrontation between “differences” and renouncing the temptation to reduce religious values to an identity banner. In this regard, the analyses proposed in chapters 4 and 5 indicate the way of a dialogic approach capable of finding a legislative arrangement for the requests for recognition of institutions embedded in the juridical and religious tradition of immigrant communities. This approach is in line with the one suggested by T. Modood and T. Sealy [21] who encourage the adoption of a “multi-culturalized secularism” to address and accommodate the demands of different religious groups, negotiating and cooperating with transnational actors. All this implies the willingness to recognize the public value of religion and religiosity as a necessary pre-condition [36].

As a matter of fact, the governance of religious diversity in a liberal democratic State entails the adoption of inclusive and accommodative, not oppressive, attitudes towards religion(s) and religious practices in public spaces [32]. As suggested in chapter 3, guaranteeing religious minorities the freedom to express their differences also in the public sphere encourages a process of “reshaping” of the same cultural and religious differences, in line with the democratic values of the hosting society. It is in this way that Europe will be able to complete the metabolization of its transformation into a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society: a task that certainly calls into question political authorities, but also the many civil society organizations that, through their daily practices, are drawing the future of a pluralistic Europe. In this process, a crucial role belongs –as underlined in chapter 6– to the educational system, called upon to create spaces and opportunities aimed at nurturing interest in (other) religious expressions and at overcoming any misunderstanding and intolerance. Finally, as strongly stressed in chapter 11, even a phenomenon like (religious) radicalization could be to some extent

prevented, by raising the awareness of both parents and professional operators towards the risk factors, particularly those related to the long-time young people spend online, but also, by recognizing how the very family of origin can play a pivotal role in the recruitment of young people into terroristic cells. The prevention of the radicalization process does not necessarily entail repressive policies, but they surely require a better understanding of the causes and contexts in which this phenomenon could develop - the migrant family is one of these contexts.

However, far more than the episodes of radicalization –on which spotlights are usually focused– examples of “bottom-up” accommodation are widespread in contemporary Europe. Their main protagonists of such examples are second-generation young people (especially Muslims) who, through their daily practices, invent ways to “hold together” the respect for one’s own religious tradition, the search for a more authentic experience of faith, the commitment to individual success and the construction of the common good. But it is a process –it must be emphasized– that unites them to the millions of faithful of the still majority religion in Europe who, despite culturalist tendencies, understand their faith as a religion “embodied” in the places of life and work, as well as in the spaces where a better future is planned and built.

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