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Introduction

Along with a number of other countries, particularly those in southern Europe, Italy has only been a receiving country for international immigration for about 25 years. Italy itself has a long tradition of emigration and it is estimated that there are currently about 60 million Italian emigrants all over the world.

In Italian Law, the concept of “immigrant” first appeared as recently as 1986. Previously there was only the general juridical type of the “foreigner”, whose residence within the national boundaries was governed by public security law.

In the Italian public discourse, up to the end of the 1980s, “immigrants” were internal migrants from less developed southern regions (“Mezzogiorno”) who moved towards the more dynamic areas of Northern Italy, a huge phenomenon throughout the twentieth century, and particularly intense in the “golden period” of the industrial development (from the 1950s and the first half of the 1970s): initially migration was mainly towards the so called “industrial triangle” (Milan-Turin-Genoa), afterwards it was also towards the central and north-eastern regions, characterized by the growth of small companies and industrial districts. Based on a historical analysis, we know that today’s aversions and oppositions towards foreign immigrants were directed to migrants from the south of Italy in the past. However, in those times immigration was not a central issue in the political debate, essentially because the internal migrants were citizens and voters and they might be employed as civil servants.

The phenomenon of international migration has therefore developed in a national context characterized by certain aspects that should be taken into account throughout the analysis.

- The achievement of national unity is relatively recent: 2011 will mark the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the nation’s birth, after many centuries of political fragmentation;

- A national context characterized by deep socio-economic unbalances, since Italy is the country with the greatest territorial differences in Europe, in terms of rates of unemployment and indicators of economic development;
- A shared and lasting self-representation as a country historically burdened by huge problems of poverty and unemployment, without enough resources or jobs to be shared to people arriving from foreign countries; an institutional weakness of public authorities and a difficult relationship between the citizens and the State, a phenomenon that has become even more serious since the crisis of the so-called “First Republic”, at the beginning of the 1990s;
- The vitality of civil society (trade unions, associations, the Catholic church...) and the high number of SMEs making up the economy (8 million companies registered).

In this context, the surprising issue is how rapidly Italy went from being an emigration country to that of an immigration country (Pugliese, 2002). Presently around 5 million legal immigrants are living in Italy. It was mainly a spontaneous change, unforeseen and largely unregulated: it grew from the bottom of the labour market and in the local social contexts; afterwards, it became recognized by public institutions and regulated juridically, with all kinds of delays and oppositions (Calavita, 2005).

Public awareness of the transformation of Italy as an immigration country rose at the beginning of the 1990s, but the phenomenon was essentially considered “pathological”: a new social problem in a country already full of difficulties. Meanwhile, silently and in an almost invisible and fragmentary way, the labour market (companies, but also households) as well as the civil society actors, were going in the opposite direction, promoting the economic integration of the foreign immigrants; at the beginning the process was mainly informal, afterwards it became increasingly formalized in the richest and more developed regions, where the gap between job supply and job demand was becoming deeper and more evident.

The political regulation of this situation only arrived later; the discrepancy between the market and migration policy continued to grow as time went on. Not surprisingly the most important instrument for the migration policy consisted of regularization acts, introduced several times (Barbagli et. al., 2004): the last one was introduced during the summer of 2009, making a total of six regularizations in a little over twenty years, as well as some other non-declared regularizations, introduced through the so-called “flows decree”. Regarding this issue, it is clear that there has been considerable continuity in Italian migration policies, despite the left-right political power swings.

But it should also be stressed that Italy is more likely to receive working migrants in comparison with most of the EU countries, because of its yearly based system of admission “quotas” of foreign workers, which is not limited to seasonal or the highly qualified workers. But every year the manpower demand in the labour market (companies and households) exceeds the conservative forecasts for foreign workers employment made by the government, and it forces policy-makers to subsequently realign the rules to the real market requests and dynamics. In the Lombardy region, according to the data (Blangiardo, 2005) two regular immigrants out of three have been irregular for a certain period during

their stay in Italy. The percentage is even higher among workers, since the immigrants that have always been regular are often those who have arrived to reunite with their families.

In contrast with the labour market, where immigrants are accepted and economically integrated –albeit in a “subordinate integration” (Ambrosini, 2010)– the cultural and religious integration is a theme that is rarely discussed and is never considered carefully. Indeed Italy is experiencing a profound contradiction: while society is becoming more and more multi-ethnic¹, in its cultural self-representation it tends to reject religious and cultural plurality. Migrants are accepted as silent workers, with a specific and determined position in the labour market, when they are useful but they do not ask for rights or advantages.

National identity and State formation

The birth of the Italian nation state was a turbulent and long process that goes back to the 1800s. In this section we will try to summarize the main historical events which led to the formation of Italy as a democratic republic.

The birth of the Kingdom of Italy took place in 1861, when the national parliament was convened in Turin, after the 1859-1860 wars. The Italian ruling monarchy was the Savoias, sovereigns of Piedmont and Sardinia, who were managing the unification process of the so-called Italian Risorgimento, under the guidance of Prime Minister Camillo Benso, count of Cavour, who finally achieved much longed-for expansionism in the peninsula.

The new State tried to create a modern institutional structure that was centralized and was fundamentally inspired by the French model. Although formally the new subjects had spontaneously adhered to the unified state in many ways, the process was an annexation that was carried out by the Piedmont State that kept on deciding and controlling most of the political, administrative and military duties. The centralized monarchic structure that had few democratic characteristics (the right to vote was limited to a minority of well-off male citizens) disappointed all those who hoped for the construction of a different national entity, that was more federalist, democratic, and ready to take into consideration the needs of the popular classes. Moreover the new state was born with several elements of weakness.

The unification movement had been supported by the petit bourgeois and the intellectual elite, with the substantial indifference, and sometimes explicit hostility, of the popular classes: in Southern Italy (Mezzogiorno) the discontent about the taxes and the constraints imposed by the new legislators, as well as the worsening of the economic conditions, brought about the phenomenon of the “brigandage”, repressed harshly by the army with a conflict we can consider to be almost a civil war.

According to estimates, the Italian language was fluently spoken by only a small fraction of people, about 3% of the population, while 78% was illiterate. In the court the Piedmontese dialect was normally spoken or, in the most formal occasions, French. All the history books mention the

1. Some indicators of this are: the amount of immigrant residents on the entire population, the rates of employment, the passage from employed jobs to autonomous ones, the increasing number of pupils of foreign origins in the schools.

famous sentence spoken by Massimo d'Azeglio, another leader of the Risorgimento: "Once Italy is made, we have to make Italians".

The new state was born in contrast with the Catholic Church, it took away temporal power from a part of Central Italy, it adopted an anticlerical and Masonic ideological approach. The clash worsened in 1870, with the occupation of Rome, that became the new capital city, and with the laws of expropriation of many ecclesiastical properties, sold by auction to benefit the emerging bourgeoisie. This fact produced a deep fracture in the collective conscience and deprived the Italian state of the support of the popular masses, who were tied up to Catholicism.

The economic policy of the united Italy favoured the industries of Northern Italy, which were more advanced and better connected with the rest of Europe, while it was penalizing for the weaker economic infrastructure of Southern Italy. Rather than decreasing, the gap grew wider over the following decades, and among its consequences was emigration of great proportions, especially towards America, starting from about 1880 and reaching a peak in the first few years of the new century. Other migratory movements, on a smaller scale and with predominantly seasonal trends, were directed towards the more advanced European countries: France, Germany and Switzerland. In those times Italy was the European country that was most marked by emigration, that caused a massive decrease in the working population in many villages, especially in the south of the country. Italy became the nation of emigrants by definition.

Participation to the First World War was officially justified with the wish to complete the process of Risorgimento, "freeing" the "unredeemed" cities of Trento and Trieste, at the north-east boundaries from Austrian Hungarian domination. The majority of the population did not agree with the war, which was supported by part of the political elite in order to strengthen the national identity through the war effort and the sacrifice of lives, and it was promoted by the military apparatus and the war supplies industries.

The veterans' frustration and the myth of the "mutilated victory" (territorial expansion was lower than people had been led to expect by the war propaganda and the allies' promises), together with the impoverishment of the country, the post-war social conflicts, the growth of the socialist movement and the weakness of the governments produced the favourable conditions for the advent of the fascist regime in 1922. The fragile democratic institutions of the country were suppressed, and the regime developed - like many other totalitarian regimes - a nationalistic representation, based on the legend of imperial Rome.

The regions conquered during the First World War (for example the Südtirol, some Croatian and Slovenian territories) were submitted to a process of forced "Italianization", with the prohibition to use other languages, the imposition of the Italian language in schools and in the public institutions, the installation of officials and soldiers from other regions, the translation into Italian of the names of cities and villages.

The government of Mussolini solved the so called "Rome issue", with the stipulation of the Lateran Treaty (Patti lateranensi) with the Catholic Church in 1929, recognizing Catholicism as the official religion of the

State and obtaining consent for the regime from a big part of the ecclesiastical hierarchies, of the clergy and of the believers.

The alliance with Hitler's Germany led to the adoption of the racial laws in 1938 and to the expulsion of the Jews from public life, from universities and from the professional associations: this was a shameful event that was removed for a long time from the nation's history and which has only recently reached public awareness.

After the catastrophic Second World War, Italy became a republic (1946) and a new Constitution was drawn up (1948). Fascism was execrated and removed by a public representation that exalted Resistance to the Nazi-fascist regime in the last phase of the war (1943-1945) and represented Italians as victims of a foreign occupation. This attitude produced "democratic antibodies" and a lasting allergy toward nationalistic myths, militarism, authoritarian governments. But it has also prevented the recognition of Italy's responsibilities for the colonial atrocities, for the persecution of the Jews, for the mass support of the fascist regime during the 1930s, for the violence against civil and resistant populations in the occupied territories.

After the Second World War migration started again: almost a million Italians emigrated to foreign countries between 1946 and 1951 (Pugliese, 2002) but also many Italians moved from the rural areas to the cities, from the Veneto region to the so-called industrial triangle (Turin, Milan, Genoa), from the south (Mezzogiorno) to the north of Italy.

The ratio between exit and entry flows reversed in the 1970s, when arrivals from foreign countries started to exceed the departures. In the same decade, internal migrations started to decline, and they also changed in a qualitative sense i.e. fewer manual workers and more educated personnel. Between the two phenomena there was a relationship: the employers started to look for foreign immigrants, no longer being able to find the manpower they required in the south. Foreign migrants started to arrive after the border closure in the countries of Central and Northern Europe, thanks to the relative ease of entry into Italy, but they stayed because they found job opportunities, initially especially in the informal economy, in the domestic sector, in Mediterranean agriculture, and afterwards increasingly in the official economy. The turning point was the legislative reform at the end of 1989 (the "Martelli" law, named after the Minister of Justice), that allowed the employment of immigrant workers, regular residents, with the same procedures and conditions as Italian workers. Nevertheless, the political acceptance of the change in the country's multi-ethnic direction was problematic, and in the 1990s a new subject appeared on the political scene, i.e. the North League. Among the themes proposed in the political agenda by this new formation was the opposition to Rome centralism, the opposition to a transfer of resources to the southern regions, the promotion of a strong federalism (or even secessionism), finally the hostility towards immigrants and nomads, that assumed a greater importance in its political agenda and obtained a considerable success.

The events of 1989, with the end of communism, and the explosion of the scandals due to political corruption, caused the end of the so-called First Republic. The North League benefited greatly from the moral revolt of the citizens, and obtained the government of a great city, Milan. In

1994 Silvio Berlusconi started his political career, creating a coalition that included MSI-DN (which became known as “Alleanza Nazionale”), the North League and the newborn party named “Forza Italia” which governed for two years.

The centre-left coalition, governing from 1996 to 2001, succeeded in approving an important bill on immigration in 1998 (law Turco-Napolitano), but refused to face the issue of citizenship acquisition and the right to vote in local administrative elections. This dissonance, between an almost reluctant openness to economic immigration, together with some acquisitions in the field of civil rights, and a substantial difficulty in recognizing its political implications, is a constant feature of the Italian situation.

Cultural diversity challenges during the last 30 years

In 1946 Italy was voted a democratic republic by its electorate (through a referendum) and a Constituent Assembly was created to draw up the Constitution. In its work the Constituent Assembly formulated several principles that established citizens’ equality and protected minority rights. The Constitution articles were approved on December 22nd 1947 and became effective from January 1st 1948.

By the beginning of the new Italian republic it was recognised that all the citizens are equal and every difference has to be respected. Therefore, the Legislator took into account the necessity to guarantee equality and the rights of minorities.

We will summarise below the most important challenges in cultural diversity that the Italian State had to face, in terms of the requests of native minorities, the needs of religious minorities and, in recent years, the increase of a foreign population.

The native minorities

In the Italian context, when we speak of native minorities, we are referring to national and territorially concentrated minorities. After the Second World War, relations with the European neighbour states were sometimes difficult, because of their hopes to annex border territories into their sovereignty. France would have liked to annex Valle d’Aosta, while Austria wanted to recover the German mother-tongue areas of Sud Tirolo-Alto Adige. On the east boundaries, Tito’s Yugoslavia had annexed Istria and Dalmazia and wanted Trieste.

The Italian government limited the secessionist tendencies creating the “special statute” for some regions. In this way the border regions acquired great autonomy and privileged economic treatment, and the issue was resolved in a politically acceptable way on the international scene. Alto Adige, however, remained politically unstable, and it was only in the 1960s, following a period of bloody terrorist attacks, that an institutional solution was reached, with the agreement of Austria, with the creation of two autonomous provinces, Trento and Bolzano, the second of which had a prevalence of German mother-tongue speakers.

Territorial minorities are theoretically protected by the Italian Constitution, which declares in article 6: “The Republic protects the linguistic minorities through special rules”. Except for the regions with a special statute, which protect their minorities through their statute, article 6 had never been applied in practice. Therefore, some linguistic minorities scattered across the Italian territory were not recognised and preserved *de facto* (for example the Slovenian minority in the eastern regions). It was only in the 1980s that some Italian parliamentarians began to formulate a law to implement article 6. After many years of parliamentary debate, law 482/99 was approved.

The law, “Rules on the protection of historical linguistic minorities”, recognises 12 languages: Friulian, Ladino, German, Slovenian, Occitan, French, Franco, Albanian, Greek, Sardinian, Catalan and Croatian. These languages can be taught in schools, used in public offices and by the media.

It is interesting to note that law 482/99 did not include the Roma language among the minority languages to be protected. The law was created to be applied to linguistic minorities who were settled in well-defined territories and it did not provide protection to minorities who did not have their own territory, such as the Roma and Sinti (Bonetti, 2010).

The religious minorities

Besides the native minorities, the Constituent Assembly had to define and regularize institutionally the relations with the Catholic Church and with the other religions. With regard to the former, after a relentless debate, article 7 recognized the validity of the Lateran Treaty, that was modified only in 1984. Italy chose therefore to follow an approach of agreement in the relationships with the religions, an approach that is still considered valid today. The minorities are protected with article 8, according to which “Religious denominations are equally free in the eyes of the law. Denominations other than Catholicism have the right to organize themselves according to their own by-laws, provided they do not conflict with the Italian legal system. Their relationship with the state is regulated by law, based on agreements with their representatives” (article 8, Italian Constitution). Moreover article 19 establishes the right to freedom of religion, without any doubt: “Everyone is entitled to freely profess religious beliefs in any form, individually or with others, to promote them, and to celebrate rites in public or in private, provided they are not offensive to public morality”.

Despite the articles about the right to freedom of religion contained in the Italian Constitution, a policy on the different religions was drawn up only in the 1980s, after the revision of the Lateran Treaty (1929). The revision was made after a long and difficult debate between the Italian government and the Catholic Church. The most important change was the removal of Catholicism as the religion of the state. Another important change was the removal of the Catholic religion as a compulsory school subject. After the revision, Italian governments began to sign various agreements with other religions, the first of which were the agreements with the Waldesian and the Methodist Churches (1984), then with the Adventist Churches and Assemblies of God (1986) and the Jewish church (1987). Some difficulties were to sign the agreements with

the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Buddhists (2000). As regards the first, the main problem was to reconcile the particular position of this religion in the state and the consequences of the religion's obligations in civic life. Concerning Buddhism, the Italian government did not know how to draw up the agreement with this religion, which differs fundamentally from the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the end, the agreements were signed. The most recent agreements were with the Apostolic Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Orthodox Exarchate for Southern Europe and the Italian Hindu Union in 2007.

Nevertheless, the procedures to sign the agreements are very complex and long, and concrete enforcement does not occur. It could be said that there are two kinds of problems regarding the relations with other religions. Firstly, Italian society has historically been shaped by Catholicism, and so awareness of religious differences has remained low; consequently, non-Catholic religious organizations have difficulty obtaining recognition by institutions and society. Secondly, it is always questionable where the balance lies between the recognition of differences and guaranteeing equality of treatment.

In addition, in the last few years the issue of Islam has arisen in Italy because of the increase in Muslim migrants and because of their demands to be recognised, to practice their religion freely and to build their places of worship. However, an agreement with Italian Muslims has not yet been signed. The general explanation used to justify the lack of agreement with the Muslims is that in Italy there is not an official body which is representative of all the Italian Muslim communities.

Immigrants

The most recent issue regarding cultural diversity in the Italian context is the increase in the number of migrants. As we saw above, Italy went from being an emigration to an immigration country rapidly, and consequently it was not ready to manage the arrival and settlement of foreign people. If we look into the Italian Constitution, there is no reference to immigrants and immigration. When the Constitution was drawn up, the concern of the Constituent Assembly was to protect the Italians who had emigrated to foreign countries.

The first law about immigration was drawn up in 1986. The law's aim was to guarantee immigrant workers the same rights as Italian workers, and to control the entry of new migrants. After that, three other laws were drawn up over the next few years: the Martelli law in 1990, the Turco-Napolitano law in 1998 and finally the Bossi-Fini law in 2002. Apart from some progress in the 1998 law which provided some measures to promote immigrant integration, the attitude of Italian institutions and of society towards immigration was characterised by a humanitarian approach on the part of some (i.e. charity organizations, trade unions) and by a defensive or restrictive approach by others (i.e. the League North party). As stated previously, immigration was considered a "pathological" phenomenon, an emergency that had to be resolved quickly. The common political solutions adopted by the Italian governments were the regularization acts, aimed at regularizing people already living on the territory².

2. The last regularization act was in September 2009, and it was implemented to regularize immigrant domestic workers.

Resident immigrants are 4.235.059, i.e. 7% of the total Italian population (tab.1). This population is very young, because over 50% of resident migrants are between 18 and 39 years old. The average age is 31.1 years compared to 43 for the Italians (Caritas Migrantes, 2009). Over half of all migrants are women (51.3%). The five main groups are the Rumanians, the Albanians, the Moroccans, the Chinese and the Ukrainians.

Table 1. Migrant population resident in Italy - country of origin - 16 biggest nationalities

Country of origin	Absolute numbers	% of the total resident immigrants	% of Italian population
Romania	887.763	21%	1,47%
Albania	466.684	11,02%	0,77%
Morocco	431.529	10,19%	0,72%
China	188.352	4,45%	0,31%
Ukraine	174.129	4,11%	0,29%
Philippines	123.584	2,92%	0,20%
India	105.863	2,50%	0,18%
Poland	105.608	2,49%	0,18%
Moldova	105.600	2,49%	0,18%
Tunisia	103.678	2,45%	0,17%
Macedonia, ex Rep. Jugos.	92.847	2,19%	0,15%
Peru	87.747	2,07%	0,15%
Ecuador	85.940	2,03%	0,14%
Egypt	82.064	1,94%	0,14%
Sri Lanka	75.343	1,78%	0,12%
Bangladesh	73.965	1,75%	0,12%
Total 16 countries	3.190.696	75,34%	5,29%
TOTAL	4.235.059	100,00%	7,02%
Total Dossier Caritas/Migrantes*	4.919.000	64,86%	8,15%

Source: *Dossier statistico Caritas Migrantes/ Istat Data* - 1st January 2010

*These data count all the legal immigrants, not only the resident ones.

Table 2. Migrant population resident in Italy and Italian population for religion**

	Absolute numbers	% of the total resident immigrants	Absolute numbers	% of Italian population
Christians	2.109.481	49,81%	59.353.790	99,55%
Orthodox	1.221.915	28,85%	57.500	0,10%
Catholics	700.777	16,55%	58.461.290	98,06%
Protestants	137.430	3,25%	409.000	0,69%
Other Christians	49.532	1,17%	426.000	0,71%
Muslims	1.354.901	31,99%	43.000	0,07%
Jews	6.809	0,16%	29.000	0,05%
Hindu	111.871	2,64%	18.000	0,03%
Bhuddists	120.062	2,83%	107.000	0,18%
Others	48.535	1,15%	68.500	0,11%
Nonbelievers/non registered	483.400	11,41%	-	-
TOTAL	4.235.059	4.235.059	59.619.290	59.619.290

Source: **Data regarding migrant resident population come from *Dossier statistico Caritas Migrantes/Minister of Interior data* (31 December 2009). Data regarding Italians come from Centre of Studies on New Religions (31 December 2008).

Table 3. Main Minority Groups in Italy and their Dimensions of Difference

Dimensions of difference	Citizenship	Racial	Ethnic	Religious	Cultural	Linguistic
Minority groups						
Muslims	X		X	X	X	
Chinese	X	X	X		X	X
Roma	X		X		X	

Source: Own elaboration

In this section we shall outline not the main immigrant minority groups in size, but those who are at the core of the public and political debate. We refer to Muslims, the Roma and the Chinese. We shall discuss their migration history in Italy, their relation with the institutions and with the Italian population³. Secondly, we shall try to identify the aspects of their 'difference' that are contested and considered difficult to accommodate and tolerate in Italian society.

Muslims

The presence of Muslims in Italy became relevant in the 1980s-1990s, when a flux of migrants from North Africa started to emigrate and arrived in Italy. By that time they began to attract the attention of the institutions and society, which considered them as representatives of the diversity that was most difficult to deal with and to assimilate.

Muslims represent 33.2% of all migrants with a resident permit⁴. In recent years they have become more visible because of the stabilization of families and the increase in the number of younger generations (but also because of the concerns arising after 11th September 2001). In the last few years Muslims have begun to make various demands regarding aspects of their everyday life, such as being allowed to build Mosques or to obtain recognition for their places of worship, the teaching of the Muslim religion and Arabic in schools, the recognition of prayer during working hours, the recognition of festivities. Even though the Islamic organizations are weak and not completely representative of Muslims, some of them have begun campaigns to get some degree of public recognition and sometimes they were invited to collaborate with the government to promote dialogue between Muslim communities and the State. Among these organizations we could mention the UCOII (Union of Islamic Organizations and Communities in Italy), COREIS (Islamic Religious Community), the Islamic Cultural Centre of Italy, ADMI (Association of Muslim Women in Italy) and GMI (Young Muslim in Italy). All these organizations reflect the plurality and the complexity of Islam, and in particular of Italian Islam. So, it is difficult to recognize and represent all these organizations. At the same time the Italian State avoids addressing the demands of Muslims, sustaining that there is not a Muslim organization that is able to represent the entire world of Italian Islam⁵.

In order to enhance dialogue between the Muslim communities and the State, in 2005 the centre-right government created the Assembly for Italian Islam. It is an institutional body which collaborates with the Interior Ministry to encourage dialogue with the Islamic communities and to promote good relations among different cultural and religious groups. It consists of 16 members who are appointed by the Interior Ministry and chosen among the most important representatives of the Italian Islam.

Although the initial aim of the Assembly was to elaborate strategies of inclusion and to form an Italian Islam which could be compatible with Italian society, de facto it concentrated only on matters of principle such as terrorism, religious freedom, and the condition of women. Internal discussions and contentions arose among the representatives of the different organizations, and it became clear that the Assembly was only a consultative body, far removed from the everyday lives and practices of Muslims.

3. The groups which are the focus of public and political debate change over the time. In the 1990s the most stigmatized group was the Albanians, which were considered criminal and violent people. Over time the hostility towards them decreased, they entered the labour market and some became entrepreneurs, especially in construction. Today they are not the subject of prejudice that they were in the past.
4. 51.7% are Christians, the other religions are 5.5%, the remaining are atheistic - or are not included in the census (Caritas Migrantes 2009).
5. The pluralism of Italy's Muslims reflects the entire geographic and geopolitical diversity of Islam (Spena, 2010).

The most recent initiative is the creation of the Committee for Italian Islam (2010). It consists of 19 members and their task is to formulate concrete proposals to address the issues of Mosques, Imam training, mixed marriages, the use of specific clothes and in particular of the burqa, etc. The general aim is to propose solutions to achieve integration, to let people exercise their civil rights, to promote co-habitation while respecting the Italian Constitution and laws.

Besides the Muslim organizations and the representatives who are part of the institutional bodies cited above, in Italy there are many places of worship which exist at a grass-roots level. These places are not always recognized and tolerated, but they often produce some negative reactions from Italian citizens, local institutions and some political forces.

Permission to use some places to pray, to meet, to teach the Islamic culture and religion to young people are seen as ways the Muslims use to increase their power and visibility, and in extreme cases as a place where it is possible to recruit terrorists. The Italian state does not respond to the Muslims' claims in a structured way, but on a case-by-case basis and in accordance with relations between the local institutions and Muslims. In fact the State is not prepared address the presence and the claims of Muslims, who undermine the traditional notion of identity and citizenship that are bound to the nation state, and its unity of language, religion, and culture.

The way the Italian State addresses the issue of the building of Mosques is an example of its difficulty in managing diversity, and in particular religious diversity.

In Italy only three Mosques are officially recognised, one in Milan (north), the second in Rome (centre) and the third in Catania (south). However, there are many other places of worship. The Interior Ministry estimates that there are 258 places of worship, the Central Direction of Police Prevention estimates 735 (Ismu, 2010). In recent years in many Italian cities the Muslim communities have asked for these places to be officially recognised or have asked for permission to build new Mosques, but their claims have been met with opposition from Italian citizens and from some political forces (like the North League in Padua).

The problems about the construction of Mosques reflect what has been found by recent research carried out by Makno (2008) and ordered by the Interior Ministry. The research findings outline that 55.3% of Italians interviewed consider migration from Islamic countries to be the most problematic, because Muslims bear more visible social, religious and cultural differences. It is pointed out that the respondents emphasize the cultural and religious problems regarding relations with Muslims⁶. Secondly, 31.4% of Italians interviewed are against the building of Mosques.

Besides the building of Mosques, another important question is the education of second generations. In Italy the number of young people of foreign origin has been increasing more and more in the last decade (they represent 22,2% of all the foreign population and they have come to represent 7% of all the students in Italian schools (Caritas Migrantes, 2009). The educational system has to consider the presence of children of different cultures and to learn to relate to the foreign families.

6. Usually when we deal with the issues regarding migrants, the biggest problem which is emphasized is the public security, secondly the competition in the labour market (Valtolina 2005, 2010).

In this scenario, the construction of Islamic schools has created objections and opposition. We refer to the school in Via Quaranta in Milan, which was at the centre of political and public debate for a long time, until its closure. This school began about 15 years ago, and it contained a nursery school, a primary and a secondary school. The aim of the school was not only to teach Islam and Arabic to children (especially Egyptians), but also to prepare them for the final exams at the Embassy. These exams were recognised in the countries of origin and children sat them because the families' aim was to go back home. To avoid educational segregation and the discontinuity in children's educational careers, a project of integration was promoted with the support of the Regional Educational Department and the Milan Municipality. The programme that was implemented consisted of Italian language courses within the Islamic school, language teaching for Italian and Egyptian students, exam preparation for children and young people. Nevertheless, the Municipality unexpectedly began a campaign to close the Islamic school. The reasons used to justify the need to close the school were the inadequacy of the building and the lack of hygiene. Besides these reasons it was also stated that the school was not recognised by the state and that the best integration for children is through attendance of Italian state schools. The common fear is that the school becomes a ghetto. Although the Muslim families protested publicly, in September 2005 the school closed and the children were obliged to go to state schools.

After the closure of the school in Via Quaranta, attempts were made to open another school in Via Ventura, on the outskirts of Milan, in 2006. This school also encountered many difficulties before it could open: there were bureaucratic problems (i.e.: permission to use the spaces for educational purposes or the official declaration that the building could be used) that nevertheless hid ideological reasons. After overcoming all these difficulties, the school opened and continues to operate today.

Chinese

Migration from China to Italy is a very old concept. The first flux of migration was at the beginning of 1900, when a group of Chinese immigrants from the Zhejiang province arrived in Milan, after having worked in French firms during the First World War. A second flux was in the 1980s (from Fujian, a province near Zhejiang) and a third in the last few years. This flux is characterized by two kinds of people. Firstly, those who lived in the North of China and who worked in industries and mines that had failed and closed. These are economic migrants. Secondly, those who also come from northern China but who are young bachelors, and whose aim is to continue their studies in Italy (Caritas Migrantes, 2009).

The Chinese population is very young. Most Chinese are between 25 and 40 years old, the average age is 30, and the migrants over 60 years represent 0.74% of the total (Caritas Migrantes 2009). Children aged under 1 year old are equal in number to people aged between 25 and 35 years old. The Chinese population, therefore, has a high birth rate. At the same time there is a tendency to send children to China to study, and this fact is backed up by the decrease in children aged between 2 and 10 years old. After the age of 10, children tend to come back to Italy.

The Chinese are also one of the largest minority groups in Italy. It is the fourth group in size (see table 1), even though they represent only 4.4% of all immigrants. They are concentrated in certain Italian areas, situated especially in the north or in central Italy, such as Milan, Prato or Rome (Istat 2010). Almost half the Chinese workers are self-employed (56.7%), the others are employed permanently (40.8%) or temporarily (2.5%). As regards the sectors, 58.9% are employed in the service sector and 39.9% in the secondary sector. Among those who are employed in the service sector, 36.2% work as traders, 18.1% work in restaurants and hotels and 1.2% in families. The Chinese are mostly entrepreneurs in the retail trade and in the textile sector.

According to the Caritas Migrantes Dossier (2009) a characteristic of Chinese migrants is the tendency to work very hard and to move within the territory. They speak a very different language and they have difficulty in learning Italian. Their project is usually to go back home after a few years. All of these elements tend to hamper integration into Italian society. Moreover, in the last 10 years, a wave of discrimination has arisen against them. In particular there are various social representations of the Chinese which circulate throughout the mass media and public opinion. The research "Analysis and processing of data on Chinese immigrants" conducted in 2008 describes the main social representations of the Chinese and tries to deconstruct them (Di Corpo, 2010).

Generally, the Chinese are considered unfair competitors in the labor market: Chinese companies are accused of dodging tax and overworking their employees. Commonly it is thought that Chinese entrepreneurs exploit their compatriots, they make them work for many hours a day and they pay low salaries. In this way they can compete with Italian firms which work as subcontractors and they can offer their goods to Italian firms on the basis of lower prices than those of Italian subcontractors. However, the main thing that worries Italians is the industriousness of the Chinese and probably the argument about unfair competition is used to justify this worry.

But there are also other false beliefs. For example it is common among public opinion to think that there are many members of the mafia among the Chinese. This belief arose because the Chinese often have a lot of money available, consequently this is seen as an indicator of illegal activities. However, we could suppose that the fear of the growing economic power of China leads people to think that the Chinese conduct illegal business. Moreover, in China the Mafia is not widespread, because the Communist government pushed the Mafia out of the state.

Nevertheless, all the beliefs described here are social representations and are not reflected in the reality. The fears about Chinese, i.e. China's growing economic power, their industriousness and ability to compete with Italian firms, the difficulties in communicating with them, the closure of Chinese communities, all lead to the construction of negative and false stereotypes. Furthermore, these social representations are linked to actual discriminatory practices, as the Organizzazione internazionale per le migrazioni (transl.: International Organization for migrations) research (2008) outlines. There it is pointed out that 23% of first generation Chinese declare that they have been victims of discrimination, and 59% of second generation Chinese declare this. The second generation, Chinese also declare that besides the discrimination there are other prob-

lems: work, isolation and depression, difficult relations with Italians. The Caritas Migrantes Report (2009) links all these aspects to the increasing amount of money sent to China in the previous year. It is supposed that the increase of remittances signals their intention to go back home, a decision partly caused by the discriminatory wave against the Chinese.

An interesting example of discriminatory behavior towards the Chinese is the approach adopted by the Milan Municipality for the Paolo Sarpi neighborhood, called the Chinatown of Milan. It is an area situated in the city centre, where the Chinese started to settle in 1920 and where they opened their commercial activities. In the last few decades their activities have continued to develop and to extend in the neighborhood, changing the aspect of this historical area of Milan. The activities themselves also changed, because Italian crafts were replaced by Chinese wholesalers. The wholesalers seemed to be incompatible with the urban structure of the neighborhood, and the area became congested because of the number of vans and trucks circulating at all hours of the day. So, the Municipality decided to adopt a policy in order to restrict the traffic and to control the Chinese wholesalers. The Municipality's decision was encouraged by the Italian citizens, who opposed the growing presence of Chinese and organized many demonstrations against them.

Some restrictive ordinances were passed and a policy of control began in the neighborhood. But on 12th April 2007 the discriminatory practices reached a climax, when a Chinese woman was fined by the police for having disobeyed the restriction. The fact caused conflict between the police and the Chinese, and resulting in some injuries. After the conflict, which some newspapers and mass media unfairly compared to the French riots in the Banlieues, the Municipality continued to sustain its restrictive policy. Nowadays the neighborhood is an area where the access of cars and vans is limited to certain hours during the day and only with authorization. The Chinese wholesale business has been penalized by these restrictions and the relations between the Milan Municipality and the Chinese community have worsened. Furthermore, the Municipality wants to transfer Chinese businesses and activities to other areas in the city, but these areas refuse to accept the migrants. Probably, the Municipality's attempt to transfer the Chinese to other areas depends not only on the need to control this immigrant group but also to capitalise on Paolo Sarpi, an area situated in the city centre.

In addition to the Milan case we could cite the situation of Prato, where the Chinese settled in a neighbourhood (via Pistoiese) and developed their commercial activities, transforming the area into a so-called Chinatown. As in Milan, where a neighborhood committee was set up to defend the neighborhood from Chinese "colonization", in Prato the Committee of via Pistoiese also began a campaign against the Chinese many years ago. The major concern was the Chinese entering the textile sector and competition with Italian firms. Chinese firms are accused of employing workers illegally, of exploiting workers, and of not respecting the legislation. In the citizens' opinion, the crisis among textile firms is partly caused by the Chinese black economy and they have asked the government to intervene to save the Italian firms. Public protests culminated in March 2009, when a demonstration was organized by the citizens to attract the attention of the institutions and to receive the support of the government and the region. The public protest was supported by the centre-right political forces, which managed to win the

municipal elections because of a campaign against the Chinese. For the first time the left-wing parties lost the election, after 63 years of government. In the following months many checks on Chinese textile firms and commercial activities were carried out by the police, supported by the newly elected municipality.

Besides these two local contexts, where the difficulties of relations between Italians and Chinese come to light clearly, at a more general level it can also be said that the approach of Italians towards Chinese is suspicious or intolerant. In a representative sample of Italians over 15 years old (Diamanti, 2007), 43% did not have confidence in the Chinese and confidence has decreased over the last few years. Generally, half of Italians have no confidence in foreigners, and the two major fears are that immigrants threaten Italian identity, culture and religion (35%), or the employment of Italian (34%).

Roma

Roma are a very ancient minority in Italy and they differentiate themselves from migrants because they do not have any territory to provide a sense of belonging or a geographical point of reference. This minority is very heterogeneous and includes Italian citizens, refugees, irregular migrants, EU citizens and stateless people. All these subgroups are different from each other not only in terms of their legal status but also in their history, language and migration processes: there are Rom, Sinti, Rom Harvati, Rom Khorakhanè, etc.

Based on a report written by Caritas Migrantes (2006), in the European Union there are about 9 million Roma, but in Italy they are only 120.000-150.000 of them. It is an estimate, because there are no official statistics about the size of the Roma population. It is certain that a large number of Roma living in Italy have Italian citizenship and they naturalized many years or even centuries ago. In addition to these, a lot of Roma arrived in Italy after 1990 from the Balkans. These people come from foreign countries and emigrated to escape from wars, famine, economic and political crises and ethnic discrimination. In their countries of origin they were sedentary and not nomad. Generally, the estimated number of Roma who are nomad is about 15% to 30% of all Roma who live in Italy. Despite this fact, the definition of "nomad" is usually used to define the Roma. It is commonplace to marginalize and label them, to define their diversity in terms of the majority.

The presence of Roma led the Italian state to implement the housing policy of "camps": some areas which were situated on the outskirts of the cities, which should have been temporary but which became permanent without being suitable places to live in. In addition to these authorized "camps", other areas were occupied illegally by people: cultivated fields, public areas, private properties, etc. All these solutions are precarious and they could influence the quality of life of people (work, health, education...). At the same time they draw the attention of the Italian citizens who live near these areas and lead them to react to and oppose the housing policy of "camps", especially when these camps have arisen (legally or illegally) near Italians' houses. So, the tendency is to build or to transfer these camps outside the city or on the outskirts, to remove the problem and to confine Roma to the edges of society. Camps are trans-

ferred to abandoned areas or near dumping grounds. They are places where the hygienic conditions are often bad, where sometimes there is no electricity or water or where there is no sewage system.

The public protests against the Roma and their camps began in 2006-2007 in many Italian cities and it was sustained by some political forces. Although hostile and discriminatory attitudes towards Roma have existed for a long time, in 2006-2007 a series of anti-Roma manifestations broke out.

It is interesting to provide an example by illustrating a shocking but significant event that happened in Milan. After being forcibly evicted from a camp, the Roma were transferred temporarily to an area situated on the outskirts of Milan (Opera). But the solution adopted, despite being temporary, provoked a violent reaction in some citizens who burned the tents set up for the Roma by the National Civil Defence. The arson attack was promoted by some representatives of local political forces (in particular the North League), who also participated in the event. In 2008 the local representative of the North League, Ettore Fusco, was elected Mayor of Opera Municipality. On the other hand, the Opera Parish priest, who was in favour of welcoming the Roma and who had protested against the violent behavior of the Italians, was transferred to another city.

Another event that provoked a violent reaction among citizens and that was sustained by the political forces was the murder in Rome of an Italian woman by a young Romanian man who lived in a Roma Camp. The crime became the pretext of the start of a campaign against Roma and Roma camps. The demonstrations have occasionally been extremely violent resulting into setting fire to Roma camps, without any real protection provided by the police who have also carried out violent Roma camp raids. The demonstrations have received the direct or indirect support of certain political forces and mass media. The result of all these campaigns against Roma was the approval of an emergency decree in May 2008 which declared a state of emergency in three Italian Regions. The Decree "Declaration of the state of emergency in relation to settlements of the nomad communities in Campania, Lazio and Lombardia" ordered the Prefects to assume the function of "Special Commissioners" with the duty to: 1) monitor and authorize settlements 2) carry out censuses of the persons living therein 3) adopt measures against convicts that may live therein 4) adopt measures of eviction 5) identify new areas where adequate settlements may be built 6) adopt measures aimed at social cohesion, including schooling. To carry out a census of Roma who live in the camps the proposal was made to fingerprint people of all ages, including children. The proposal was contested by many political forces and organizations - both at a national and an international level - condemning the discriminatory nature of this initiative. After a long debate in the European Parliament, the Italian government was urged not to take the fingerprints of Roma and not to subject them to a census.

The Italian state has been criticized not only for the matter of fingerprints, but generally for its policy and attitude towards Roma. For example the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) criticized the Italian approach to Roma, which is characterized by prejudice, and condemned not only the physical isolation, but also the political, cultural and economic segregation of camps.

Despite the criticisms and the recommendations, policies and attitudes towards Roma have not changed. As regards the policies, the forced evictions of Roma camps continue in many Italian cities, such as Milan or Rome.

Nevertheless, these initiatives have still not resolved the problem. Actual forced evictions of Roma camps are still occurring and a definitive solution has not yet been adopted. In Milan for example 370 Roma camp evictions were carried out in the last three years, and they cost about 5 million euros. The Municipality uses the evictions to demonstrate its interest in resolving the problem and in guaranteeing safety for its citizens. Nevertheless, every time the camps are evicted, Roma move to other camps and the problem is not resolved.

As regards public opinion and the attitudes of Italians towards Roma and Roma camps, the tendency is to not tolerate Roma and their lifestyle that people imagine they have. The mass media sustains and reinforces the prejudices and beliefs. An episode that demonstrates the Italians' intolerance towards Roma is their reaction to the attempted kidnapping of an Italian baby by a 16 year old Roma girl in Naples. The girl did not mean to kidnap the baby, but she probably entered the house to steal and she had taken the baby to calm him down, not to kidnap him. But the old belief that Roma kidnap babies prevailed and, when the girl escaped, the neighbors managed to stop her and tried to lynch her. Finally, the girl was arrested. In the following days some Roma camps situated near Naples were burnt by Italian citizens and the Roma were obliged to escape⁷.

The negative attitudes of Italians towards Roma are confirmed by research conducted by Arrigoni and Vitale (2008). The research shows that 56% of Italians do not know how many Roma there are in Italy, 49% think they are not Italian and 84% think that they are nomads. Interestingly, they are the least welcome population group, since 81% do not like them very much or do not like them at all and only 6.7% like them. The attitudes toward Roma are based on a feeling of aversion (49%) or on the idea of poverty and marginalization (35%). The Roma are thieves, they are a closed group, they live in camps situated on the outskirts of cities by choice, they take advantage of children.

If we look at the Roma's 'differences' we could note that the most important aspect that is contested is their nomadic lifestyle. Regular migrants are accepted because they work, they are not involved in illegal activities and they obey the law; by contrast, Roma are discriminated against because the public opinion is that they do not want a house to live in and they do not want to work, but they prefer to be nomads and to steal. However, these social representations generalize behaviors that involve only certain members of a stigmatized group. For example, as we saw above, most Roma did not live as nomads in their countries of origin (e.g. those who come from the Balkans) or they have been sedentary for a long time. Above all, they do not work because their traditional jobs have disappeared, not because they prefer to steal: itinerant craft-making and commercial activities, musical or circus travelling exhibitions were typical of the past, but they are no longer suitable for the economic changes of the post industrial era. Besides this, some of them do not have permission to stay in Italy (e.g. those who come from the Balkans) or are discriminated against by employers. All these difficul-

7. Besides the strong reactions of Italians, it is interesting to report the court judgment towards the girl: she is "fully integrated in the typical schemes of Roma culture. Because she is completely integrated into those patterns of life, the risk that she will commit an offence again is concrete". This judgment seems to link the Roma culture and the likelihood of committing an offence in a cause-effect relation.

ties force them to find a job in the black economy and to do precarious or seasonal jobs.

So, besides the necessity to deconstruct prejudices and beliefs about Roma, it is most important to implement housing policies and to improve the situation of Roma camps, which always have to be considered temporary accommodation.

Definitions of tolerance in Italy

The issue of cultural and religious pluralism regarding immigrant populations is perceived in Italy as a socially relevant problem. The issue of cultural minorities' rights was previously marginal in public debate, due to the almost mono-linguistic and mono-religious composition of the country. The "problem" of the linguistic minorities was relegated to a just few areas near some national borders, whereas the issue of historically settled religious minorities (Jews and Protestants, especially Waldensian) was included in the historical dispute about the Catholic Church's public role in Italy.

Among the fundamental elements that are useful for understanding the Italian situation, the electoral successes of the North League play a major role; the party's political program has become increasingly characterized by hostility towards immigrants, which is manifested in the proposal to close borders to new immigrants and to impose cultural assimilation on legally resident immigrants. The 2001 terrorist attacks, together with those in Madrid and London, did not provoke changes in the political visions regarding immigration and cultural diversity; on the contrary, they provided new elements in the North League's approach and reinforced its credibility in the public's opinion, which was disoriented by the exceptional changes.

Support for the North League started in the Pre-Alps valleys, but in the first half of the 1990s it extended into all the northern regions, reaching greatest popularity in the Lombardy and Veneto regions. In the last elections, votes for North League extended to the cities situated in Pianura Padana; moreover, votes started to spread also south of the river Po, in some regions that were traditionally left-oriented, such as Emilia-Romagna. The political campaigns against immigrants are a distinguishing cause, maybe the main one, of this advance of the North League even in those territories that up to a few years ago were not very sensitive to its cause. This kind of cause, based on the intolerance of immigrants, became hegemonic in the center-right political alliance, with the only exception being a small minority led by the Chamber of Deputies' president, Gianfranco Fini. Nowadays the North League is perhaps the only populist party in Western Europe that forms part of the government, it controls the all-important Ministry of the Interior, and carries out an aggressive anti-immigrant campaign together with certain political initiatives with a high symbolic impact, such as the so-called "security-package". This is a package of regulations that mainly includes more severe sanctions against immigrants, especially against immigrants who are illegal residents. It also includes the use of the army in order to safeguard the streets and the formation of "patrols" consisting of private citizens, volunteers, to help keep public order.

In terms of its cultural message, in the 1990s the North League began a political campaign based on alleged origins in the Celtic civilization and used new-pagan symbols. In the last few years it has modified its claims and its approach, declaring itself the defender of Catholic traditions by defending for example the presence of the crucifix in schools and in other public places, or the display of the nativity scene during the Christmas period, and so on. In this way, hostility towards the opening of places of worship for Muslims has gained even more power and more coherence, being a central point in North League's political stance. The Northern League sees the Catholic religion as a civil religion, a symbol of the shared cultural traditions, a social unifying element for the territory, that is useful in promoting communitarian identification, but which is disengaged from the actual practice of religious rituals and values: a religion that is used to excluding people or to drawing a boundary between "us" and "them". So the North League even opposes the Catholic ecclesiastic authorities when they preach openness and tolerance toward Muslims and other religious groups, and it presents itself as the real principle of the Catholic tradition.

The local administrations have been promoters of initiatives that may seem curious or clumsy, and that are often declared inadmissible by courts of justice, but that are incisive in the public opinion: the refusal to give lunch to primary school pupils whose families were not able to pay for the service; the "White Christmas" operation, to control and identify, house by house, the possible presence of illegal immigrants; the refusal to celebrate mixed marriages, with the pretext of the risk of "marriages of convenience". These and other similar initiatives appear in the front pages of newspapers and in television news headlines, causing debate but then they normally disappear. Nevertheless they communicate a message of suspicion and hostility toward immigrants in public opinion.

So we can say that religious and cultural tolerance in Italy has taken a few steps backwards over the last few years, especially in the northern regions: these regions are the richest and most developed in the country, most highly populated immigrants, but also the most receptive to North League's message, which has now become accepted almost uniformly by the whole government majority. Also the local administrations led by center-left alliances have a great deal of difficulty when they have to decide on suitable urban spaces for the construction of places of worship and Islamic cultural centers, and to grant the relevant permission.

Roma and Sinti minorities are experiencing similar difficulties. In this case, as we explained above, the conflict is especially related with two aspects: first, the security issue, which has enormously influenced the perception of immigration in general, and in particular the attitudes towards Tzigane minorities; second, the establishment of "camps" (both with and without authorization) for the accommodation of these groups, defined as "nomads", that are usually located in degraded areas of the urban peripheries. The spontaneous settlements consist of assembled huts without any bathrooms, not so different from the favelas found in large cities in poor countries. The periodical removal of these camps without the offer of feasible alternative solutions simply causes the inhabitants to move a few hundred meters away; in a year, removal after removal, the inhabitants come back to the original settlement.

In these conflicts, the North League has also led citizens' campaigns "for security", obtaining significant results in terms of visibility and electoral consensus. Open hostility towards a specific ethnic group has become a legitimate theme in public debate and it is used to justify mistreatment and violence. It may also be used to set "honest citizens" against "nomad predators".

The case of Chinese immigration is different to some extent. Racist stereotypes and prejudices combine with an unheard-of fear for the economic efficiency and the commercial penetration capabilities of Chinese entrepreneurs. On the one hand, Chinese restaurants, abandoned by clients, are obliged to become Japanese or even Italian restaurants. On the other hand, the peddlers in the urban markets, like the sellers in the clothing industry in Prato (Toscana), complain about the aggressive nature of their Chinese entrepreneur competitors, their access to ample capital, their ability to adopt working hours, salaries and working conditions that are unsustainable for Italian companies.

The persistent political opposition to immigration can be seen through regulation of citizenship processes. Immigration laws were modified when Italy started to receive conspicuous flows of foreign immigration, eighty years after the approval of the original law (1912). The reform particularly affected "non-EU" immigrants who were subject to stricter conditions than others. The Italian law in question, approved in 1992 and passed by Parliament almost unanimously, sets out different requirements (according to the country of origin) for minimum periods of residence before any application for citizenship can be made. Foreigners from EU countries are only required to have four years residence, while residence of ten years is needed for others (the so-called "extracomunitari", i.e. non-EU migrants), in comparison with the period of five years that was required of everyone under the previous law. Moreover processing the applications takes a long time (four years, on average) and the answer given by the authorities is discretionary (negative in most cases). The acquisition of citizenship, therefore, seems to be an obstacle race. By contrast, the granting of citizenship through marriage is more easily obtained in Italy than in many other European countries.

The same law, which is based on a facilitated procedure for acquiring of Italian citizenship for the descendants of Italian emigrants to foreign countries, basically defines the boundaries of the Italian nation in ethnic terms. Giovanna Zincone (2006) used the expression "familismo legale" (legality through family ties): "Italianism" seems to be essentially a matter of blood relationships, a commodity that is handed down through families, or a quality that can be acquired with marriage, thanks to a link with a partner belonging to the tribe of the Italians: in 2008, in Italy the percentage of citizenships acquired through marriage was 63.2% of the total number of citizenships granted (Caritas Migrantes, 2009). Moreover the total number (35.766) is much lower than that in other European countries that have older migratory flows, like France (154.827) and Germany (117.241), but also lower than the number of acquisitions in a country similar to Italy, e.g. Spain (42.860 in 2005, in comparison with 19.266 citizenships granted in Italy).

At the same time, between 1998 and 2004 the opportunity to acquire citizenship for descendants of those who had emigrated a long time

ago silently produced over half a million new citizens: the most numerous group were “returning” Italians from Argentina with around 236.000 acquisitions and from Brazil with 119.142.⁸ It is important to stress the fact that these people are not defined as “immigrants”, even if they choose to come and live in Italy (rather than to use their Italian passports to migrate to Spain, Great Britain or the United States), although on the social level they may face some difficulties that are not so different from those the migrants classified as “foreigners” normally face. For example, their educational qualifications are not usually recognized (unlike what happens in Spain), and they have to look for low level positions in the labour market.

The right to vote went more or less the same way. Many years after the end of mass Italian emigration to foreign countries, in 2006 citizens resident in foreign countries obtained not only the right to vote, but also the chance to elect their own deputies and senators in reserved electoral constituencies, located in Latin America, Australia, the United States, Central and Northern Europe: members of Parliament that vote on laws about fiscal or public safety issues that are not applied to their electors. By contrast, foreign immigrants resident in Italy, even long term residents, do not have the right to vote in local administrative elections.

The present centre-right political majority is resisting any change regarding these two aspects and the centre-left parties were not able to find an agreement about the issue when they governed. The whole issue is also conditioned by the perception of widespread hostility to change on the part of the public.⁹

This reluctance has a clear symbolic dimension: Italy has trouble redefining itself as a multi-ethnic society. But it also has social and political consequences: without access to citizenship or the right to vote, it is very difficult for immigrants to demand their social and civil rights such as the freedom of worship. Consequently, the current pattern seems to be characterized by a decrease in tolerance, in contrast with an increase in the diversity which is transforming Italian society.

Concluding remarks

Italy has become an immigration country only recently and it appeared unprepared to face the issues of cultural and religious diversity, although these matters were not new in Italy’s history¹⁰.

The lack of awareness about migration can be found in public and political debates: in the Italian context “immigrants” were considered those who moved within the country, especially from the southern regions to the northern ones. From a juridical point of view, migrants do not exist and there was no legislation that regulated immigration flows (the first immigration law was only passed in 1986). As a consequence, immigration was regarded as a social problem, an emergency to be resolved quickly, without carrying out any fundamental changes in public policies.

Whereas the politicians adopted provisional solutions, such as the regularization acts, immigrants entered the Italian labour market silently,

8. The system our country used to reduce even higher numbers of acquisitions, according to the law of 1992, among the descendants of Italian emigrants in areas such as Latin America, has been very simple: not to provide consulates with the necessary personnel to settle the matter.
9. The most authoritative Italian daily paper, “Corriere della Sera”, usually a moderate voice of the Milanese bourgeois class published a series of heated editorials by influential commentators such as Giovanni Sartori and Angelo Panebianco, against a parliamentary bipartisan proposal to reduce the number of years required to obtain the citizenship. The fundamental reason was the fear of potentially giving Muslim immigrants political influence. A slight change in position shortly afterwards (when the proposal was set aside) almost went unnoticed.
10. We saw in section 2 how the unification process of Italy happened: an annexation carried out by the Piedmont State, which included territories under its control with different histories and languages.

they substituted Italian workers in “dirty, dangerous and demanding jobs”, they covered the lack of support provided by the welfare state to the Italian families (by taking care of children and elderly, by substituting Italian women in domestic work), finally they entered the service sector¹¹. In short, immigrants entered Italian society from the bottom and starting with the labour market.

However, although the economic integration of migrants (albeit in subordinated jobs) is emerging, a parallel change in the law and in policies has not happened. On the contrary, strong hostility towards migrants has spread, sustained by some political parties, such as the North League. So, in the current Italian context two different approaches to migrants have emerged: on the one hand political and public debate is characterized by the intolerance towards migrants; on the other hand, the labour market promotes their economic integration, whereas some civil society actors (Catholic organizations, trade unions, NGOs), also support their social integration. As a result, there is a deep discrepancy between the sphere of the market and migration policy, between the civil society actors and public or political debate. There is also a discrepancy between declared policies and applied policies, between common representations and the actual attitudes, behaviours and actions¹².

In particular the political policies of the North League have acquired substantial support, based on “zero tolerance” –i.e. strict enforcement of the public safety rules, the need to fight against the illegal flows of migrants, and generally the hostility towards foreigners. Among the immigrant groups that are least tolerated are the Roma and Muslims, two groups that are considered a danger to public order and the safety of citizens. Nevertheless, the intolerance towards them is justified not only by the fact that they use urban spaces without formal authorization or they invade territories without the right to do so; they are also religiously or culturally different and they can not claim either recognition or rights.

In the same way, the Chinese are not tolerated because they are considered very different culturally; nevertheless, the hostility towards them is based not only in terms of these issues, but also because of fear of their economic efficiency and commercial capabilities. Competition in some economic sectors between Chinese and Italian entrepreneurs increases hostility and intolerance towards them.

In conclusion, religious and cultural tolerance in Italy has regressed over the last few years. Some events that repeatedly occur in local contexts, especially in the northern regions (where most immigrants live and where the North League enjoys wide support) demonstrate this. We refer to the dismantling of many Roma camps in Milan or Rome, prohibition or the difficulties in building mosques or places of worship, the closure of an Islamic school in Milan, the restrictive ordinances targeting the Chinese in Milan and Prato, etc.

Nevertheless, Italy can not oppose the transformation of society and the increase of diversity. It is necessary to take into account the social, cultural and economic changes that society is experiencing and the discrepancy between the policies declared and the public debate on the one hand, and the reality on the other.

11. Nevertheless, they also entered the building trade, the restaurant industry, the retail sector and agriculture (Caritas Migrantes, 2009; Inail, 2010).

12. In some public arenas the civil society actors oppose the typical representations and try to act in order to integrate migrants, such as in schools or in the public health services.

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