Religions, Migrations and Minorities
Intellectual Output 2, Unit IV

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Reference Digital Module:
Religions, Migrations and Minorities

Key concept: Immigration

The phenomenon of immigration is a very complex social phenomenon from the point of view of causes and consequences. Generally, the term refers to the permanent or temporary transfer of people to the country of origin to another, although the places of departure and arrival have changed with the succession of historical periods. The causes of immigration are due to several factors: for example, poverty pushes thousands of people to richer countries; in other cases the reasons are political (wars, genocide, dictatorships, persecutions), religious (impossibility to practice their own religious cult); climate (due to environmental upheavals such as droughts); health (the outbreak of an epidemic or a pandemic); or, criminal, where the migrants are victims of human trafficking.

For more information:

- **What is the meaning of the words "migration", "diaspora" and "minorities"?**
- **Socio-anthropological motivations of diaspora**

Religious communities and immigration

The history of the great migratory flows has shown that, through the centuries, religion is a precious asset for every migrant who re-evaluates and emphasizes his/her own cultural tradition precisely in the country in which he/she ends up settling. Religion therefore represents an important identity element for migrants - a cultural root perhaps more solid than traditions - that, at least at the beginning of their path of integration, they intend to protect. In this context, religion helps to reconnect with what is left from their homeland and to face the impact with new cultures. However, the history of migratory processes has also shown that religious communities can perform very different social functions and sometimes have opposite results. In some cases, they can constitute a wall that slows down the path of integration, becoming impermeable to the outside, self-centering, and nourishing a religious identity that is antagonistic to the surrounding society. Examples of these religious communities are some mosques in the United Kingdom and some Evangelical churches in the Scandinavian countries, which ended up isolating themselves from their social context, with dramatic effects from the point of view of integration.

Case study: Chinese communities in Italy

Many Chinese immigrants in Italy, who have not converted to Christianity, have continued to practice their religious faith in unorganized communities and religious centers. Chinese masters lead Daoist religious centers, where Chinese and Western teachers teach martial arts courses, *qi gong*, yoga, dietetics and Feng Shui. Although many of these religious centers have gradually lost their religious element, becoming simple martial arts gyms, in some cases, they have maintained their function as places of religious worship. Some of them, related to the Daoist tradition, are inspired by famous masters such as, for example, Howard Y. Lee, founder of The Light of Life Institute, a network of "energy induction groups" spread all over the world, including Italy. Another Chinese group present in Italy is Falun Gong, a religious group that mixes Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian doctrinal elements, and is in open conflict with the Chinese regime.

For more information:

- **Definition of Daoism**
- **Daoism and modern China**
  (esp. analysis of Source 2 for explanation of *qi gong*)

Case study: the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox communities in Italy

Copts are a minority of Egyptian Christians in a Muslim context who migrate for religious, political and economic reasons. The Coptic Church has an active interest in the mutual support of its faithful in various fields of social and family life; in the ecumenical field, it welcomes the theological dialogue among Christians, furthermore fostering initiatives to support Christian minorities in the Middle East. Today Coptic immigration in Italy is estimated at around 100,000 people, distributed throughout the national territory and, in particular, in the area of Milan. The presence of Copts began to be felt in the mid-1970swith an exponential growth, which today sees two resident Coptic bishops in Italy, a monastery and twenty functioning parishes, and other parishes and communities in formation. Moreover, in 1995, the Coptic Orthodox community in Italy began to spread on the Italian territory: the diocese of Turin, Rome, Florence and its surroundings, was divided into four macro areas - Rome, Florence and Perugia, Bologna and Reggio Emilia, and Turin.

For more information:
Stabilization of religious minorities in Rome, the center of Catholicism: the case of the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox community.
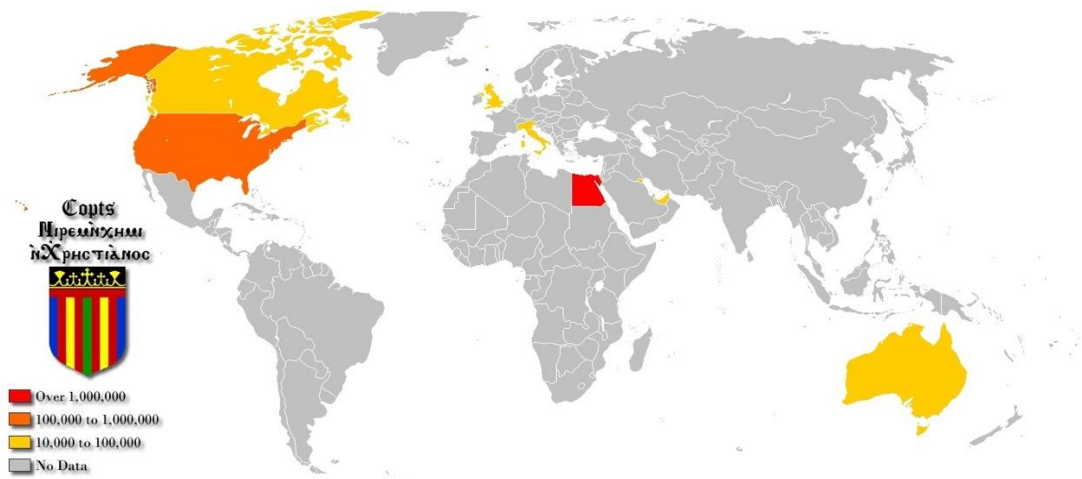
Copts around the world. Source: wikicommons.

Immigration and religion: between secular state and religious pluralism

There seems to be more and more tension around the relationship between the social question of integration and religious identity, especially regarding the cultural contacts that take place thanks to migratory flows. Much of the process of integration of immigrants must necessarily pass through the religious sphere, especially in Europe or the U.S., and the law is increasingly involved in dealing with cultural and religious differences in relation to the numerous revisitations and critiques of the theories of multiculturalism. It has been widely demonstrated that even multicultural strategies, which are more open to intercultural dialogue, have produced negative results: this phenomenon has been referred to as the

paradox of multiculturalism. It should also be noted that, in many cases, the process of integration is subject to many critical conditions in Europe and the U.S., which undergo the political strategies of cultural assimilation. Behind the values of Western democracy there are often fears that feed the worrying wave of nativist fanaticism and anti-immigrant crusades: those who are not white and Christian, rarely deserve equal treatment or full access to citizenship.

For more information:

- **Religious plurality in contemporary Europe fact sheet**
- **Introduction on contemporary religious pluralism**

Battery Park rally against President Donald Trump's controversial Immigration Ban. Author: Alec Perkins

Key concept: Diaspora

Diaspora is a word of Greek origin (from the Greek verb διασπείρω, which means "disseminate"), which in the past meant the dispersal of a people in the world after the abandonment of their original places even if, nowadays, it generally indicates the dispersion of individuals previously gathered in a group. The diaspora par excellence is that of the Jews in the ancient world, although it may also indicate other historical events of forced migrations: the African slave trade, the flight of the Armenian population following the genocide carried out by the Ottomans at the beginning of the 20th century, the forced expatriation of the majority of ethnic and Italian-speaking citizens from Istria, the Quarnaro and Dalmatia, or the flight of the Tibetan population to India, following the Chinese repression of 1959.

For more information:
What is the meaning of the words "migration", "diaspora" and "minorities"?

Case study: Jewish diaspora

The expression "Jewish diaspora "generally refers to the dispersion of the Jewish people in the world, although, it also carries religious, philosophical, political, and eschatological connotations. The diaspora originates mainly in two distinct historical moments: the first significant one dates back to the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 587 BC and to the consequent deportation of the Jewish population to Babylon. During this period the drafting of rabbinical norms (Babylonian Talmud) was completed. The second most important diaspora is dated 135 AD, when the Roman Empire decided to repress the continuous rebellion of the Jewish people by destroying the city of Jerusalem and driving Jews out of Palestine. This and other repeated evictions, due to rise of religious intolerance in Christian Europe, caused the forced migration of Jews to other distant lands, from North Africa to Spain, from the Balkans to the Caucasus, not to mention the massive migration to the U.S. during the rise of Anti-Semitism in Europe in 20th c.

For more information:
- **Historical origin of the first diffusion of Judaism, Christianity and Islam**
- **Israel and the Jewish diasporas**
- **Judaism and the Jews in the 20th and 21st centuries**

(esp. Source 3)

The spread of monotheistic religions

The first historical diffusion of monotheistic religions, such as Christianity, Islam or the already mentioned Judaism, is itself the result of migrations, sedimentations, and cultural contaminations by other religions.

Christianity

Immediately after Jesus's death, the Apostles spread his message from the Hellenized Roman Empire and beyond into East Africa and South Asia: this first part of Christian history, during the lifetimes of the Twelve Apostles, is called the Apostolic Age. Apostles travelled extensively, establishing communities in major cities and regions throughout the Roman Empire and, by the end of the 1st century, Christianity had already reached Greece and Italy. This religion began to worry the Imperial authority when it appeared as a phenomenon infiltrated into society: equality among men – free and slaves, rich and poor, allies and enemies –, the priority of the values of the spirit with respect to material values, and therefore of spiritual authority over the political and military authorities, the refusal to worship the

emperor as a god, were considered principles in contrast to the Roman Empire. These were the reasons for the first persecutions, such as the one triggered by the Roman emperor Nero following the fire in Rome in 64. Persecution of Christians occurred intermittently over a period of about three centuries until the 313 Edict of Milan issued by emperor Constantine the Great and the "Religio Licita" which finally legalized Christianity.

For more information:

- **Historical origin of the first diffusion of Judaism, Christianity and Islam**
- **Early evangelism and Christianization**

Islam

The birth of Islam occurred between the fall of the Roman Empire and the era of great discoveries. The historical mission of its founder Muhammad, born in 570 in Mecca, was to unite the Arab tribes creating a new monotheistic religion. At his death, in 632, his authority was recognized throughout the Hegiaz (region that overlooked the Red Sea) and the new religion spread very quickly in the Mesopotamian region and beyond. The political and spiritual leadership of the Islamic community was firstly assumed by a succession line of caliphs, a name given to the first successors of Muhammad, who led Islam in his place, replacing him in all roles, except that of prophet. In the history of the Islamic expansion, the initial advance was favored by the decadence of both the Roman Empire and the Persian Empire: the first caliph, successor to Muhammad, completed the subjugation of Arabia and entered Palestine, while the second caliph advanced to Damascus, initiating the Arab penetration east of the Euphrates and the Tigris, and westward to Asia Minor. Thanks to these two last conquests Islam became a maritime power, so that the Arab troops passed the Strait of Gibraltar and occupied Spain, where they stopped because they were defeated by the Franks after they tried to reach the plain of Toulouse. The period of Islamic conquests and building of the empire marks the first phase of the expansion of Islam as a religion.

For more information:

- **Historical origin of the first diffusion of Judaism, Christianity and Islam**
- **Muslim conquest**
- **The *convivencia* in Al-Andalus**