



UNIVERSITÀ
CATTOLICA
del Sacro Cuore

**Dottorato di ricerca in Sociologia, Organizzazioni e Culture
ciclo XXXII**

S.S.D: SPS/08

**Religion and Immigration:
a Comparative Study Among Ethnic Churches in
Europe**

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Anno Accademico: 2018/2019

Abstract

This PhD thesis wishes to contribute to an emergent body of research that inquires into the intersections between religion and migration. In the European literature, differently from that of North-America, this subject has long been a controversial one. On one side, the long-term implications of secularization paradigm, i.e. an antireligious bias, have affected its theoretical development. On the other side, the Islamic religion, given its media and public overrepresentation, has become the main empirical core. Nevertheless the religious panorama is more varied and complex than how it is commonly represented. Migrants have indeed contributed to shape new forms of religious pluralism, even inside the Historical Christian denominations, as in the case of Roman Catholic Church. In this direction the thesis aims at filling some theoretical gaps within this area of interest, focusing on ethnic churches established by catholic migrants in the city of Milan and London. By combining and comparing data collected in these religious communities, the study examines how religion becomes a significant component of the experience of migration and analyses how and in which ways it contributes to integration processes.

Empirically, the thesis starts by analysing the spatial dynamics through which migrants have been able to mould new religious landmarks both in the city of Milan and London. Following a specific methodological approach, the study explores the transformation of the urban landscape into a religious transnational setting. Adopting the lived-religion approach, i.e. a focus on subjectivities, the thesis moves on to discuss how migrants de facto experience religion, providing a classification of the various meanings and functions of ethnic churches. The research then explores such subjectivities in motion and relation, providing accounts on the models of migrants' religious participation. Migrants have indeed created lively networks, moulding complex organisational settings, also animated by various kinds of groups and activities. The study moves to analyse how churches evolve, becoming intrinsically multifunctional to migrants needs', providing what I label as an informal-welfare, able to support their social inclusion. Subsequently the study explores in which ways ethnic churches may act at transnational level, explaining how they have become pivotal actors in creating circuits where various resources are exchanged beyond national borders, renovating and redirecting a historical pattern of Catholicism. Finally, given the nature of case studies, the thesis explores how the local catholic panorama is facing this internal pluralism. Today -at different levels- the Catholic Church is indeed more and more engaged with a *governance* of migration, which starts with dealing with arrival of new believers.

Methodologically the study draws on a qualitative research design, which includes 75 in-depth interviews with both clergy and lay members of ethnic churches, in Milan and in London. It also includes ethnographic notes collected while attending (sacred and secular) meetings and events sponsored by these ethnic churches. Finally, the thesis is presented with of a rich set of visual data.

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Chapter 1 Introduction: Old and New promised lands. Religion and migration in a changing world

Visiting the “Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration” in New York, among the many installations one can discover religious objects belonging to immigrants at the time of their migration to US at the beginning of twentieth century. Similarly, visiting the “Museum of Trust and Dialogue” in the island of Lampedusa, among the many installations one can to discover devotional objects brought by immigrants during their journeys to Italy -and therefore to European Union- at the beginning of twenty first century. Thus, almost a hundred years later, there is an interesting and significant “red thread” between the “south-door of Europe” and the ancient “golden-door of New World”. Objects like rosaries, kippah, crosses, holy-images, bracelets and several other religious items have always and still intimately escorted immigrants during their experiences. Is this just a coincidence? Or does such a “historical” continuity also reveal a “sociological” pattern able to transcend time and space? This is an undercurrent issue that goes through my thesis, from the beginning to the end.

In light of this, from a historical point of view, human mobility and religions have been always intertwined (see: Warner, 2000; Levitt, 2003). In this regard most of the pioneers, leaders and proselytizers of many faiths have indeed faced a migration in their life. For example, as pointed out by Levitt “Abraham Was Really the First Immigrant” (2003). On many occasions, the Promised Land was often a label that marked the experience of human mobility. Again, the anthropological experience of liminality involved in physically crossing borders is often linked to the intimate sense of the transcendent. As pointed out by Timothy Smith (1978), migration is also a *theologizing experience*.

In this direction, reflecting on this “evergreen” intersection between religion and migration, Hagan (2008) has recently shifted the empirical focus on the new American “golden-door”: the border between US and Mexico, publishing one of the major contributions to this emerging literature. Before reading her book -as recalled by herself in the conclusion- one should pay attention to the title, “Migration Miracle” and mostly to the photo on the cover, where we can see an interesting picture: a cross in top of a mountain. As pointed out by Hagan, right here the reader may find the metaphor of her theoretical work. Deconstructing the cover’s meanings, it’s possible to focus on two elements; a cross, a religious symbol, placed in the centre of a national border, the mountain which indeed signals the geographical and political division between Mexico and US. Starting from here, Hagan provides a step-by-step account of how religion becomes intrinsically part of immigrants’ experience. In this sense, the border has a powerful “epistemic” role. Hagan stresses that beyond the value of legal passports, migrants also dispose of “spiritual passports” (2008:57), a resource often neglected by migration scholars. Commenting on the famous sentence of Max Frisch: “We asked for workers. We got people instead”, Pace has recently added that: “We discovered they have a soul” (2018:3).

Moreover today the geographical movement of people around the world is enriching and renewing the global panorama of religions (Levitt, 2007), and migrants are among the main drivers of this diversification. Also in Europe, despite the genesis of state borders -i.e. *the form*- and the processes of national building -i.e. *the content*- which have strengthened the creation of homogeneous cultural-settings¹, following important migration flows, the panorama is characterised by a significant pluralism of religious identities. This is a process that involves also established Christian denominations that are experiencing an interesting internal renewal. In this sense, the secularisation theory -which has forecasted the progressive disappearance of the sacred following processes of modernisation- is questioned today by the genesis of new sacred spaces established by immigrants, who are contributing to import new religious beliefs and practices.

¹ See G. Baumann for a clear definition of state-nation (2002:30).

Scholars are trying to provide new theoretical frameworks and concepts that can enable them to elaborate on this unexpected scenario, e.g. the notion of “*post-secular society*” (Habermas, 2008), or the notion of “*post-secular city*” (Beaumont and Baker, 2011). But, the only prefix “*post*” doesn’t provide satisfying details on how these processes take place. Instead the prefix only reminds us that contexts have changed, saying nothing with regards to how and in which directions. It has instead become important to develop accounts on the implications and interconnections that these religious processes led by immigrants have with the wider social issues. As pointed out by Portes (1997) by recalling his mentor R.K. Merton (1987), migration is generally a *strategic point of view* from which to grasp sociological trends. In this sense, religious processes sponsored by migrants have entailed significant theoretical changes on how we should study both religion and migration. This consideration brought me to present the main epistemological and theoretical challenges present in today’s literature that deal with the intersections between migration and religion.

1.1 Challenges to a *theory-building* on immigrants’ religious involvement.

To clarify the theoretical framework that informs this PhD thesis, I initially discuss the main “epistemological” challenges involved in addressing the intersections between religion and immigration. Being an emerging body of work -and therefore often unsystematic- this preliminary discussion becomes necessary and fruitful. A purpose of this thesis is to integrate and reciprocally-inform the approaches usually adopted by the scholars involved in this area of inquiry, which in turn have often developed their work along different and parallel lines. In this sense, if interdisciplinarity is a typical characteristic and an added value of contemporary social theory, it becomes important to analyse the *junctions* where concepts can mutually inform each other in order to grasp the complexity of the mechanisms behind a given issue, as for example the religious experience of immigrants. A richer engagement between different areas of inquiry may benefit to the empirical discussion, and this is particularly true for the field of migration studies. As pointed out by Hein De Haas (2014), there is a weakness in the connections between empirical evidence and theoretical developments.

In addition to these epistemological and theoretical issues, this introduction faces also a different kind of challenge, which I have labelled “ideological”. In this sense, both migration and religion are nowadays among the most “*sensitive and susceptible*” subjects, easily exposed to normative and political positions, both in public opinion as well as in academic debates. Potentially, their intersection may become even more problematic vis-à-vis the analytical approach.

1.1.1 Opening the immigrants’ agency-box towards the transcendent.

As pointed out by Ebaugh in reference to the North American debate, scholars of Migration Studies have for a long time underestimated the role of religion:

“While we know much about the new immigrants in terms of their countries of origin, socioeconomic backgrounds, labour force participation, educational achievements, family patterns, reasons for migration and the role of social networks in their patterns of settlement, we know relatively little about their religious patterns. Immigration scholars have ignored religion as a factor both in the migration process and in their incorporation into American society”. (Ebaugh, 2003: 226)

This consideration is particularly pertinent for the European debate. First of all, the trail of the

secularisation paradigm (Foner and Alba, 2008) has extended its implications also to the case of migrants' religious engagement, as if they were automatically involved in the same process and in the same ways. This expectation has indeed affected and limited field of research. However scholars of migration have recently become more aware of the role of religion. In this direction it's important to readdress vision providing more accounts on how immigrants draw on religious beliefs and practices to cope with new experiences. Migrants' *ability* to also transform "the sacred" into a "secular" activity should be examined, focusing on the *capability* they have to adapt their religious institutions on the basis of various needs that arise during the settlement into a new society.

In this regard, Thomas and Znaniecki (1918), one hundred years ago, in their book *the Polish Peasant*, had already recommended the need to adopt a more complex "*theory of social action*" in order to elaborate on the migrants' experiences. This approach should interconnect the material conditions of migrants, their moral orientations and cognitive perceptions. The two sociologists provided a *longitudinal* and detailed analysis of immigrant's agency. Starting by considering their initial disorientation and vulnerability, the two gave an account of all the *strategies* and *tactics* that Polish peasants placed into action in their host society. In this way, we are presented with a collection of *acts* that together will constitute the new agency of migrants. This was a dynamic process, carried out through trial and error, reflection and rethinking. In this sense, religion became crucial in providing meaning and reinforcement to the process: one hundred pages of this book are dedicated to this issue. Religion took part of Polish *agency*, intersecting their new experiences. According to the classic Weberian approach, the sacred is also *worldly* activity and not just a parallel and separate realm to everyday life. Moreover, religious and secular practices become even more intertwined in the experience of migration; values, activities and relations developed within religious institutions may shape migrants' life-courses in a new society.

1.1.2 Putting the sacred text into the secular context

Starting from Religious Studies it's important to consider religion as a *social phenomenon*. According to Durkheim's theoretical framework (1971), for the field of sociology, differently from theological approaches, religion is primarily a human activity that intersects historical and social conditions (Vasquez, 2006). Therefore sociologists don't debate the truth of religion, the normative elements prescribed by texts, nor the validity of the meanings elaborated through exegesis, but rather discuss how these aspects, by being part of human practices, influence social processes. Even more so in the case of immigrants, as recently pointed out by Vasquez and DeWind:

"Examining migrants' religious beliefs and practices would help to move the study of religion beyond prevailing abstract and universalized notions of religion as unchanging beliefs and doctrines, toward more historicized, re-materialized, and re-territorialized understandings" (2014: 255).

Moreover, during the process of moving and settlement, migrants regularly challenge and renew religions, giving new meaning to the traditional and institutionalised notions of sacred. These additional meanings are intrinsically linked to the migration experience, which can be labelled as a "*spiritual-journey*". Starting from this perspective, it becomes important to elaborate not only the theological elements but also how migrants de facto experience religion in a new social contest. For example, in recent times, two theoretical steps have been developed to take these shifts into account:

- The first is a *micro-level* perspective. Among religious scholars the theoretical concept of "*lived or everyday religion*" has achieved relevance (see: Ammerman, 2007; McGuire,

2008). It has become important to centre attention on the individual experiences of the sacred, which intersect in a variety of ways the traditional and institutionalised notions of religion and in this direction scholars are sponsoring a micro-phenomenological analysis of the sacred. As mentioned above, migrants have de facto become *agents* who import, reproduce and change religion. They also become agents of transformation of institutionalised schemata. Again, these mechanisms take shape through micro-acts of immigrants during their new experiences in a host society. Scholars who work in these intersections, to describe emerging forms of sacred -i.e. new pluralism- should start from a micro-level perspective, and then from migrants' subjectivity.

- In second place the general notion of “globalisation of faiths” also means elaborating the role of *space*, and localising concretely where migrants try to re-activate religious identities (Vásquez and Marquardt, 2003). In other words, scholars should be able to move with agility from the *global* to the *local*. Here we find what is also labelled as the *spatial-turn* in religious studies, necessary to comprehend the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of faiths (Knott, 2010). As pointed out by Emerson and Johnson -in their presidential address at the Association for the Sociology of Religion (2017)- religious scholars in the last decade have lost sight of the role of space within their theoretical frameworks, included the growing relevance of urban contests, e.g. the notion of Global City (Eade, 2003). In this sense, through migration, religions travel in the world to then settle in a new space. At the same time, political, normative and social features of every local context may in turn influence the development of these religious processes. In light of this, religious spaces are also *contingent processes*, subject to various local dynamics. This is also the reason behind the growing interest in religion within areas of inquiry like Geography and Urbanism (Sheringham, 2010; Knott, 2015). Interestingly religion, which by definition is associated to the transcendent and *unearthly*, has become very relevant in disciplines which are generally ‘down to earth’.

In this sense, what's labelled as a “new pluralism” can be framed as a *descriptive* starting point, and becomes important in order to elaborate all the mechanisms behind and around it. A “new sacred architecture” today characterizes the European religious landscape, but, beyond this important consideration, we need to analyse more deeply all the social factors that are locally involved in the establishment of migrants' religious organisations.

1.1.3 Avoiding methodological atheism

To develop these theoretical aims, it becomes crucial to come to terms with the *methodological atheism* that often marks academic debate, including the Italian one. In this sense, normative positions or ideological perspectives on the role of religion within contemporary societies have had implications that were basically thoughtless with regards to empirical research. In this regard, reconsidering the role of religion also means reconsidering the methodological approaches employed to collect data on religious experiences. Again, *opening up* the traditional sociological concepts also implies *opening the styles and modalities* that are typically used to collect and organise empirical evidence (Fitzgerald, 2006; Cadge, Levitt and Smilde, 2011).

For a long time, a general secularization trend in mainstream academic literature has mostly sponsored more normative positions than analytical perspectives. Scholars of social sciences have often faced the issue of religion only through the polarity between sacred and secular, which in turn has produced parallel “epistemological” realms of research: as if the sacred lived completely detached from reality, or in un-happy islands. Only recently scholars have tried to go beyond this

useless polarity. As pointed out by Berger: “the relation between religion and modernity is not a matter of *either/or*, but rather *both/and*” (2018: 29). If, first of all, this kind of approach has limited the theoretical debate, it has also limited the opportunity to collect data on these topics. If we don’t think that religion still intersects social processes, rarely we collect data on eventual intersections, including the case of immigrants.

For example, recently Beaumont and Cloke (2013) have opened a window on this issue, showing how it has become significant to collect more data on the interactions between religious and secular actors within local contexts. During the economic crisis, and given significant changes in welfare policies, new partnerships animated both by secular and religious ideas have been created at the local level. In this sense the notion of *strange-bedfellows* is a comprehensible label: we face “crossover narratives around which post secular partnerships can converge around particular ethical precepts and practical needs” (Beaumont and Cloke, 2013:27). This critical advice on re-opening the debate and collecting new data is also valid for the role of religious communities established by immigrants, which have become relevant players in supporting social-needs of members. Theological ideas about caring for one’s “brother” are issues commonly shared within religious contests, able to promote practical forms of help.

Thus, as corollary, taking stock of these dynamics has implications both for the sociology of migration and that of religion, including their methods, both quantitative and qualitative. It means looking for religion in different places from those where it is traditionally studied. It means seeing spirituality in everyday activities. It means going where people actually practice their faith and noticing its spontaneous, informal incarnations (Levitt, 2007b: 114). If the contemporary world has become an increasingly complex scenario, it involves also sponsoring new ideas and methods.

1.1.4 Avoiding methodological nationalism

Methodological nationalism, i.e. “the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002:1), has become one the main epistemological challenges within social sciences. Normally, with the term *methodology*² the academic community means a set of methods³ -consolidated and shared- adopted to conduct a research. As pointed out by Wimmer and Glick Schiller, “*nationalist thinking*” produces methodological implications given that it creates an implicit assumption of correspondence between social practices and the state’ borders. The “national gaze” influences how we observe reality and the ways in which we collect data on reality. This advice has become indispensable in a more global and interconnected world, where the social-life and the territory that are bounded by national borders are no longer coincide (if they ever have). This epistemological issue doesn’t mean that the *state* has become insignificant. On the contrary, notwithstanding an emphasis on global processes, the state still has a significant power in controlling its *population* within its *borders*, ruling rights of entry, exit and permanence. More specifically, if the state loses authority in many fields, on the contrary the control of mobility represents an important -maybe one of the last- prerogative (Ambrosini, 2018). Nevertheless, an excessive emphasis on nation-state as a homogenous unit of analysis influences the possibility of elaborating and collecting data on the presence of various social processes able to break such congruence. This is particularly evident in the case of migrants and their ability to activate spaces, identities, practices and relations that cross national borders.

² As the Greek etymology of word itself recalls -μετά, in this case “by aid of”, ὁδός “journey” and λόγος “discourse on”- methodology is a systematic path, consisting of a body of methods, to adequately collect data for achieving a theoretical goal in a specific field of studies.

³ Here there is a difference with Italian, we use another term: technique, instead of method.

As corollary, the latter consideration leads to introducing the transnational perspective⁴ that in the last decade has achieved a significant position within migration studies. Today, one of the main interests is to analyse how migrants are able to create networks that link receiving and sending countries in a variety of ways, where in turn various types of recourses circulate. In this regard religion is one of the principal supranational areas that allow migrants to connect places and symbols beyond state borders (Levitt, 2007). In this sense, migration processes can be also framed as an intimate experience of the sacred, which is continuously negotiated between two different social settings. Recalling Thomas and Znaniecki once again, the label of “super-territorial organizations” was coined to analyse migrants’ activism in creating organisations (*i.e.* ethnic churches) capable of keeping alive a piece of Poland in a foreign land. Taking stock of these dynamics has implications also for empirical research: immigrants bring a much broader understanding of what religion is and where to find it (Levitt, 2007b: 119). Different forms of rituality, worship and beliefs are introduced and created, different spaces have been established, different temporalities are experienced. Thus, these processes require a more careful reflectivity on how to collect data and interpret these transnational processes.

1.1.5 The US and Europe: new bridges and old barriers

In this section I want to introduce another key issue that is both theoretical and ideological. Much of the research on migrant religions originated in North American literature. In this sense there is a clear distinction between the two shores of Atlantic. Foner and Alba (2008) have synthesized this tendency by the famous statement: *bridge or barrier to inclusion?* The major issue that affected the development of the research is the role of religion in favouring the integration of immigrants. Foner and Alba observed that in the US immigrants’ religiosity was seen substantially in positive terms, as a process that improves the integration into the receiving society. The fact that in US religion has always been a crucial aspect of social, civic and political life has influenced the approach to immigration. In Europe, religiosity of immigrants has become a much more controversial issue, both in public and academic agendas. On one side, there is the tension between the religious attitudes of immigrants and the secularization of European societies. On the other, a conflation between immigrants, Islam, and terrorist threats has come to exist. The debate is commonly much more focused on Islam and emphasises problems and conflicts arising from immigrants’ religious belonging, together with difficulties in integration. It’s clear how the difference between US and Europe for most time has affected the development of this body of work.

In light of this, a first consideration calls into question the features of the European religious scenario, which is much more complex than common representations. For example the majority of immigrants in Southern Europe come from countries with a Christian religious tradition (in the Italian case see the report published by Idos-Confronti, 2019). Furthermore, within other European countries the religious landscape is particularly diverse, having not only Islamic communities, but also Hindu temples, orthodox parishes and evangelical churches. Collecting more empirical evidence on such a complex religious panorama could -perhaps- partially “re-open” and renegotiate the polarity framed by Alba and Foner (2008). A less political and more analytical approach could bring benefits to this emerging corpus of studies. Finally, as pointed out by Cadge and Ecklund (2007), to better frame the role of immigrant religions we need more comparative data, both at a national and international level. Research is often limited to single case studies, but to improve the public debate and to develop new theoretical perspectives, it becomes important to share and collect more data on migrant religions.

⁴ Later, in a specific paragraph, I will better elaborate the current theoretical debate on transnationalism. Here, I quote this perspective only to introduce how migrants through their international linkages are significant players in “demythologizing” the homogeneity of nation-state.

1.2 Outline of the thesis

I have introduced five ‘challenges’ involved in developing theoretical perspectives on intersections between migration and religion:

- The “theoretical-status” of religion within Migration Studies, which have often neglected its role in the experience of migration.
- I recalled the need to study religion as a social-phenomenon, providing more grounded accounts. (e.g. on its spatial localisation as well as a focus on its subjective experience).
- The need to review the collection of data, given that a latent secularisation (an anti-religious bias) has often limited the possibility of collect evidence about immigrants’ religious involvement.
- The need of think out of “national-gaze” to grasp how immigrants are able to produce social processes that “transcend” national borders. In this sense migrants develop transnational identities and networks through religions.
- The possibility to progress the international debate that has developed in parallel between the two shores of Atlantic, this being a division often more “ideological” than “analytical”.

Thus these challenges represent a necessary premise given that my study works along an interdisciplinary border, between migration and religious studies. Nevertheless, I make them interact dynamically in order to inquire how spiritual involvement may de facto influence the migration experience as well as vice-versa. I wish to contribute to this body of research by filling some lacunae, and in this section I give accounts of my work, explaining what has guided me in defining the *theoretical objectives*. Initially, I discuss why I chose this specific field of interest, explaining the need to provide more details on migrants’ religious activism. Then I move on to debate why I centred my attention on Catholicism as area of research, collecting data both for the English and Italian cases, as well as explaining why I focused on case studies selected in two global cities like Milan and London. Subsequently, I present the main theoretical questions that I empirically addressed, as the spatial-dynamics of religious participation, the need to elaborate migrants’ subjectivities, the various models of spiritual involvement they create, the genesis of an informal welfare, the role of transnational networks and finally the implications of this emergent “super-diverse” Catholicism within European countries.

1.2.1 Positioning theoretical objectives

As I mentioned above, scholars of migration have generally underestimated the role of religious organisations established by newcomers into receiving societies (Hagan and Ebaugh, 2003; Hagan, 2008). These institutions represent instead a significant resource for facing most of the stages involved in migration experiences (Hagan, Ebaugh, 2003; Cadge and Ecklund, 2007). In this direction I intend to elaborate the various ways through which migrants turn to religion to cope with challenges they meet. I explore how involvement may provide meanings and tools to face this new experience. Thus, a first theoretical step is to recognise how it’s erroneous to see a dichotomy between sacred and secular, as two completely separate and mutually exclusive realms. This is the reason why it’s important to avoid a reification of religious organisations, debating instead what kind of profile such contexts may assume. Being intrinsically moulded by migrants’ needs and aims, these spiritual institutions de facto become multifunctional and multidirectional, showing an interesting dynamism. They become arenas where migrants may develop a new subjectivity, build skills and relations that enable them to navigate in the receiving country (for an introduction see Warner, 2000). Moreover, within religious institutions migrants may develop a series of new

processes, which are religious but not only. In transplanting religion they can transform it, creating shifts in ideas, practices, approaches and roles. Migrants may also start to arrange new social activities, as meetings, events and welfare services. Finally, through religion they can establish transnational networks where to exchange resources beyond national borders.

Given these premises, the empirical core of my thesis takes into consideration ethnic churches that were established by Catholic migrants both in London and Milan. First of all, my decision to focus on Catholicism derived from the fact that the academic field has persistently neglected this denomination, despite its global diffusion and a more than significant number of immigrant members (see as rare exception the volume edited by Pasura and Bivand Erdal, 2016). As I mentioned, Islam has always attracted more attention, with the exception of studies of the Pentecostal congregations. It should be instead noted how the migration issue today has significantly impacted in variety of ways on all European Christian denominations (Jenkins, 2002; Darrell and Passarelli, 2016). Mainstream Churches are indeed increasingly engaged with migrants, providing welfare support, promoting the regularisation of juridical positions, participating in the public debate and acting for their political advocacy (for a conceptualisation see: Ambrosini, 2016a). Nevertheless flows have contributed to the genesis of a flourishing and complex ethnic pluralisation, this being a subject overlooked by research, so that the levels of interactions between migrants and Churches are still a field to explore and analyse.

For the Italian case I want to extend the debate, given that the intersections between migration and religion are still understudied topics (see as an exception: Ambrosini, 2007; Pace, Ravecca, 2010; Ricucci, 2017; Ambrosini, Naso, Paravati; 2019). Also in Italy, the main focus is generally Islam, and scholars have rarely elaborated on the panorama in its whole complexity. This being a fact that is also confirmed by quantitative reports published annually, which show how Christianity is the main faith professed by migrants in Italy (see reports regularly updated by of Ismu-Foundation online, e.g. 2019). In this direction it becomes important to analyse the development of a new religious processes also within the mainstream Italian religion, that in the last decades, following migrant flows, has seen an unexpected diversification. In a certain sense a symbol of how Italian society is becoming more and more multicultural. Also in the UK, Catholicism and ethnic churches established by catholic migrants have been often neglected (see some exceptions: Garbin, Pambu, 2009; Eade, 2011; Pasura, 2012). In this regard I intend to provide further evidence on a religion, which despite being a minority if compared to the general landscape, has sees an interesting renewal following migration flows. The composition of catholic panorama has always been enriched by the arrival of immigrants (e.g. the Irish) and in recent decades new flows from Eastern Europe (see Trzebiatowska, 2010; Ryan, 2016; Gallagher and Trzebiatowska, 2017) and from south-America (for the Brazilian case see: Sheringham, 2013) have in turn generated new and vibrant ethnic churches.

I decided to focus on Global cities given that they have become significant sites where a post-secular trend promoted by migrants is consolidating (see Garbin and Strhan, 2017), although urban theorists for most time have neglected religion within their researches (Garbin and Strhan, 2017: 10). These contexts represent hubs for migration flows as well as arenas where several religious processes are taking shape. The city of Milan is experiencing the genesis of a new Catholic context given the presence of various migrant communities. London, which is an emblem of Global city, presents a Catholic panorama that is de facto structurally multicultural, and migrants are becoming the main contributors of this minority. In the following sections I proceed to give details on research-design, showing how aims and findings dialogue in the thesis' development.

1.2.2 Profiling empirical sections

In this section I explain how the thesis is empirically structured. To grasp the complex and multifunctional profile of ethnic churches I decided to develop the thesis in a progression. Each

empirical chapter initially fixes a theoretical aim and is then debated through evidence collected both in Milan and London, showing in this way analogies and differences. Thus, the empirical discussion develops through a logical progression, and each chapter adds a new perspective in sequence.

I start from the space (1), given that churches de facto are geographically situated social-processes. Then the study takes on a micro-level focus, exploring migrants' subjectivities (2). Thanks to individual storylines I was able to inductively bring out the meanings and functions of these spiritual spaces. I move on to elaborate how migration influences religious participation, by changing the degree and kind of involvement (3). In doing this I decided to adopt a *meso*-level approach, analysing also the subjectivities in motion, showing in this way a complex relational-dynamism that in turn generates specific models of church. I then present the genesis of an informal welfare (4), i.e. series of resources and services capable of sustaining the integration of migrants. Afterwards I debate the transnational perspective (5), given that ethnic churches have become sites of various and overlapping transnational ties. Finally, given the nature of my case studies, I show the kinds of relation between these ethnic churches and local Catholicism (6). Each chapter is detailed below:

- In the first chapter I want to address the debate on the concept of space in relation to migrants' religious involvement. As I have introduced, in the last decades migrants have generated a new sacred landscape and an account is provided on how Catholic migrants contribute to this process. Indeed several spatial dynamics characterise ethnic churches, enabling attendants to move out of their invisibility. Initially I explain how foreign believers "*take a place*" by building a sanctuary. Then, I explore the experience of urban movements towards these sacred spaces (i.e. urban pilgrimages) as well as the movements outside the same spaces (i.e. urban processions). I move on to analyse how migrants activate "*place-making practices*", arranging and harmonising their new church. Thus I analyse the urban *cartography* of these contexts in the city of Milan and London. According to the nature of my case studies, the issue of space involves intrinsically the theme of *negotiation*, given that they have to share spaces with local parishes. I therefore analyse how native-Catholicism has to negotiate the presence of a new migrant-Catholicism. Putting together these perspectives I'm able to present a peculiar *spatial-methodology*, that ultimately shows how migrants are able to create transnational religious arenas by transforming local spaces.
- In the second chapter I move within theoretical debate on migrants' agency. I explain how within ethnic churches one can observe an emergent subjectivity. Then I start to explore how migrants de facto experience their spiritual spaces. Thanks to the possibility of carrying out interviews with church members I'm able to present the meanings and the ways in which migrants turn to their religious spaces. From migrants' "eyes and words" I explore how an ethnic church is inhabited. I examine how migrants represent their church and mostly what they associate to their involvement. In this direction I present a classification that I have inductively assembled from my fieldwork, providing six main functions of ethnic churches as migrants experience them.
- In the third chapter I progress the study analysing "subjectivities in motion and relation". I start from the clergy of ethnic churches, given that "from above", i.e. from their storylines, it's possible to provide a synopsis of internal life (e.g. the internal complexity, the lively dynamism and its relative tensions). Then I move on to elaborate this panorama "from below", analysing initially the kinds of religious involvement, given that church membership can follow different paths. The experience of the sacred is intrinsically intertwined with the experience of migration and it can lead to various kinds of

participation. I then explain why it is so important to adopt a *meso*-level approach. To this purpose I show how Churches are internally animated by a vigorous dynamism that in turn has created several groups based on different criteria (*e.g.* prayer or devotional groups as well as the genesis of Charismatic movements). These relational processes create a specific kind of religious organisation, similar to a congregational Church. Finally I explore how migrants are able to sponsor several religious and social activities, showing once again great vitality, not without tensions and ambivalences.

- In the fourth chapter a crucial topic is analysed. Ethnic churches have become intrinsically multifunctional, establishing in turn what I define as an “*informal welfare*”. Various and significant forms of support and help are indeed provided to the members, sustaining their social inclusion in host societies. Moreover I claim how today religious organisations are *de facto* part of the complex infrastructure that intermediate and support migrants’ needs. I then explain the mechanisms and the resources allocated. In doing this, I focus my attention on the case of irregulars, who are excluded from the state but not from God. Thus the issue of informal welfare becomes fundamental in a period of recalibration of public policies and mostly as a consequence of the political tensions that invest migrants’ social rights. In this regard ethnic churches have become a space for the integration of migrants.
- In the fifth chapter I face the question on transnationalism, a recent and burgeoning theoretical perspective within migration studies. I explain how ethnic churches have become a privileged point of view to progress this area of study. Religious contexts are indeed “dense” relational fields, where relationships, emotions, values, ideas, resources and identities are activated and exchanged combining and involving at the same time the sending and receiving countries. Firstly, I point out the existence of a specific transnational pattern in reference to my case studies. Catholic migrants are indeed able to create international circuits within an institution, *i.e.* Catholic Church, which *per se* is historically transnational. Thus I move on to explore the various and overlapping transnational networks that take shape within migrant communities. I start to analyse the circuits of solidarity and their implications, then I explore the movements of religious-leaders as well as the movements of lay-leaders across national borders. Finally the final frontier is investigated: virtual transnationalism as a new trend that allows migrants both to live experiences and exchange emotions simultaneously with families and friendships dislocated around the world. In this way I suggest how today ethnic churches represent sites of *transnational nested circuits*, animate by different actors that circulate various resources. This consideration in turn opens to the final chapter where I analyse how local Catholicism is facing this vibrant and complex transnationalism(s).
- The focus moves to already established Churches, analysing the kinds of relation that exist between local Catholicism and migrants. Firstly, the transnationalism activated by migrants -in all facets that I previously analysed- *de facto* transcends and challenges the parish borders, *i.e.* the mainstream catholic organisation of space. In this sense, Italian and English Dioceses have to negotiate solutions in order to create continuity for migrants’ religious dynamism, trying to incorporate them. Secondly, even if the Catholic Church has always been engaged with the migration issue, such activism has nevertheless achieved a significant position within European countries, a perspective that is neglected by the current academic debate. I therefore examine the different levels of interaction between Churches and migrants, *e.g.* political advocacy or social support. I explain how Churches have created a “protective shield” both in Milan and London in the face of to an unfavourable political and social contest: where the state tries to defend itself against migrants, the Church tries to support them. But, despite such activism, social distance and exclusion cuts transversally the

attitudes of catholic communities. The migration issue is becoming more and more part of ecclesial life, but is incorporated in various ways by church members, representing today a challenge for European historical denominations.

Thus I conclude the thesis providing a final summary on theoretical aims and empirical findings. Finally, I show how of the thesis can be taken into account in future research.

Chapter 2. Catholic Church and immigrants: from old to new insights

In accordance with to the area of inquiry of my thesis, in this chapter I analyse the several interplays that happen between Catholic Church and migrants. This discussion allows us to frame the role of religion with greater theoretical precision, both “from above”, in terms of how the Catholic Church behaves towards migration, and “from below”, in terms of how religion is involved in the migration experience. In this direction, within the emerging debate on the intersections between migration and religion, the Catholic Church takes a peculiar position and has indeed a long and consolidated history in relation to migration flows. By exploring this subject, many different perspectives can be in turn developed to disentangle such interplays. In the next paragraphs I progressively advance different accounts on the various ways and levels in which the Catholic Church has interacted and still interacts with migrants. Moreover, many political and social signals are suggesting how such interplays are acquiring a new relevance and new directions. In this sense it will be also possible to elaborate in detail how the public role of Catholic Church in the last decades has been significantly shaped by migration issue.

As preliminary consideration it should be observed that Catholicism has generally been a neglected focus within the literature on migration and religion (Pasura and B. Erdal, 2016: 1), especially compared to the large amount of research on Islam and to the burgeoning area of study on Pentecostalism which in the last decades has attracted a great attention among scholars of religion and migration. To understand such a “empirical marginalisation” -as I discussed in the first chapter- the long-term effects of secularisation paradigm also comes into play, that for most time has limited the study of the ways in which religions act within public and social life (Casanova, 2001; Vasquez and Marquardt, 2003). Nonetheless it’s possible to map interesting insights on the interplays between Catholicism and migration within different disciplinary fields, like globalisation and religious studies, anthropology, sociology of migration and also historical studies. In this chapter my theoretical task is to select some of these interdisciplinary insights, incorporating them in order to provide a framework through by which to proceed to the data analysis.

In this direction one should first consider how Christianity in the course of history has become one of the main worldwide religions; this being a process that can be also framed as “the history of a migration”. As pointed out by Levitt “Abraham began a journey, guided by his faith, that millions have followed” (2003:870). Although originally this journey started in the Middle East, Christianity has de facto always been considered as a “western” religion that over time has spread -from the “west”- to the “rest” of world. Following the period of colonialism (the combination between “sword” and “word”), the growing mobility of several missionary congregations as well as the contribution of various migration flows -as in the case of US at the beginning of twenty century- Christianity has regularly gone through new phases (Casanova, 2001). Today, in most of these “non-western” countries the adhesion to Christianity has rapidly grown and its global distribution has shifted towards new significant international equilibriums (see the report of Pew Research edited by Skirbekk, et al. 2011). This process takes shape whilst in Europe the demographic transition (i.e. birth rates declining) and the secularisation trend are changing the “statistics” of Christianity (Berger, Davie, and Fokas, 2008). As pointed out by Jenkins (2002), within this global picture one should consider how contemporary migration flows from the South to the North of the world have in turn produced significant religious implications -for example Adogame (2013) on African Churches and the issue of “reverse mission”- implying a growth and a renewal of Christianity in Western countries (Pace, Da Silva Moreira, 2018); a process that sees migrants as protagonists. Today religions are less and less rooted in specific spaces of this world as migration flows are actively contributing to re-map the global religious landscape (Geertz, 2005). Recalling the

statement of Peggy Levitt, it seems that the Abraham's journey is not yet over.

In this evolving picture, it should be noted as though the Catholic Church was able to develop and maintain a specific organisational structure, an articulation between centralization (i.e. hierarchy) and ramification (i.e. international capillarity) (Casanova, 1997, 2001; Hervieu-Léger, 2018). Despite several initial difficulties, the Church has not remained stationary with respects to the processes of modernisation and globalisation (Hervieu-Léger, 2018), trying instead to take on the social and political challenges that these processes involve, including the issue of global mobility. The Catholic Church has regularly incorporated internal diversity, operating actively also within the governance of migration flows. Building upon these latter considerations it's possible to discuss more in depth how the Church comes in contact with migration issues, analysing its crucial role as an institution that works in favour of immigrants. This already happened at the beginning of twentieth century, when the Church operated in defence of immigrants in the US (see the third paragraph for details), helping with their housing and settlement. And in this direction the Catholic Church today still operates in US; for example it works on border between Mexico and US (Hondagneu-Sotelo et al., 2004; Hagan, 2007; Menjívar, 2007) and in the North American cities where many bishops and parishes are locally engaged against exclusionary migration policies:

In the face of governmental border enforcement and a quasi-criminal underground railroad, they have become guardians of migrant rights and dignity, a role they maintain in part through migration counselling, and are part of the ever-expansive and complex social infrastructure that supports migrants in their travels (Hagan, 2008:84)

In light of this, the Church has been more and more involved in defending immigrants over the last decades also within European societies. It has become a crucial player, both within the political arena and as provider of welfare (Ambrosini, 2016). In the face of a growing (and critical) politicization of this issue, the Catholic Church continues to be a significant pivot in defending migrants' social and political rights.

Moreover it should be noted how such interplays between Church and migrants take another outline: beyond the political and social role, the Church typically provides spaces for immigrants, where they can build sacred communities based on a common ethnic background (i.e. ethnic churches). In the US, starting from the beginning of twentieth century, an archipelago of ethnic churches were created and developed and multiplied as a result of regular migrant flows. These religious spaces have supported migrants in their settlement in a difficult if not alienating context (Warner, 2000), defending them from discrimination and providing a complex of benefits summarized by Hirschman (2004) as the "three R": Refuge, Respect and Resources. In the last decades, this process of internal-pluralisation has also interested the European continent. One of the mainstream Christian denominations sees the genesis of an intercultural panorama that poses new challenges. International mobility has de facto generated an archipelago of ethnic churches also in Europe, where migrants can go on living their Catholicism.

To sum up, the Church has acted significantly as an institution in defence and support of migrants' rights and needs as well as providing spaces for the genesis of migrant communities, incorporating the ethnic diversity. But these instances have historically alternated and the following sections I develop such theoretical insights in order to frame in greater detail the types and the forms of interactions between Catholic Church and immigrants. In this regard it's possible to facilitate the discussion by splitting the analysis in two main directions: religion "from above" and "from below". Finally I will debate another theoretical framework: transnationalism. Over the last decades transnationalism has become one of the main perspective within migration studies and I will explain why this concept becomes pivotal in understanding the interplay between the Catholic Church and immigrants.

2.1 Framing the Catholic Church as a mediating and multilevel institution

The intent is not to put religion on a pedestal as the ultimate guarantor of immigrant social justice. Rather, the intent is to recognize -and yes, salute- the efforts of faith-based activists and organizations working for immigrant social justice and to analyze some of the complex processes involved in these efforts (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007:15)

Taking inspiration from this quotation, in the following section I examine how the Catholic Church acts in favour of immigrants. I will not explore this subject from a theological point of view or in terms of social doctrine: I evade this perspective not because it's irrelevant. On the contrary the Catholic Church in the course of time has developed various theological speculations on migrants, expressed by official teachings in documents such as *Exsul Familia* (1952), *De Pastoralis Migratorum Cura* (1969), *Church and People on the Move* (1978), *Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity* (1992) and *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (2004) (including several other documents); reflections that today see new and interesting developments towards a more practical and "grounded" theology (Groody and Campese, 2008; Campese, 2006, 2012). In this section I instead want advance another perspective, able to formalise the activism of Church in favour of immigrants from a sociological point of view. I shall now give some preliminary accounts on why.

Firstly, I want to remark a consideration valid both for the academic field and public debate. In a certain sense "everybody" knows that the Catholic Church is engaged with migration issues. But the various types of activity promoted by the Church are -paradoxically- taken for granted and rarely these practices have been elaborated and itemized. It seems there is a sort of "hesitancy" in discussing this activism within academic debates, "maybe" because it could imply some form of public recognition in a society where the paradigm of secularization still has aftermaths. Consequently we lack a systematic analysis and tailored data on this area of activity. In other terms: in theory everyone knows that the Church helps immigrants but effectively nobody knows how, where and to what extent. Moreover, the same activism sometimes -even more so today within the rhetoric of populism - the Church is also criticised because "it provides more help to immigrants than to the local poor" (This notion being nowadays in Italy's public domain).

Secondly, it should then be noted how the Catholic Church is structurally a "non-homogenous body", but it a *polyvalent* force and a *complex* institution: 'polyvalent' given that on one side it clearly works in a theological and religious realm, and the other it acts and operates within society, generating "tangible" implications. With regards to migration issues, as pointed out by Hondagneu-Sotelo while discussing the role of Catholic Church in the US: "religion works at the level of belief and theology, providing the fuel that motivates people to pursue social justice activism, but it also operates as an organizational tool, a social network, and a resource" (2007:11). The crucial suggestion that informs Hondagneu-Sotelo's study is that scholars need *new understandings* of the various practices of social-justice sponsored by this institution, even more so in a time of restricting policies (ibid; 2006). The issue becomes indeed to elaborate where, how and in which levels the Church acts, and what kind of "tools" it adopts or sponsors. Historically, religious beliefs have concretely merged with social action (clearly, religion and social justice is not a new combination) but it's important today to understand how this -evergreen- pattern takes shape within a changing political, social and economic context. In this sense the Catholic Church is a *complex* institution: it's structured "on the *inside*" on various levels and organisations (also with different points of view), "on the *outside*" it can be connected to various actors, both religious and secular. This framework suggests how the Catholic Church acts through a complex organisational ecology and it develops networks with sacred (e.g. Voluntary groups, Charities, or other religious associations) as well as secular (e.g. Ngo, Trade Unions, political parties, bureaucracies) organisations. To sum up these preliminary comments: firstly, it's too often taken for granted how the Church helps immigrants, but actually there is no systematic analysis to provide specific details. Secondly, from a

sociological point of view, the Church is a complex structure animated by internal organisations and a variety of networks of trust.

Following to these considerations I propose some operative concepts. I suggest a *dynamic* approach versus a *static* one. In particular I explain how, in relation to migrants, the Catholic Church can be framed as a *mediating* and *multilevel* institution, two concepts that of course need to be developed. The first introduces the idea that the Church performs a function as *mediating structure* between migrants and the receiving society. In this regard, more generally, between the individual-sphere and the national institutions numerous relational fields exist as well as numerous collective actors; in sociological terms, between the micro and macro level, there is also the ‘meso’ level, constituted by social ties and their organisational outputs: a plethora of collective actors. Using the biological metaphor developed by the political scientist Giovanni Sartori, society is like a “vertebrate” subject, constituted by many types of players who try to intermediate, organize and represent individual aims. In this direction, there is a wide range of relational fields and collective actors also between migrants and the state and these intersect and interact with their experiences. Especially in the case of immigrants, *the role of intermediaries* takes a specific relevance (Ambrosini, 2017) and the Church can be framed and observed within this (recent) area of research, this also being a field that should be analysed, given the different organisational features and the kind of activities promoted by such intermediaries (see the classification of Ambrosini, 2018, in particular: 46-50). Some scholars have argued the heuristic validity of such concept, i.e. that of the Church as a *mediating structure*. In particular, studying the migration process of Haitians, Mooney has tested its empirical value with regards to three different national contexts (2007:157). After her, Hagan (2008) brilliantly applied and extended the same idea to the experiences of irregular migrants between Mexico and US. She explored the various forms of supports sponsored by religious groups in favour of immigrants. Moreover, the case of migrants living in irregular condition shows clearly the crucial role of religion as a mediating structure.

The second concept, i.e. *multilevel institution*, introduces how Catholic Church may act at supranational, national and local levels. First of all, “multilevel” is a notion borrowed from political studies (especially IR: international-relations). Its genealogy essentially derives from a large body of inquiry related to the functioning of the European Union. Over time this notion was stressed and applied to other cases and is nowadays essentially associated to the notion of *governance* -i.e. *multilevel governance*- that has become one the main theoretical frameworks to study politics (but not only) in a more global and interconnected world, where various players (private and public) participate in policy-making processes. In essence, a multilevel approach suggests the existence of an *emergent “verticality”*, where decisions are managed and negotiated between this hierarchical perspective: international, national, regional and local levels. In light of this, the Catholic Church fits with the concept, given its peculiar structure that develops through vertical processes: “from the Pope to the parish” the Church operates at different levels.

Merging these two concepts -mediation and multilevel- a framework is now ready for elaborating on how Catholic Church comes into relations with migrants: an entity that may operate as a mediator at different levels. This framework becomes indeed heuristically generative given that each act of mediation could be performed at every level. However, these two foci need to be advanced and better formalised. First of all *the specific forms of mediation* should be detailed. As I discussed in the introduction, there are still no well-organized researches on this issue, but only fragmented images. In the US, the literature is more advanced (see as introduction: Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2006, 2008; Voss and Bloemraad, 2011) in Europe only few scholars have empirically debated this question (in Italy see: Ambrosini, 2016; in Spain see: Itçaina, 2006; Itçaina and Burchianti, 2011, in England see the report of Davis et al; 2007; while for a general overview see Minkenberg, 2008; on the Christian denominations in Europe see the report of Darrell and Passarelli, 2016). In this direction the study of Ambrosini on the Italian the Catholic Church provides a theoretical formalisation, suggesting the existence of various *areas of interaction* between Church and immigrants. Originally such areas are six, but for the moment I shall only

consider three of them: political, social and economic. Nevertheless this formalisation can in turn be applied in other countries where the Catholic Church operates:

A: The political field. The Church may act politically in defence of immigrants; for example, demanding regularization measures (amnesties) for irregulars. It may operate against anti-immigration policies and promote new policies and initiatives (both directly or indirectly through its soft-power). In Italy for example -among the many actions- churches have promoted a reform for citizenship-law that is a state prerogative and in this sense, political advocacy is a significant form of mediation. Moreover, these kinds of activities become crucial given that migrants generally have less political voice.

B The provision of social services. The Church has activated many welfare resources for immigrants, such as language courses, educational supports to children, health services, help with accessing the local bureaucracies as well as many services to address fragility and marginality, like food, shelters and clothes as for example various charity-centres within parishes. Moreover these activities are crucial for immigrants in irregular conditions that can find in the Church a pivotal support for their existence.

C Intermediation in the labour market. In Italy the Church has acted as intermediary for jobs like care services. It has operated between Italian families demands and migrants availability. But beyond this Italian peculiarity it's possible to generalise saying that the churches provide a networking platform where to develop social capital and trust that in turn are the basis for exchanging crucial information, like job vacancies or references. Moreover the Church can work to provide legal protections and advice for sectors of the labour market where the exploitation of workers is recurrent (In UK see Davis et al., 2007; Wills, 2008; and the report of Wills, et al., 2009).

These are only *ideal-types* of interactions between churches and migrants. Various empirical examples exist for each form of mediation. In addition the Church can act at different levels:

1 *International level:* political activism in favour of immigrants can be mentioned in the case of participation to the Global compact on Migration. In Italy the recent promotion of humanitarian corridors (in coordination with other religious associations) was able to generate supra-national agreements. There is also the case of next Episcopal Conference (February of 2020- "Mediterranean, border of peace") where bishops of the various countries of the Mediterranean region will meet to discuss new solutions and ideas. But, also from an historical point of view, the Church has always acted at this level in favour of migrants, for example, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it worked for supporting Italian emigrants in US.

2 *National level.* Earlier I introduced some critical examples of political activism of the Church for immigrants at this level; this level tries to shape national policies pertaining to migration (see for example Mooney on the role of Bishops Conferences in US and France, 2006), playing a crucial role in migrants' advocacy. In UK, the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales regularly operates at this level through the Office for Migration Policy; among the issues: the detention of irregular migrants, reunification of families, systems of visas, refugees (see Snyder, 2016). The Catholic Church (and more generally Christian Churches) in most of European countries, have a long history in negotiating migration policies (see the study of Minkenberg on European countries, 2008). Moreover the Church participates in public debates, something even more visible in recent time during the "migration crisis".

3 *Local* level. Locally the Church takes on even more direct forms of interactions. Firstly it works on the very small scale thanks to the geographical and canonical division on parishes, where several catholic charities or voluntary groups are based. Given this peculiar organisation it's able to create and allocate various welfare resources; moreover it can collaborate with other local players as boroughs and exercises moral and ethical suasion on believers.

Some considerations need to be added to the theoretical framework that's been debated so far. In first place, it's possible to note how the Church, given its history, structure and relevance, may act in network with other players at each level. As pointed out by Mooney, the Catholic Church de facto is "*embedded within a set of horizontal and vertical networks*" (2007: 160). In this sense Mooney adds a horizontal perspective to the concept of multilevel that is "too vertical" by itself. For example this aspect is visible at the local level, where the Church can work "shoulder to shoulder" with other actors, like charities or voluntary associations as well as private or public institutions. Various kinds of actors, also belonging to different political areas, are more involved today in working together in defence of migrants. New experiences are growing "from below". In this regard, the notion of *strange-bedfellows* is a comprehensible label "arguably because of the contradictions permeating immigration which are embodied in convoluted alliances" (Kalavita, 2008:304). These are processes that are not isolated during and after the period of economic crisis; in facing new social risks it's possible to recognise some "crossover narratives around which post secular partnerships can converge around particular ethical precepts and practical needs" (Beaumont and Cloke, 2013:27).

A final consideration concerns instead the interpretation of such activism (a reflection in turn valid for other charities that work in the same field); often a common understanding tends to represent this operation only as a form of "replacing" compared to state prerogatives. This view captures the reality but often tends to produce a passive conceptualisation, whereas one can observe how replacing and proactive dimensions may also cohabit. As also argued by Mooney (2007), the framework of "replacing" can indeed "hide" how Catholic Institutions (and also other several players involved in the same activities) can be also changed by their social activism. In filling the state's role, actors can produce new initiatives and ideas. Especially in recent times, coming into relation with the migrant issue seems to produce new forms of activism as well as new ideas thorough which to become aware of societies that are becoming more and more cosmopolitan.

2.2 The Catholic Church and immigrants: a history of ethnic pluralisation

The interactions between the Catholic Church and migrants can take another significant profile. Generally, beyond the various forms of political and social mediation, the Church also offers spaces for newcomers, where they can gather and start a religious community mainly based on a common national belonging. Thanks to this opportunity migrants de facto create ethnic churches (i.e. the empirical focus of my thesis). Thus in this paragraph the interpretative key is different from the previous one given that it calls directly into question the Catholic Church as community of faithful. In this case it's possible to observe an "internal" form of mediation. If earlier I discussed how the Church acts in favour of migrants in relation to the socio-political context, in this case Catholicism is instead questioned internally. I then start to debate why and in which ways migrants decide to establish ethnic churches.

To better frame this subject one can explore it from an historical point of view (as brief introduction see: Dolan, 1988). In this case, the main benchmark of such reflection is the northern American context. Indeed, at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, a great variety

of ethnic churches was born in the United States (Dolan, 1977; 2011). Several historical reports explore the genesis of this ethnic religious landscape given that, as pointed out by Vecoli, the “Impact of the immigrants upon the Church has clearly been a central feature of American Catholic history” (1969:219). In particular, migrant churches were based on ethnicity, a different criterion from the mainstream ecclesial model, i.e. the parish, defined instead by specific geographical borders. These ethno-spaces became in the US one of the main points of gathering for catholic immigrants, and thanks to religion migrants were able to build a form of mediation in order to soften the impact with the new context (Warner, 2000).

Historically, one of the main flows of catholic immigrants was the Irish one and at the beginning of their experience in the US they faced different discriminations. Firstly, Catholicism - given its hierarchical structure- at that time was conceived as a dangerous religion for American liberalism (Zolberg and Woon, 1999; Hirschman, 2004). Secondly, despite coming from Europe, “whiteness” was a difficult status to achieve, and it was extended to the Irish only in the course of time after a long period of discrimination (see the work of Ignatiev, 1995, where he explains how the Irish ‘became white’). In this sense, as pointed out by Hirschman, the establishment of Irish Churches was fundamental: “The primary advantage of religious affiliation was to create a sheltered community where immigrants and their families did not have to endure the daily insults” they suffered elsewhere (2004:1222). Churches over time provided to migrants with various social supports, creating educational and civic opportunities that were not available in the mainstream context.

Aside from the Irish, many other flows of catholic immigrants came to the US from Central Europe (e.g. Germany and Poland) and then it was the turn of South European, as for example Italians. In particular the history of Italian mass emigration provides some interesting historical insight on the interplay between the Catholic Church and migrants. Through the establishment of various ethnic churches, Italians could find a very important support for their experience (Vecoli, 1969). Firstly, they could defend themselves from the discrimination of the Irish, who in the meantime had become a majority within American Catholicism. The Irish saw the presence of Italians as a danger to their efforts in creating finally a good image of themselves as Catholics (i.e. becoming white to all effects). Secondly, thanks to religion, Italians found support against the discrimination and the social exclusion experienced in everyday life (Sanfilippo, 2003; 2011). In this regard it’s interesting to analyse also the genesis of a “transnational” welfare infrastructure. From Italy, the Catholic Church, thanks to the activism of specific congregations, started to organise and provide supports. In particular, Giovanni Battista Scalabrini, at that time bishop of Piacenza, founded an institute for the assistance of Italian emigrants, including a college to train missionaries to this specific task (Brizzolara, 2011). Moreover, the genesis of this transnational support was possible thanks to the commitment of female congregations (an aspect too often neglected). To this effect, the role of the “Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus” founded by Francesca Saverio Cabrini, was crucial (Di Giovanni, 1991; Sanfilippo, 2011). She arrived in New York in 1889 and in the following thirty years Mother Cabrini created schools and hospitals. Moreover, from New York Cabrini sent nuns in many American cities as well as establishing centres of support both in central and South America. The collaboration among missionary sisters and Scalabrinian fathers was fundamental also in terms of identity; they worked both to safeguard catholic faith and to create a national cohesion. Indeed within churches and schools as well as orphanages and hospitals, Italian was adopted as the main language, contributing to the formation of a homogenous community which brought together all the different regional nuclei. Therefore, both the national parishes and the welfare institutions - especially schools and hospitals- allowed Italian immigrants to survive and helped them to adapt gradually their lives in this new context.

In light of these accounts we should point out how catholic immigrants in the course of time have diversified the American religious landscape in two significant ways: (1) “within” the same denomination that have been increasingly articulated along various ethnic lines, and (2) “outside”: Catholicism, that starting as a minority, became quantitatively one of the main American

denomination. As pointed out by Matteo Sanfilippo, over the course of two centuries the Catholic Church, thanks to regular migration flows, has become increasingly central in the American religious landscape (Sanfilippo, 2011). This trend of ethnic-pluralisation didn't stop at the beginning of twentieth century. Indeed, after the introduction of new migration policies (i.e. Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965) that abolished the quotas that had been set out in 1924, many other new immigrants arrived in the US from different parts of the world. In particular, these international flows have imported both new religions in US (e.g. Buddhism, Hinduism) and have significantly altered the ethnic background of established Christian denominations, including Catholicism itself. Migrants from Asia and Latin America have de facto re-started a process of ethnic diversification within the Catholic Church, this being a process that lasts until today. As pointed out by Matovina (2010; 2011), it's necessary today to once again map the geography of American Catholicism since Latin Americans today constitute almost one-third of catholic believers, posing new and interesting challenges to the already established parishes, especially in terms of ecclesial inclusion (Bruce, 2017).

From this historical depiction one can grasp further sociological inputs on the intersections between religion and migration. Taking a step back, the study of Thomas and Znaniecki represents a landmark in sociological literature. Exactly one hundred years ago, Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) published the *Polish Peasant*, where -among various other themes- they focused on Polish ethnic churches. In particular, more than one hundred page were dedicated to the religious involvement of immigrants, providing interesting views on how the Polish interacted with their national parishes (defined by Thomas and Znaniecki as "supra-territorial" organisation). Having lost their family-ties, cultural background and, more importantly, their moral orientation, migrants faced the need to find new groups and values. These needs represent the theoretical core of the book, i.e. the passage from moral-disintegration to the re-organisation of a new identity in a new context. In this sense religion became a reinforcer in supporting the genesis of new social-units. The book describes how Polish churches were able to protect immigrants, enabling the circulation of social and moral resources that aided their settlement and inclusion, to the point of achieving the genesis of a new Polish-American identity.

This book is still useful today in new terms; the authors indeed gave the first accounts of transnationalism, a theoretical perspective that is increasingly central within contemporary migration and religious studies. In the next paragraph, drawing on the existing literature, I discuss this perspective, explaining its relevance for the study of the interaction between the Catholic Church and immigrants.

2.3 Catholicism, migrants and transnationalism

Taking the moves from the volume of Thomas and Znaniecki, I start in this paragraph to develop a more in-depth discussion on the transnational perspective in relation to Catholicism. Given the originality of data employed, Thomas and Znaniecki are usually mentioned as pioneers of methodology, but from a theoretical point of view their relevance is often underestimated, notwithstanding how they introduced significant theoretical issues for the future development of sociology; issues are still useful in the contemporary arena of migration studies. In particular, they anticipated the *theory of transnationalism*: on one side, they described (thanks to the peculiarity of data) some of the transnational relations that migrants kept alive between Poland and US. On the other side, their book was the first that tried to break away from so called "*methodological nationalism*" (Wimmer and G. Schiller, 2002). They were among the first to consider two different countries in order to explain immigrants' experiences, and today a new theoretical framework has been developed to explore this insight. Transnationalism has become one of the mainstream perspectives through which migration processes are studied to ever greater extent; the ways in

which migrants develop and experience transnational ties (where various types of resources circulate) are at the centre of the contemporary debate on migration.

As pointed out by Levitt (2007), religion has always been one of the principal supranational areas where migrants are able to connect places and symbols beyond national borders; and today, among the various “transnational domains” explored by scholars, religion has become an important empirical focus (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007). Within this area of study -what is also called “religious transnationalism”- Catholicism in turn takes a peculiar position because of its history. In the previous paragraphs I have analysed Catholicism “*from above*”, describing the Catholic Church as a globally diffused institution, structured on different levels and articulated in several networks. I have then instead explored how, “*from below*”, migrants experience Catholicism in the course of their adventures in a foreign land, establishing sacred communities based on ethnicity. It’s now possible to recall and develop these two perspectives in order to frame with greater precision Catholicism in relation to a transnational theory. Indeed, to improve the discussion on a topic that is still made of fragmented pictures, I shall split the argument along two separate levels (or “scales” adopting another recurrent term within this area of study); a macro-level, focused on the institutional character of religious transnationalism, and a micro-level, focused on how migrants experience religious transnationalism.

In particular, I start the discussion by recalling the work of Peggy Levitt, a pioneer of the transnationalism perspective who provides interesting suggestions also for the case of Catholicism. The common thread of her studies pertains to how religions may act transnationally. In a famous work (2004) she analysed different religious communities established by migrants in the city of Boston, these being Pakistani Muslims, Hindus, Irish Catholics and Brazilian Protestant. Reflecting on this case study, Levitt suggested a classification, recognising the existence of three main patterns of religious transnationalism: extended, negotiated and recreated. In particular, Levitt underlines how the Catholic Church fits into the first model i.e. the extended one. Ethnic churches established by Irish immigrants in Boston are indeed integrated *with continuity* within the “body” of Catholic Church. Thanks to this model migrants may establish their own communities, where in turn they can claim transnational meanings, values and practises tailored to their needs and aims. The case of Brazilian Protestants belongs instead the second pattern, i.e. the negotiated one, given that “Protestant church partners must negotiate power sharing, leadership, and financial management” (Levitt, 2004:3). Hindus represent the third pattern, i.e. the recreated one, given that this religious group tends to “reinforce members’ ties to their home country, often at the expense of receiving-country social integration” (Levitt, 2004:3): some groups can indeed be local branches of wider international networks. This study is particularly significant given that Levitt has tried to grasp the institutional features of religious transnationalism (or in her own words: “the institutional aspects of transnational religious life”).

Nevertheless, she has developed more perspectives through which to elaborate these (macro) models of religious transnationalism, giving more accounts on the micro-level. Most of her studies focus on how global religious institutions may shape the migration experience and furthermore proceeds to explore how migrants in turn may shape global religious institutions by making them local (2004:849). In this sense migrants continuously *extend* the “infrastructure” of global religions (like those quoted before), transplanting them in a local site. Migrants embody a global religion and then generate new local expressions, as in the case of Catholicism. She explores a sort of circularity, where the macro and micro-level can converse uninterruptedly, influencing one another and continuously creating a new series of transnational ties. This consideration opens a discussion on transnationalism “*from below*”, the second focus (or level) that I proposed.

In this regard, in the existing literature it’s possible to recall some crucial studies on religion, migration and Catholicism. One of the main ones is Thomas Tweed’s book (1997), a research on popular Catholicism transplanted by Cubans in US. Tweed’s work starts from a shrine -*La Ermita*- dedicated to the patroness of Cubans -*Our Lady of Charity*- an artefact that was brought by immigrants into the United States. Around this shrine Cubans created pilgrimages and over time it

became a point of reference for Cuban community in US. In particular, thanks to a long ethnographic work around *La Ermita*, including numerous interviews with attendants, Tweed explored the various functions that this popular devotion played for Cubans in US. The central idea is that Cubans developed around religion a *diasporic identity*, able to make sense of their new experiences as migrants. The shrine dedicated to the patroness was able to transcend time and space, connecting migrants in exile from Cuba (something title of the book itself recalls: *Our lady of the exile*). According to Tweed, the religious symbols may merge past and present, building an “imaginary bridge” between the mother country and receiving nation. The work of Tweed was fundamental in two ways. On one side he provided new insight on the role of “local level” (contributing to what is today called “rescaling”) giving more rooted evidence to discuss global religions (see Tweed; 2006). On the other side, through a focus on subjectivity, he provided new understandings on how migrants conceive themselves after displacement. In this case, Catholicism played a significant role in making sense of their migration experience. The other landmark at the base of religious transnationalism “from below” is the book of Robert Orsi (1985) -*The Madonna of 115th Street*- a work on religious practices transplanted by Italians in the US (Harlem). This is a text that illuminated also the genesis of a new theoretical framework, i.e. “lived-religion”, which is increasingly central today within religious studies (see the third chapter for an in-depth description). He provided a micro-level analysis on how, through religion, migrants were able to rewrite *urban* contexts, re-negotiating the borders between the sacred and the secular. Starting from this spatial focus, he then progressively analysed how religion de facto was intertwined with everyday experiences of Italians (what he also called “The theology of the streets”; 2010: 219, in order to explain how sacred and profane coexist in migration). He analysed how the “cosmology” of Italian popular Catholicism, and its complex system of meanings and practises, became part of migration experience; the devotion of “The Madonna of 115th Street” played a role between the suffering and aspirations of Italians:

(The Madonna) exists in the interstices between the old and the young, the individual and the domus, between the United States and Italy, severed memories and emergent aspirations, the fear of success and the longing for it, between the old moral order and the discovery of the new (Orsi, 2010, 163).

Between the US and Italy “the Madonna” has de facto represented a “transnational bridge”. Within the literature, thanks to these researches, Tweed and Orsi are often mentioned as pioneers: the focus on local-scale, where people concretely embody religion, and the focus on individual-level, relating to how religion interacts with subjectivity, have provided more “rooted” perspectives to the theoretical debate on religion and migration. In particular, they provided concrete insight on how religion can be experienced transnationally.

Nevertheless, within the general debate on religious transnationalism, some critical questions arise. One of these relates to the kind of differences that can be recognized with respect to the past. In this sense what is changed since the publication of Thomas and Znaniecki’s book? To this regard one could argue that most of transnational processes show a strong regularity (Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2002). For example, the development of ties with mother country have always been a typical character of migration processes: “migrants had always maintained ties to their countries of origin and therefore little news” (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007:131). Scholars -both empirically and theoretically- may face several challenges in identifying what effectively makes a contemporary processes distinctive. In a certain sense these challenges represent a theoretical controversy between historical and sociological studies. Nevertheless Levitt addresses this critique providing five elements⁵. Other scholars like T. Faist (2000) and A. Portes (1999, 2000) have also provided

⁵ The first regards the features of international mobility, as the number of migrants or the countries involved. The second is the role of communication today increasingly influent on migrants’ life, as phones, internet

significant accounts on the main features of “contemporary” transnationalism. Their main aim is to reinforce the validity of transnationalism as a theoretical perspective and not only as a sophisticated and refined “label”. Among the various clarifications provided it’s possible to recognise *quantitative* and *qualitative* differences compared to the “old” transnationalism (Boccagni, 2012). To sum up, compared to the past what makes the difference are the features of international mobility (types, numbers and directions) and the role of new technological instruments that facilitate international ties. In turn many more types of resources may circulate today, such as ideas, information, opinions, emotions, material resources and people. Another issue becomes that of analysing how migrants may create more regular and stronger ties, including their ability to reinvent new supra-national channels. In this direction the focus on remittances is another pivotal perspective, not only from a quantitative point of view but also qualitatively, including the kind of effects that remittances may produce (De Hass, 2005; 2009). Moreover, differently from the past, one of the main insights concerns the role of transnational identities, de facto not completely definable within the homogeneity of nation-states (Levitt, 2007). Critics of the old “assimilation paradigm” have indeed opened a new era for the study of migrants’ capability to create, maintain and feed “transnational identities” (Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2002).

These considerations have implications also for the study of Catholicism. A first issue is the need to develop a more dynamic approach than that proposed by Levitt’s model (i.e. extended) considered to be too static. Migrants de facto extend the catholic infrastructure, but how they reinvent Catholicism is often overlooked. The idea of “subsumption within an homogeneous body” can indeed neglect the various and different ways in which religion is experienced by migrants. Moreover, the increasing ability of creating transnational ties may give new directions to these processes (for example the global spread of Charismatic movements). As a corollary, the interplays between already established Churches and migrant communities are aspects often overlooked. There may be various ways in which ethnic churches can be framed and included at a local level. Another subject is the possibility to create multicultural parishes in response to the growing ethnic diversity (Garces-Foley, 2007), an interesting aspect mostly in times of populism and neo-nationalism.

2.4 Concluding remarks: an ever less European Catholicism

In this chapter I decided to analyse the various interplays that happen between Catholic Church and migrants. I structured the theoretical debate thorough two different interpretative levels (from above and from below) in order to develop more accurate accounts on the ways in which religion becomes part of the migration experience. Following from the case studies of this thesis these two different levels must be taken into consideration. Indeed religious communities established by catholic migrants (i.e. ethnic churches) come into relation with a Church that is already established and socially rooted.

According to these two interpretative levels, I started by focusing on the role of Catholic Church in helping immigrants, a subject that is generally overlooked by the literature. In doing this I presented two concepts to frame the role of the Church: mediating and multilevel. I then discussed their theoretical value, explaining how the Catholic Church at different levels (local, national and international) operates actively both in producing welfare services and in migrants’ political advocacy. This activism in favour of immigrants has become even more important in times of

access and several platforms of social media. The third is the degree of national-building achieved in most countries of this world. The fourth is that migrants today move in a more interconnected world and this implies that migrants are more socialized compared to the receiving countries. Finally, the world is (or seems to be) more tolerant towards ethnic pluralism (Levitt, 2001:21-27).

restrictive policies (including a public debate that is increasingly unfavourable). Starting from various historical accounts on North America's experience, I discussed how migrants have created an archipelago of ethnic churches at the beginning of twentieth century, changing the profile of US Catholicism. Thanks to these historical accounts (e.g. the Italian mass emigration) I explained the significant function that these religious communities serve for migrants' settlement and inclusion in an alienating context. I concluded with a discussion on religious transnationalism, a theoretical approach that has become today more and more relevant in order to elaborate migrants' religious participation. I initially presented some of the diverse ways in which Catholicism can be generally framed within this transnational perspective. I started from a macro level (institutional characters), and then moved towards the micro level in order to show how migrants concretely experience religion both *locally and transnationally*.

Thanks to this theoretical framework developed one paragraph after the next, I am able to now approach the empirical focus of my thesis. Indeed, as I explained in the introduction of this chapter, the settlement of immigrants in Europe is shaping an evident phenomenon of pluralisation and de-Westernization of Christianity, including Catholicism. Migrant flows are de facto changing the face of the Catholic Church; in this sense the concept of super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007) describes how the "body" of believers is becoming more and more multicultural. In a similar perspective, Stephen Warner, in debating the religious panorama of US, states: "new immigrants represent not the de-Christianization of American society but the de-Europeanization of American Christianity" (2004, 20). This play of words becomes an interpretative key to understand the composition of European Christianity, including Catholicism. Newcomers are impacting on established churches and challenging them in terms of space, liturgy, religious activities and social customs, as well as with regards to moral and ethical positions. Moreover through the interplay with established churches migrants challenge host societies in terms of inclusion and racial justice. Taking stock of these considerations and by focusing on an ever less European Catholic Church, I want to provide more grounded accounts on how such challenges take shape, also analysing ambivalences and contradictions.

Chapter 3. The empirical turn on immigrant religious institutions

This chapter aims to develop and discuss the meaning of “*from below*”, introduced in the previous chapter. More specifically, starting from the existing literature, I will examine the main features of religious institutions established by migrants in the receiving society, including their function in terms of settlement. Among the key themes on the intersections between religion and migration, the supportive role these religious institutions perform takes indeed a significant relevance.

Before starting, an elucidation is needed: during the discussion I will use *terms* such as immigrants religious institutions (IRI), immigrant religious communities (IRC) and immigrant religions (IR). In first place, these abbreviations allow to avoid a boring redundancy in the discussion, secondly, there’s no convention on their use: the literature generally adopts various terms to recall and discuss such forms of religious organisations (among the others: ethnic congregations, migrant churches). In this sense, terms like IRI/IRC/IR can cross the reference to a specific denomination. From the point of view of religious studies these terms may probably appear too general but -for the moment- the main issue is to discuss *what* an immigrant religious community, i.e. a field of ethnic networks focused around a religious identity, can provide to its members. I’m aware that words aren’t just words, but nevertheless, the available literature, beyond the type of religious community analysed, shows similar findings regarding the functions that they provide. For example, the forms of support that will be discussed under the concept of “informal welfare” (see chapter 7), are substantially transversal to all religions in the case of migration. If these types of help can assume different profiles within each congregation, they are nonetheless a recurrent practice. Similarly, I will address other issues. Moreover, these linguistic options -as the term *immigrant religions or migrants congregations*- have been adopted within the most relevant publications, like the study of Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000), which is a wide research project (as well as a point of reference of this kind of literature) on thirteen religious communities established in by immigrant in US. Indeed, their main theoretical aim was to grasp analogies on the role of religion in migration. In this theoretical chapter, I want to follow a similar direction.

In this sense the main bulk of the literature has focused primarily on the North American experience (as I mentioned in the first chapter). The early empirical works were published by Warner and Wittner (1998)⁶ and by Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000)⁷. These were the first two wide national research projects on *new* immigrant religious communities in US (after the Immigration Reform Act of 1965 that changed the features of migration flows to US). Starting from this “empirical turning point” other scholars have started to go into the details. On the basis of these works, systematic reviews have been published, for example -in a chronological order- by Warner (2000), Yang and Ebaugh (2001), Levitt (2003), Hirschman (2004), Cadge and Ecklund (2007), Foner and Alba (2008).

Starting from these insights, in the next sections I will discuss the main issues at the centre of the debate, I will then expose some new developments. Over time, the literature has indeed become more detailed. The “empirical turn” has generated a theoretical “revitalization”, and other scholars have published important contributions linking the role of religious organisations with other topics, like the issue of legal status, civic and political participation and transnationalism. Finally, in the last part of this chapter I will discuss another perspective that is increasingly relevant today in this field of study: the “lived-religion approach”, explaining why I decided to adopt it for the discussion of my empirical evidence. Thus, being a chapter aimed focused on literary review, I want to grasp the main perspectives through which my thesis will develop empirically.

⁶ The name of the project was NEICP (New Ethnic and Immigration Congregations Project), a study that functioned as a training for new scholars interested in the study of religion and migration. Subsequently, numerous books and articles on various religious immigrant experiences were published, filling the gaps in the literature (Ebaugh, 2003:229)

⁷ The name of the project was RENIR (Religion, Ethnicity, New Immigrants Research) a study based in Houston, Texas. Specifically, the research design was a comparative perspective on thirteen religious congregations within the same city.

3.1 Religion as a tool for reproducing and inventing ethnic identity

A key theme is the role of religious institutions in the *reproduction of ethnic identity*. In particular, the literature shows how religion in migration becomes an important vehicle for the transmission of *ethnicity*. On one side, a religious institution in foreign land represents a familiar space to attend (like a Church or Temple), on the other it provides a field of ethnically connotated relations that may help migrants in maintaining traditions and values within an alienating context. Sociologically, as pointed out by Hervieu-Leger (2000)- who in turn has developed and updated Durkheimian theory, in particular the concept of collective conscience- religion represents a “chain of memory”, a set of common meanings rooted in tradition, enlivened and strengthened by symbolic rituals; this chain allows believers to become part of a community that links past, present, and future. Thus, in the case of immigrants, religion becomes a significant support to help them in keeping alive their common ethnic belonging; in other words: through this chain, migrants may reactivate “a home away from home”.

In this regard, empirical studies have explored various strategies through which migrants re-produce an ethnic identity through religion (for example see Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2000: 385). To summarise these findings I divide them in three main sections: (1.1) if on the one hand the native language shared within communities is the main vehicle (or in other words a chain to transmit cultural meanings), then a common practice is the physical installation of aspects that can recall the mother country’s religious structures. The *sacred architecture* is one of the major ways for reproducing ethnicity, e.g. shrines, statues, icons, images, altars, chapels, temples, pagodas. These physical elements become cognitive reference points, thanks to which migrants can mutually recognise and “physically” experience their cultural belonging. (1.2) The second strategy is the *incorporation* of various cultural/ethnic elements within the religious sphere; for example, national holidays are often celebrated within sacred spaces, becoming part of religious calendar. This incorporation includes a wide set of cultural markers, such as the use of traditional musical instruments, songs, choirs, clothes, native foods, which together create the impression of feeling at home. All these elements (food, music, smells) merged with visual elements (sacred architecture) stimulate and feed all the “senses” of migrants, becoming important pull-factors. (1.3) Immigrant congregations also sponsor *secular activities*, like social events, parties, festivals, fundraisings, meals, and language classes. These institutions are de facto turned into social spaces, where numerous activities are planned in order to reinforce and create ties among members (also for transmitting this sense of belonging to the younger generation).

These processes activated by migrants have wider implications in relation to the social context, one of which was particularly salient in the literature. As pointed out by Portes and Rumbaut (2006) the road to successful integration for migrants -even if it can appear counterintuitive- has commonly passed through the creation of ethno-religious communities (2006, 304). One of the main reasons for which this topic was so central within US studies is mainly linked to the characteristics of North American religious panorama and to its historical pluralism. In particular, as pointed out by Foner and Alba (2008), the value of professing a religious identity has always had a significant role within American society, a process in turn transmitted to migrants; and it can be easily summarised through the following famous quote: “*becoming American through religion*”. Or, in the words of Hirschman: many immigrants “have become American” through participation in their religious communities (2004:1207). In reality, this famous sentence was previously written by Prema Kurien in studying American Hinduism, and the title of her book is “*Becoming American by Becoming Hindu*” (Kurien, 1998), where she explained the “Americanising” impact of immigrants’ engagement with religion (Foner and Alba, 2008: 366). Kurien argues that professing Hinduism has helped Indians in integrating into US society, affirming “a position at the multicultural table”

(1998:37). But again this idea has an even longer tradition within the literature and originally comes from Herberg's (1960) historical studies on ethnicity and religion in US. At that time (before 1965), the range of religious pluralism studied by Herberg was limited to Protestants, Catholics and Jews. But, after the Immigration Reform Act of 1965, and the subsequent pluralisation of the religious panorama, several authors started to review and update Herberg's idea applying it to the new context. Nevertheless, the crucial nucleus remains: in showing a religious identity migrants have found a "path" of integration into receiving society.

It's now important to recall what several authors have suggested for elaborating these insights about the relation between ethnicity and religion during migration experience. Over all the main concern relates concepts like religious identity and ethnicity. These are slippery categories, hard to catch and subjected to reification (Baumann, 1996). As clearly pointed out by Warner: in migration, religious identities aren't primordial but "constructed" or "transmuted" (2000:275). Indeed, starting from the previous cultural background, ethnic belonging is rehabilitated, assembled and reinvented in new ways. Moreover, the majority of migrants (as well as natives) have an idea of "belonging" that is often linked to the region or city where they were born, and the new identities de facto come into being precisely in the space between such differences. In this sense, "race" is both a conditioning factor in these negotiations and is itself conditioned by them (Warner, 2000:275). In particular, as developed by Levitt in her studies, religion for immigrants becomes a *tool* for producing, reproducing, and inventing identity (2006: 397). Thus, the focus on identity, ethnicity and religion requires *dynamism* in the empirical research, a dynamism that can grasp both continuity and innovation (Schiller, Çağlar, Guldbrandsen, 2006). It becomes important to capture where and when migrants show a religious identity, through which tactics and strategies, which involve understanding the role of the local context where this process concretely takes shape (Schiller, Çağlar, Guldbrandsen, 2006). Religious institutions de facto are *social constructions moulded both by internal and external processes*. This consideration leads us to the next paragraph, where I progress in exploring the changes that may occur to religion in migration.

3.2 The three C: Congregationalism, community Centre-model and internal Cells

Another key theme within the North American literature regards the kind of organisational features that immigrant religious communities tend to assume in a new context like the US, characterised by congregationalism as a main religious pattern. In particular, I intend to discuss how migrant communities "often differ substantially from the ways in which they were structured and functioned in their homelands" (Ebaugh, 2003: 232). Warner, recalling a concept formulated by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) within organisational studies, provides a significant theoretical insight about this issue: "However the religious group is organized in the home country, there is a tendency for religious institutions in the United States to assume a "congregational" form, just as formal organizations tend toward the isomorphism of "bureaucracy" (Warner, 2000: 277).

This insight is particularly significant given that it focus the attention on how *the local context and the needs generated by migration* may have an impact on the internal structure of migrants' religious organisations. In this sense it's possible to recognise regularities across denominational specificities. For example, Warner, thanks to a comparative perspective on ten congregations in the US -on the basis of the research project previously introduced, i.e. NEICP- provides seven arguments to support his thesis. To summarise: (1) A religious community becomes a *voluntary membership* association, whose identity is defined more by the people who form it than by the territory they inhabit, (2) which is (for example) completely different from the model of the parish, typically based on territorial divisions. (3) A congregation normally presents *lay leaderships*, (4) and *systematic fund-raising* based on a shared trust between believers. (5) Given this kind of leadership, and voluntary funding, the clergy tend to be *professionals* hired as employees. (6)

Because of its voluntary and self-determined nature, the congregation also has a tendency to *ethnic exclusiveness*. Because the people who establish the congregation have multiple needs, there is (7) a tendency for it to be *multi-functional* (providing educational, cultural, social, civic, and welfare activities). Because families tend to have the day off on Sunday, there is (8) a tendency for these activities to be brought together under the roof of the institution on *Sundays*, regardless of the actual sacred day of that tradition.

Also Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000), on the basis of their study -i.e. RENIR- on thirteen congregations in the same city, focused on the same thesis, providing similar arguments. But, they decided to divide the discussion in two directions, presenting two organisational ideal-types: (1) the *congregational structure*, and (2) the *community centre model* of service provision. Moreover, they added another ideal-type, that they call (3) “the *set of sub-structural* “mini-congregations”. If in the case of the first ideal-type, they basically found the same features of Warner, in the case of second ideal-type they detailed with greater accuracy the various activities sponsored by congregations. Here, I summarise the main empirical evidence: (2.1) the communal celebration of secular holidays, (2.2) the provision of secular classes (2.3) the formal provision of worldly services for members (2.4) the presence of recreational facilities (2.5) the existence of a community hall in which social activities occur. In the case of the third ideal-type, they discussed the regular presence of various internal groups. In particular, beyond the specific kind of activity that can characterise each group (as for example various prayer groups dedicated to different devotions) they introduced this category to explain its social function: these groups provide members with the opportunity to meet in small groups where they can intimately interact and share their experiences. For some congregations the authors have also adopted the label “*cell*” given the high level of structuring that produces internal positions and various organisational roles.

The discussion on congregationalism and the focus on the internal composition provide significant insights on migrants’ religious institutions. The main issue is that migration has a powerful impact on religions given that these may change their organisational features in the direction both of local contexts and on the basis of members’ needs (Yang and Ebaugh, 2001). First of all, the necessity to build a “new” community “from below”, may automatically transform the original format. The previous institution is no longer taken for granted; it needs to be re-created and the new profile embodies also the features of local landscape. In the US, a clear example is provided both by Hinduism and Buddhism. Such religions are typically not characterized by a systematic set of beliefs and practices in the homeland (Levitt, 2006: 401), but when transplanted they tend to change towards the model of congregationalism, taking on new internal organisational features (including a major relevance of lay leaderships). A similar case is provided by the study of Bankston and Zhou (2000) on Vietnamese Catholics and Laotian Buddhists; despite the obvious differences between these two religions, the communities established by migrants present similar features, as the tendency of religious figures to become professionals employed by congregations as well as a shift in power towards lay committees (2000: 467). More generally, religions tend to be “institutionalised” within the context where they come into being, incorporating some local features; being migrant, religious communities need to rent or buy spaces for the worship, to arrange an “administrative” office to be recognised locally, as well as providing economic accounts on the activities they promote; then, as a consequence, communities have to select leaders (president, vice-president) or responsible that plan these requests. Moreover, the presence of social-service centres is often unusual in mother country, where the state and the market provide welfare activities for members. In a foreign land on the contrary, religious institutions have to reinvent themselves, making available also more spaces -and opportunities- for socializing, where to meet the various needs of members.

Nevertheless, a debating issue concerns the congregational model (for a general introduction on such debate see: Cadge, 2008; Cadge, Levitt, Smilde, 2011). Some authors consider it as a theoretically limited framework (the main critic: Cadge, 2008), others as transversal and common. Indeed, this interpretative polarity characterises the North American literature. The main critic

concerns its normative assumption, mutated from the north-American protestant background; in this sense scholars tend to see only congregational elements and not differences. On the other side, given how religious communities are established *from below* on the basis of believers' voluntarism -and thanks to their social and economic efforts- they tend to assume these organisational features that go beyond the archetypal characteristics. Here too, just as for cultural identity, the researcher needs dynamism and reflexivity if it aims to capture analogies and differences (Vásquez and Marquardt, 2003). Nonetheless this controversy reveals further general insights that can be applied in other national contexts and shows how important it is to try to analyse all the pressures that may mould religious communities when they are transplanted. In this regard I would remark how thanks to the *comparison*, a precious sociological tool, scholars were able to go beyond single case studies, developing new theoretical insight on immigrant religions. Beyond the North American landscape - which has specific characteristics- this focus becomes significant also for the European case, where migrant flows have created new communities within very different religious scenarios. Comparisons (both at national and international level) could represent a significant tool to provide new empirical and theoretical evidence able to advance the debates on migrants' religions (Cadge and Ecklund, 2007).

3.3 Introduction to Informal Welfare: the invisible hand of God

“When the fog begins to thicken on the horizons of our lives, and the flash of lightning and boom of thunder announce the outbreak of the hurricane of our suffering, of grief, of sorrow, and of anguish, we turn our eyes and our thoughts to this sanctuary and we find here safety, relief and peace”

The quotation was taken from journal of Italian Catholic community in New York: the “*Bollettino*”, September 1929 (see Orsi, 2002:175) and tells the story of a *Sanctuary* where Italian emigrants could find a safe and peaceful place; this story brings us to introducing the theoretical argument of this paragraph: one of the main features of immigrants' religious communities is the *welfare provision*. Indeed these sanctuaries provide a wide and complex set of resources for sustaining migrants' settlement and integration into the receiving country. Similarly, Hirschman (2004) has stated that religions give immigrants a array of benefits summarized as the “three R”: refuge, respect and resources. In this sense, in the next sections I enlarge this idea, adopting the concept of *Informal Welfare* to debate this combination that represents the theoretical development of different empirical findings provided by the literature on this topic. This concept is well recognisable within various studies, and is also transversal to the different religious denominations. For example, Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000), in the conclusion of their project, observe that a main axis to explore immigrant religions is “providing for the needy”. I introduce this concept, its history and genealogy, then I present the kinds of activities constitute it. Finally I shall debate the reason why I used it in my empirical study given how, not being a concept commonly adopted, it requires to be discussed in detail.

Historically, within religious organizations the promotion of activities correlated to solidarity is certainly nothing new; even if we consider the term *welfare*, this was coined by an Anglican archbishop, William Temple, in the early 1900s (Heidenheimer and Flora, 1986). At that time the Churches were at the forefront in promoting activities in order to support fragility, marginality and social exclusion. De facto, religions anticipated the successful season of social policies that expanded in Europe during the nineteenth century. If *welfare provision* is no novelty new for European religious denominations, neither it is for religious congregations established by the immigrant population into receiving countries. For example, exactly a century ago, Thomas and Znaniecki, explored the same welfare activities that R. Orsi found in the case of Italian Immigrants;

they described the moral, social and material role played by new ethnic-parishes created by Polish peasants in the United States. In their famous text, they noticed how religious communities became the main bastion in defence of immigrants, helping and supporting them during their experiences in the host land: “the parishes established by the new arrivals were de facto the main social-units to avoid moral disintegration and, over time, the parishes became fundamental community centres, with humanitarian and practical aims” (1918: 279).

Social activism represents a significant -and historical- feature of religious institutions promoted by immigrants. Today as in the past, these congregations have de facto become an active part of the complex social infrastructure that supports the inclusion of the immigrant population (Hagan, 2008). Between the “state” and “migrants” we find various players that mediate and influence their experiences (see chapter 2), including religious institutions. Nevertheless, within the European scenario, *welfare provision* sponsored by immigrants’ religious congregations has never drawn academic interest. One on side, a secularization-bias continues to prevent the collection of data concerning the role of faith organizations in secular activities typically associated with the state and the market (what I called ‘methodological atheism’ in the first chapter). On the other side, an anti-religious bias continues to undervalue the role of immigrants’ religious institutions in supporting integration (Foner and Alba, 2008).

Only recently this issue has attract the attention of some scholars, albeit silently. But specifically, this happened through another theoretical debate; during the economic crisis, that saw the increase of neoliberal policies and the simultaneous decrease of public policies, scholars have started to analyse the role of non-state actors that are replacing the vacuum left by the recalibration of welfare-state. In this space charities, foundations, voluntary and religious organisations as well as interfaith-coalitions are these days working together against social exclusion. (Smith, 2001; Beaumont, 2008; Ley, 2008; Wills et al., 2009; Beaumont e Cloke, 2012;). Thus, mapping the *new geography of welfare*, researchers have also started to notice the dynamism of immigrant churches. Religious communities are indeed the promoters of what may be termed as the “invisible hand of charity” (Cnaan, Boddie, 2002). With reference to the activities promoted within these contexts, comprehensibly, the literature available gives a fragmented picture, but is nonetheless extremely significant. In the next paragraphs the aim is to provide a literature review on this issue, explaining how the migrants’ religious communities sponsor an *informal welfare* capable of advancing the inclusion and the integration of their members.

3.4 Psychological and emotional supports: taking care of souls

First of all, in order to frame the role of informal welfare activated by religious communities it’s important to disaggregate the general category of “needs”. In the case of immigrant population, “needs” indeed assume several facets in the face of a new society; from the material ones, as work and housing, to immaterial ones, as health and feelings. The experience of migration poses numerous challenges and immigrant religious communities may serve as dynamic spaces where to find appropriate answers. Disentangling the complex provision of welfare supports, it emerges how the first crucial activity sponsored by immigrants’ religious institutions is to provide assistance for emotional and psychological needs. The anthropological experience of *liminality* implied in migration experience may produce various kinds of feelings. In first instance, crossing a border intrinsically generates questions on self-identity (Warner: 2000). Indeed facing different cultural traditions and lifestyles necessarily generates disorientation and confusion. Moreover, the break of established relationships and the construction of new ones is not a simple process. Migrants can experience periods of loneliness as well as great disappointment. They can also undergo stress, given how personal goals are often “trapped” between the expectations of receiving society and

those ones of family. Moreover, as is well known, migrants can face various forms of stigma, prejudice and social exclusion.

However within religious congregations, one can find two fundamental forms of support for such kind of emotional needs; on one side -as I argued above- religious institutions provide a hospitable and comforting atmosphere, where migrants can find various positive reinforcements for their wellbeing, such as symbols, images, sounds and food that serve as “a familiar place” in an “unfamiliar space”. Thanks to this atmosphere they can experience a sort of cultural continuity with their mother country; they may also find several social activities that can soften the “break” generated by the migration experience. On the other side, communities are arenas that can bear traumas and hardships: religion provides a safe space where to try and soften social pressures as well as initiating and supporting the formation of a new identity. Within the church migrants can find new friends willing to listen and share experiences, ready to lend *their time* in case of need. These activities of support and understanding of emotions linked to the alienating experience of migration can be also provided by religious and lay leaders, able to provide reliable advice to face fragility and stress. Within religious institutions migrants can meet those who Kim has labelled as the “*workers of compassion*” (1996).

As pointed out by Gozdiack: “Researchers have also tended to neglect the role of religion and spirituality as a source of emotional and cognitive support, a form of social and political expression and mobilization, and a vehicle of community building and group identity” (2002:137). For example, as reconstructed by Gozdiack in a case study on forced migration from Kosovo to US, sacred spaces became a “*spiritual emergency room*” for asylum seekers. Starting from her interdisciplinary background -psychiatry and anthropology- Gozdiack explains how refugees have re-elaborated their sufferings and pains as a religious experience; a “*catharsis*” that has softened the impact of a traumatic past and the disorientation of dislocation in a completely new context. (Gozdiak, 2002). Similarly, McMichael -recalling the famous insight of Clifford Geertz on religion as a system of symbols- through an ethnographic study, explains the ways in which Somali women in Melbourne have drawn upon Islam to provide emotional support, manage transitions and frame experiences of depression and loneliness (2002: 182). Religion has provided to these women what McMichael calls an “enduring home”. Equally Dorais (2007) explains how Vietnamese refugees have drawn upon religion to face the traumatic experience of journey and build a new life in Montreal. Finally, Connor, through a wide quantitative study, demonstrates how religion represents a “balm for the migrant’s soul” (Connor, 2012). In a certain sense religious immigrant communities address the Durkheimian problem of *anomie* (the loss of normative orientations), providing a system of meanings (or a capital of symbols) that they can draw from in order to deal with emotions and feelings created by migration.

Developing this perspective, it should be noted how during the migration experience emotional and psychological needs become more complex and multifaceted; beyond the first moment of arrival and settlement -the alienating experience of cultural diversity and solitude- sadness and distress can be also generated by critical experiences faced in host society; for example, the tensions associated to what De Genova (2002) calls “deportability”. A first observation concerns indeed the legal position of immigrants; on their arrival, they may not have legal status or they may lose it falling into unexpected situations. In this sense, as noted by Bloch, Sigona and Zetter: “Churches offer undocumented migrants spiritual guidance and relief from the moral dilemmas stemming from their situation, a safe haven and an environment in which they do not feel different or discriminated against because of their legal status” (2014: 110). Similarly, the work of Menjivar on illegal migrants from central America to US explains the crucial role of religion for the condition of illegality: “Religious institutions have been pivotal in easing the anxiety of these immigrants’ legal limbo (...) because they have no other institutional sources for this assistance” (2006: 1024/1025). As clearly affirmed by a Salvadoran woman in her research: *If not the Church, who else?* (2006:1025).

Another critical transition that can generate problems regards the economic position. Migrants often experience a significant shift of social class (i.e. what economic sociology calls “downward social mobility”), with relevant consequences for their social status, this being a process which is generally framed only from an economic point of view. As known, migrants in the new country typically start their life from a different economic position compared to the previous one; a process that is experienced with hope and courage, but nonetheless exposes them to a critical reorganisation of self. For example, habits and consumptions may change, and daily routines no longer be the same. In this sense another critical resource provided by religious involvement is the possibility to acquire leadership roles; these positions provide forms of *self-worth*, which are extremely significant for migrants that face a downgrading of abilities and skills. What they lose in the secular-arena they can informally achieve within sacred sphere. From a psychological point of view, migrants may attain through leadership positions a new dignity and respect. Religion serves for facing structural pressures, helping migrants to negotiate the social stigma faced in ordinary life. For example, Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) in their study have found that members of religious communities, after facing downward social mobility in US, gained a new status through leadership roles; a sort of “informal religious social mobility”. Warner explains clearly this process: “religion can help them reclaim honor denied in the host society (...) election to church offices is thus often an honor to be eagerly sought, rather than an obligation to be borne stoically.” (2000: 272). The honour is so important that it can also lead to schism within the community. Finally, family issues represent another significant form of psychological distress (Bonizzoni: 2007, 2014, 2015); as known, migrants face stressful familiar dispersions, and the much-awaited reunification is not always an easy process. On one side, they miss their family, feeling loneliness and distance, on the other, once a family is reunited, they may experience problems in the search for new internal balance. However immigrants in their religious communities can find various forms of support to face psychological and emotional needs; from the arrival to the numerous challenges posed by migration experience, religions provide resources able to sustain “migrants’ souls”.

3.5 Welfare platforms: work, housing, rights, family and education.

The previous focus on migrants’ emotional and psychological needs allows us to consider how religious communities become pivotal platforms for accessing more tangible resources. Among these it’s possible to recognise: food pantries, clothes, health assistance, advice concerning juridical status, information for jobs and rooms, fundraisings for those who are in need but also language courses and citizenship classes (see for example Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 371-385). Elaborating these various topics, the literature provides significant details.

Given the kind of jobs typically covered by the immigrant population -Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning (Ambrosini, 2011) -where the role of reliability of workers is more important than their officially certified skills (i.e. Curriculum)- “word of mouth” within ethnic networks becomes the key for vacancies. In this sense religion is a privileged space for forging confidence and trust. Religious communities de facto become *informal employment agencies* where to produce the sponsorship of references. If trust, on the basis of social capital, is a significant credential for the job, it is also valuable for another critical resource i.e. housing. As noted by Guest in his study on Chinese communities in New York (Guest, 2003), and by Mooney for the Haitian diaspora in different cities of North America (Mooney, 2009), within religious communities, immigrants can find information on rents or solidarity for a temporary hospitality. Churches become hubs to create an *informal estate market*.

Religious institutions are also the context where theological and ethical principles promote the search of solutions to face social fragility, marginality and the restriction of social-rights (Menjivar, 2003). Religious communities may activate regular solidarity practices, such as the delivering of

food and clothes, and can also sponsor fundraising for members that are facing situations of particular fragility like health emergencies, which in turn involve significant costs and periods of inactivity. In this way, members of a community establish *informal financial assistance* for emergencies. The role of solidarity becomes essential mostly for those who are excluded from entitlements, as in the case of immigrants in irregular conditions who can create in these contexts survival strategies (Hagan, 2008). Sacred spaces are often among the few contexts that can be safely visited (Menjívar, 2003). In this sense, the borders of the sacred walls overlap and interfere with migration policies, creating “gray areas” of survival (Menjívar, 2006). Communities become also hubs for sharing functional advice on how to use local bureaucracies (Ley, 2008), where to find information for improving one’s legal status, as well as to request a family reunification. Communities are also providers of *juridical activities*; even when they don’t directly provide this legal advice, they are often linked to local civic-organisations that can help migrants for this kinds of needs.

Furthermore, religious congregations also become sites of support for parenthood, often interrupted by migration process (see previous section). In a foreign land, the reconstruction of family unit may become problematic. In this sense, within religious institutions, immigrants look for safe spaces to reconcile life, family and work (Bankston and Zhou, 1995; Chen, 2006) and a balance that is difficult to achieve during the migration experience. Families and children also need to access a new educational system that they often don’t know, and lack information and experience about these new educational agencies. A kind of service that often migrants can’t easily “buy” in the market; e.g. private tuition often used by native middle-class families. Immigrants are often also unable to access the educational resources that moreover cannot even be found in family networks - as the help of grandparents or acquaintances able to offer adequate support- being the relations of proximity often interrupted by migration. In this sense, as highlighted by Cao in his famous ethnographic work, Churches become a “*surrogate*” family, filling some educational gaps (Cao, 2005).

To sum up, the literature shows how immigrants’ religious institutions provide various forms of welfare resources, like “informal employment agencies”, “informal estate markets”, “emergency financial assistances”, “juridical activities” and “informal family services”. In practice, religious communities become an informal and parallel welfare. Nevertheless, it is important to better elaborate this perspective, providing more detailed theoretical and methodological tools.

3.6 Developing an approach to religious welfare: trying to formalise the informal.

In the next sections I will discuss further theoretical accounts on informal welfare in order to better contextualise it within the literature. I will then present a methodological approach to study these forms of support triggered by immigrants’ religious communities. These institutions don’t provide official programs of welfare as typically intended and defined within areas of study like political science, economics and economic sociology. Nevertheless, beyond formal categories, religious communities sponsor activities able to allocate significant resources (as I mentioned above) for the socio-economic wellbeing of immigrants. Consequently, between formal and informal, the pivotal question is how to advance the analysis of this “hybrid” area. In this sense, it becomes fundamental to present theoretical and methodological tools that can study this informality; in other words: trying to formalise the informal. In first place, I shall discuss how these forms of support can be framed within the literature; in second place, I discuss how it’s possible to disaggregate the social-mechanisms at the basis of informal welfare.

3.6.1 The diamond of welfare and immigrants

Theoretically, in order to introduce the role of informal activities of support, we can take into account the metaphor of the “welfare-diamond” (see Ferrera, 2006). This represents a framework usually adopted (mostly within welfare studies) to analyse the support necessary for the individual wellbeing. Each of the four corners of this diamond -*state, market, family and community*- is a provider of instruments to solve problems and avoid risks and fragilities. In this sense, immigrants’ religious organisations can take place on the side of “community”, where scholars typically tend to locate everything that isn’t the state, the market or the family and instead is for example neighbourhood networks, Charities and other several actors of “third-sector”.

This corner has today become more and more central due to the economic crisis, the recalibration of national welfare state and the genesis of new social risks (Ferrera, Maino; 2013). Moreover, in the case of the immigrant population, this side of the diamond assumes a specific profile, given a more complex and difficult relation with the other three providers (state, market and family). In reference to public policies (*the state*) migrant cannot be completely eligible⁸ to all social rights given how there can be formal and informal barriers. Migrants generally cannot afford to purchase welfare services within *the market* such as health insurance or other private forms of security. In addition, migrants often do not dispose of all parental networks in receiving countries (Bonizzoni, 2007) and -as is well known- *families* are a fundamental “parachute” for avoiding socio-economic risks. Consequently, immigrants can find significant help for their wellbeing in the last corner of the welfare diamond, which in turn is a complex panorama; here we can find the role of civil society, various voluntary organisations as well as the role of ethnic networks, including migrant associations. Therefore, in this last side of diamond it’s theoretically also possible to place religious organisations. My empirical work will develop this theoretical framework in order to analyse the features of this informal welfare in relation to the diamond just presented.

3.6.2 Religion, social capital and solidarity.

“*Networking*” is the first methodological key that can be adopted to analyse informal welfare activities. Religious institutions (as I also debated in the previous paragraphs) can sociologically be framed as “factory of relationships”, a “conglomeration of ties” which over time provide the members with *religious social capital*. This networking then evolves, producing and allocating socio-economic recourses able to sustain the needs expressed by members. It now becomes important to explain how relations, trust, social capital and solidarity may interact, generating welfare activities.

As is known, *social capital* is at the basis of relational mechanisms of sharing, help and support. The chance of creating inter-subjective relationships and of broadening these through different spheres of social life and spaces of aggregation can be capitalized by people and transformed into resources to achieve objectives. As pointed out by Coleman (2005) in a classic of sociological theory, social capital becomes functional for achieving individual aims. Moreover, as also explained by Weber, religion is one of the main contexts for developing these relational dynamics (Weber, 2001). On the one hand, religious identity fosters interpersonal recognition, strengthening the genesis of respectability and *mutual trust*, on the other, religion favours the chance of being included into stable social networks, that in turn can be activated for individual needs.

⁸ Migrants can present different “degrees” and “levels” of social citizenship, i.e. rights to access to welfare state; if the participation to the labour market makes them eligible, at the same time the complex stratification of legal statuses (Morris, 2003) can create forms of exclusion from welfare supports.

Thus the role of religion becomes significant also in creating migrants' social capital. In this regard, it's important to highlight that ethnic belonging alone is often not sufficient to produce stable relations that can give the access to socio-economic resources; indeed immigrants' networking is a complex process, often controversial (Portes, Sensenbrenner, 2009). In this sense, Churches, mosques and congregations may provide additional values (like respectability and trust) able to reinforce the possibility of building relations. In addition, as known in literature, migrants may find various forms of ethnic networks, but not always "reliable", Engbersen, Van der Leun; 1998; "to their eyes" religious institutions may on the contrary represent a safe place where to try and access a certain type of relations. Nonetheless, even within religious communities, these relational mechanisms need to be constantly strengthened and revitalized. In a sociological perspective, trust and respectability are social products that develop over time, representing a laborious process and the result of commitments and obligations.

To better understand the evolution of social capital towards the promotion of social activities, the role of *solidarity*⁹ must be taken into consideration. Most of the religious beliefs are indeed animated by this value that consolidates the idea of welcoming and helping one's "brother" (Hagan, 2008:140; see also the work of Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2006). In sociological terms, solidarity is a trigger of social cooperation; it can facilitate relational mechanisms that in turn can generate new forms of collective actions. Within religious organisations -although migrants (in most cases) are not a wealthy population- charity is generally a shared value, indeed a precept for most religions. If generally solidarity is a "rare commodity" (also within ethnic networks) religious contexts can however activate additional meanings capable of advancing the cooperation towards common objectives (e.g. fundraisings). Moreover, as the transnational perspective shows, immigrants' solidarity follows many directions, and can also cross the borders of nation-state; religious communities may send resources to mother country for various social projects (Levitt, 2007). In this sense, religious institutions also become local platforms of a transnational welfare.

3.7 Civic and political skills: how religion may train new citizens.

Within the literature, the links between religious involvement and civic and political participation represent another interesting subject. Frequenting and being involved in a religious community can lead to developing new attitudes, expertise and skills that can be practised and invested also beyond the sacred walls. The main theoretical issues to be debated concerns the *kind* of new abilities that can be developed within the congregations, *how* they come into being, and to what *extent* immigrant religious institutions are able to promote both civic and political participation. These subjects represent an alternative perspective for elaborating the role of religion in migration, including its function in fostering the integration into a new social context. These themes indeed denote a progression and an advancement of religious belonging. I decided to debate such perspective disaggregating initially the concepts of the *civic* and *political*. Although in the literature there is no clear distinction (not only in migration studies) given that they are intrinsically interrelated and embedded, I consider them in two different sections in order to explore how they may be experienced by immigrants.

For the first case, generally the available studies on immigrants reveal how religious attendance may also extend to include practical forms of civic activism (Levitt, 2008). In particular, a first significant focus for elaborating this form of participation is the role of *volunteering*. (Ecklund and Park, 2007; Handy, Greenspan 2009). In general, as pointed out in the study of Handy and

⁹ In a certain sense solidarity can be also framed as "*practice of resistance*", more silent than classic political voice, but no less efficacious. I will face this subject in the empirical discussion.

Greenspan, “the volunteering experiences of immigrants are a neglected topic” (2009:958), however, this kind of activity provides significant civic-benefits to immigrants. Basically, volunteering promotes a (1) “substantive knowledge”, skills like (2) “managerial expertise”, and finally it enlarges the possibility of access (3) “wider relational fields”, giving for example the chance to find public works or also linkages with local institutions. In other words, volunteering tends to broaden the spectrum of immigrants’ agency into receiving societies. In this sense -as I have also mentioned in the previous paragraph discussing the solidarity shared within such spaces- religious beliefs and ideas are intrinsically associated with the “*welfare of others*”. Similarly, Foley and Hoge (2007), through a survey research on various immigrant congregations in Washington DC, explain in detail *how* these may transform in “arenas” to develop civic skills, as the possibility to become a leader, learn to manage one’s position, prepare group activities, guide training classes (e.g. language courses, or courses for the use local bureaucracies) or plan religious meetings and others collective activities. In this sense, the empirical work of Foley and Hoge is really clear in the conclusions, summarized in the subtitle of their book: “how faith communities form our newest citizens” (Foley and Hoge, 2007). These internal benefits become *de facto* “a stepping stone to integration” of immigrants (Handy, Greenspan 2009). To sum up, generally those who experience actively the “religious field” also tend to promote activities outside church, involving other actors and sharing needs, problems and solutions.

In facing this subject we can widen the theoretical framework, given how this area of inquiry has indeed a long tradition, although rarely the focus has been applied with continuity to the case of immigrant religious communities. As pointed out by Putnam (2001), who in turn recalls the studies of Tocqueville, in the US associationism is very often linked to religion. In his wide research, Putnam explains how the majority of philanthropic activism as well as the preponderance of volunteering organisations are sponsored by religious congregations. This consideration recalls for the second time the role of social capital. Putnam employs this concept theorizing it in a different way from Bourdieu and Coleman. His conceptualisation focuses more on the social capital of communities and not of individuals (a different unit of analysis). Putnam’s empirical work is indeed more interested in the civic life than in personal achievement. It also provides two ideal-types of social capital: bonding and bridging. To put it briefly, the first is more focused on internal ties shared within a community, the second focuses on the ties that can link people with external relational fields. Applying the same perspective to the case of immigrant religious institutions, Stepick, Rey, and Mahler (2009), starting from an in-depth ethnographic work on the city of Miami, explain how immigrant religious congregations can promote what they define as *civic social capital*¹⁰: “how social relationships based in the church affect individuals’ relationships with the broader civic world” (2009: 14). In this study it’s possible to find a “diachronic” perspective: over time communities are likely to extend their range of action in the wider urban area where they are based (Stepick, Rey, and Mahler; 2009). The authors have also explored the role of religious leadership -the sociological theme of *charisma*- of those who can relocate the status developed internally out of communities’ boundaries, activating forms of bridging social capital (for example involving local institutions of the host society). Nevertheless, this area of inquire is still fragmented, and there are no clear findings that explain “how” and “under what conditions” migrants’ religious communities can promote civic participation.

Also in the case of political activism, the empirical field is fragmented and there are no structured studies on the interrelations between migrants’ religious participation and political mobilisation. However, as pointed out by Levitt: “History is also filled with examples of people who mobilized their faith to abolish slavery and to fight for civil rights” (2008: 767; “Black Churches” were evident examples). In the US, this field of interest -“religion and politics”- has indeed a specific tradition, but it was rarely applied with continuity to the case of migrants. Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) have showed in a famous book how generally church attendance improves the

¹⁰ Practically, they review the Putnam’s idea on “bridging social capital”.

political skills of members, like public speaking, conducting meetings and planning events. They have also underlined how religious activism develops the political ability to bargain and make compromises, the ability to create new solutions to problems, and exercise critical judgments. Here we can find skills similar to those developed in the case of civic activism.

Nevertheless it becomes important to understand how migrants' religious communities may concretely promote forms of political participation and mobilisation. In this direction, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2006, 2008) and Hagan (2006) have pointed out how migrants' religious communities have become increasingly important within a political context marked by an anti-immigrants agenda, including a growing militarisation of borders. In order to develop this area of inquiry, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Hagan suggest that over time religion can transform itself from a "cultural expression" to a "political tool", de facto contesting the state. For example, they explain how an annual pilgrimage (which per se is a religious ritual) has become one of the most important political mobilisations along the border between the US and Mexico. Another clear example is the study of Alyshia Galvez (2010) on Mexican migrants in New York. Focusing initially on a famous popular devotion -"Our Lady of Guadalupe"- and studying Mexican catholic communities -established in a neighbourhood of the Bronx - she explains how religion provides illegal immigrants with political tools. Adopting the concept of "cultural citizenship", she debates how over time catholic migrants have developed a sense of self-worth, moral values and a common solidarity that in turn leads to contest the conventional notion of citizenship defined by the state (Galvez, 2010: 183). In practise, in a context where immigrants' citizenship rights have become a highly contested terrain, religion becomes an alternative channel to make one's voice heard. In this area of study it's interesting to note how popular devotions (often associated to something of pagan or pertaining to folklore) can over time be transformed into a political tool. This suggestion leads us to consider how today scholars are developing evermore ways to inquire traditional concepts such as "citizenships" and "political participation". As suggested by Levitt (2007; 2008) "when we talk about citizenship, we are also talking about identity (...) How people think themselves, racially, ethnically or religiously, influence also how they see themselves as citizens. How they perceive their rights and obligations and how they participate in the public sphere (2008: 786). Nevertheless, as pointed by Galvez in the conclusion of her book (that is "colder" if compared to the foreword), these issues need to be better developed, both theoretically and empirically.

To conclude, religion can represent an interesting frontier to debate civic and political participation, especially in reference to migrants who generally have less entitlements and access to public space, and less political resources to claim their presence. In the course of history, it has often been noted that religious congregations, along with other collective actors like trade unions, have been particularly important for the marginal members of the community; they have improved their chances of becoming more active in terms of civic consciousness. For the moment this theme is unformulated in the case of immigrants, even more so in countries where migration is more recent, like in Italy. In this sense, studying how religious communities can assume a proactive dimension, and not only a protective one, can provide new directions to this kind of studies. Following Weber, in contrast to a static view, religions become also a worldly activity.

3.8 Lived-religion: a valuable heuristic for immigrants' religious participation

In this section, I discuss another perspective through which to frame the experience of religion in migration. It can also help in developing most of the themes previously discussed. Being an interdisciplinary body of research, over time scholars have indeed provided various interpretative tools. I shall present a *heuristic* for supporting the theoretical framework of this study: the concept of "*lived-religion*". At first, I introduce both its definition and genealogy, I then expose the key-role that this concept has achieved within the literature on migrants' religious communities in the last

two decades. In doing this I explain the reasons that motivated me to adopt this concept for my empirical analysis.

Today the “lived-religion” approach has become a valuable theoretical tool for disentangling the experiences of sacred between institutionalized notions of religion and everyday behaviours; in sociological terms, it helps in grasping the “dynamism” between structure and agency, adding crucial insights also for the theory of social change. This micro-level approach becomes useful for facing macro-debates as secularisation, individualisation and globalisation of faiths, which often present empirical *lacunae* on how effectively these processes happened at individual and local level. In particular, this framework is even more valuable for the case of immigrants. Following the different stages and challenges that are intrinsically linked to the migration process, religious engagement may face different kinds of transitions and evolutions. Migrants indeed rebuild their spirituality in a new context, starting from a new social position and through new relations. Moreover, they lack pre-established guaranteed sacred places as in their mother country. They can also find “brothers” coming from different areas of their country, probably with different cultural expressions of the same faith. All these processes can therefore involve transformations and negotiations in their spiritual involvement. Finally, this approach provides more accounts on how religion *concretely* intersects immigrants’ experiences, going beyond stereotyped visions. Moreover it can help to understand how “from below” migrants may change and renew traditional notions of religion.

3.8.1 Definition: beyond mainstream approaches, towards a grounded-theory of religion

Essentially, as its etymology evokes, the concept of “*lived-religion*” focuses on how religion and spirituality are practiced, experienced and expressed by ordinary people in the context of their everyday lives (McGuire, 2008:12); for this reason, often, instead of “lived”, in the academic debate the label “everyday religion” is often adopted (Ammerman, 2007). As pointed out by Hall (1997), this approach practically represents the “Americanisation” of the French concept “*la religion vécue*”, which imported in the field of religious studies the influences of cultural sociology, pushing scholars towards a more individual and phenomenological inquiry of what is religion.

This framework suggests that the religious realm cannot be disconnected from everyday experiences and practices. Particularly in a changing world, scholars should study religion also outside the “orthodoxy”, going beyond the mainstream definitions and the normative positions of what should be religion in abstract terms. As Vasquez and Marquardt have underlined recalling R.Orsi:

“To study religion in the United States today is to study texts (...) over the last two decades few studies are empirically based. The written and spoken word, rather than engaged behaviour studied in its place, are what occupies the practitioners.” (2003:6)

Those who study the sacred for most time have often centred their attention solely on what is the “true” notion of religion; as a consequence, they have looked for “true” and “pure” expressions of sacred in the reality; they started “*from the top*” but we argue that scholars should start “*from below*”, from behaviours and everyday experiences of sacred. As pointed out by Ammerman: “religious ideas and practices may be present even when they are neither theologically pure nor socially insulated” (Ammerman, 2007: 6). In epistemological terms, a sort of inversion takes place through this concept: from a *deductive* approach to religion to an *inductive* one (a grounded-theory of religion). The social-reality is indeed *more complex and varied* than the only theological-ideas of religion. Again, society and religion have historically always been embedded, influencing each other reciprocally; consequently, in a changing world, it becomes important to understand emerging

and renewed forms of religion. Following the process of individualization, within social contexts where the borders between sacred and secular have become blurred, and given the religious renewing sponsored by various migration flows, a lived-religion approach helps in reconsidering how it's possible to investigate the sacred in such a contemporary panorama. These are the main reasons behind its growing academic relevance and in the case of immigrants, through the collection of individual storylines and observing everyday practices it's possible to better understand how they use and negotiate religion in a new context. As pointed out by R. Orsi (2003), are we sure that when we ask about immigrants' religion, the first question should regard Islam? Or Hinduism? Should we instead start from contextualizing religion in its everyday relations, associations and activities?

3.8.2 Genealogy: The Madonna of 115th Street

To better frame the role of this approach within migration studies, it's important to recall the *genealogy of the term 'lived-religion'*. Specifically, centring the attention to its epistemic-father: R. Orsi, who in the US first coined and adopted the lived-religion approach. This is often overlooked but it should be noted how this concept was created while studying Italian immigrants' lives in US, focusing on role of Catholicism in their migration experience. Indeed, R. Orsi published the first book in this area of inquiry: *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith And Community In Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, that over time has become a landmark for scholars of the lived-religion approach. Adopting a new methodological approach -which included participant observations during holy performances, ethnographic notes, in-depth interviews, historical documents and newspapers- R. Orsi detailed the various intersections between "sacred and secular" within immigrants' everyday experiences and explored in this way the whole complexity of meanings behind the religious involvement of Italians.

The first aim of Orsi was to write a "new form of social-history" (2010: XII) and at that time one of the issues to debate became whether historians "study only dead people"; historical disciplines were indeed facing new theoretical directions. Practically this meant conceiving an approach that was closer to the everyday lives and centred on how people experienced concretely the historical-structures, which began to appear only just as theoretical-shadows on human stage. But, in that period, within these areas of interest the Marxist approach was preeminent and monopolised debates centring the attention only on the political culture of the working-class. Clearly, the religious involvement of workers didn't attract much attention but in spite of this Orsi noted how spirituality was central in their ordinary life and mostly in their "*theodicy*".

In particular, by collecting life histories and ethnographic notes, he explored how Italians experienced religion within a new society. He focused on its role in creating communitarian dynamics, as organisations and associations, including its function in supporting the visibility of immigrants in the public sphere. Moreover he explored how immigrants imported a new version of Catholicism, different from the American one. This insight was crucial, because he elaborated and enlarged the notion of "popular religion". At the time, this concept, i.e. "popular religion", was recurrent in the debates but it usually framed spiritual manifestations of immigrants only as a second-order religion: similar to a primitive, rural and pagan spirituality. This kind of approach has prevented for long time the possibility to grasp with more attention the social and symbolic role of religion for immigrants whereas in truth for them "religion was more than religion". In other terms: R. Orsi sponsored a review of the concept of "popular" for Religious Studies, now intended as symbolic imagery with a crucial role in everyday experiences of people, embedded in ordinary relations and within urban-interstices. To summarise this genealogy we can say that R. Orsi drew attention on the fact that religion is *more dynamic* than common ideas, *is located* in places different from those official, *is experienced* in different ways compared to orthodoxy, and is more

intertwined with secular and everyday lives than its more pure and commonly understood expressions. Clearly all of this is even more true when it comes to immigrants.

3.8.3 Exploring migrants' subjectivities

Moving between institutional meanings and individual practises, the micro-level focus may fill up various empirical lacunae within the literature on migrants' religious experiences. First of all, as showed by Bartkowski (2007), one should always take into consideration how *religious rhetoric and practices* are intertwined in various ways. The experience of the sacred is more heterogeneous than common representations, and today it has become increasingly complex and multiform.

For example, starting from individual experiences, a lived-religion approach may provide accounts on how to disentangle *kinds and degrees* of migrants' religious participation. In this regard, during migration, individual experiences of the sacred may face different kinds of transition; religious beliefs and practises are transferred beyond national borders, and this international displacement in turn influences the degrees of religious engagement. If "God has never stopped at national borders" (Levitt, 2007), what changes instead is how God is experienced after having crossed those same national borders. For example, if in the mother country migrants can be believers, during the process of settlement they may lose their religion (Connor, 2008; Massey, Higgins; 2011); or, on the contrary, they can become religious in the receiving country even if they weren't so in the mother country (Warner, 2000). There are various shades inside this polarity; shades of continuity, renewal or re-discovery; religious involvement may become intense or figurative, demonstrative or reactive (see for example Peek, 2005). Migrants often express a religious identity moulded by an ethnic-identification (see previous sections) and more in general religion can become a cultural-tool for producing and reproducing a 'renewed' identity. Migrants may instead show a religious identity only occasionally during the most important festivities and ceremonies which call them back to their belonging to a mother country. On the other hand, they can instead assume a sort of reactive-identity in response to a new -secularised- context (Williams and Vashi, 2007). During the settlement, migrants can change their degree of involvement with religion; for example, everyday challenges like loneliness, homesickness and work-related stress lead to approaching religion in a more deep and intimate way. Also the "ethical contents" of religious belonging may change, given that "migration often encourages a process of reflexivity where migrants think about the norms and values of their place of origin in relation to their place of settlement" (Eade, 2018: 124). In this sense, religion serves as a provider of moral points of reference (taking also conservative positions) able to address the challenges and disorientations implicit in the experience of migration. Another interesting process is a returning to the "theological foundations" (Yang, and Ebaugh, 2001); migrants tend to revisit their theological ideas in order to find answers and justifications tailored on the contingencies experienced in the new context. In other words, migrants "look for the new in the old". Moreover, as pointed out by Yang and Ebaugh in the case of Buddhism and Hinduism in US, given that diverse sub-groups of a religion and its diverse national sub-groups may meet in the same city, this often implies a revision of some theological principles in order to create new models able to "hug" this new local super-diversity. They have found the same process also for the genesis of Pan-Orthodox Churches (a religion traditionally divided along national lines). Finally, migration can also lead to conversion to another religion (Yang, and Ebaugh, 2001; see also the in-depth study of Yang, 2010). Thus, as pointed out by Timothy Smith (1978), migration is a *theologizing experience*; it implies a new spiritual journey, "a journey within a journey". As one can see, migrants' religious beliefs and practices are more complex than the general representations; starting from a micro-level focus it's possible to disentangle these various religious processes and their interrelation with the stages and challenges implicated in the migration process. As a corollary, such reflections open another theoretical window.

The lived-religion approach also enables to better frame *migrants subjectivities*. Such a perspective shows how immigrants may find in religious participation a channel in which to develop their *agency*. If generally this issue, i.e. that of migrants' agency, is more and more debated today within migration studies (see for example Ortner, 2006; Triandafyllidou, 2019), rarely is religion taken into consideration as a sphere of its development. Often (implicitly or explicitly) the idea persists that the sacred is something of "absolutus" and then fixed, that tends to restrict the range of action "from above". In a certain sense, this consideration recalls the challenge of "methodological atheism" introduced at the beginning of this thesis; a bias that has prevented the elaboration and collection of data on religious activism when interrelated with wider social issues. Nevertheless, as I argued until now, religion de facto becomes an arena where migrants start to develop a new identity, forms of solidarities, social cooperation, civic and political skills. In this sense, religious involvement provides also the possibility to re-negotiate society's structural constraints. As pointed out by Menjivar (2006) in examining the experiences of Latino migrants in the US, religious engagement becomes a crucial strategy for survival. Following her insight, the literature provides some interesting theoretical frameworks on this perspective; for example, Scott's conceptualisation of resistance (1985; 1989), that focused on *everyday practices*, i.e. acts or tactics to resist structural pressures. Or also the famous study of Broeders and Engbersen (2007) that explores the (various) *micro-counterstrategies* of irregular migrants; in this sense religion may represent another dowel to add to the "weapons of the weak". As I also mentioned before in debating informal welfare, solidarity and charity are silent, but no less they enable migrants to resist social exclusion. Therefore as many studies suggest today, the closer we get to migrants' subjectivities, the more religion needs to be taken into consideration. In this direction, a lived-religion approach allows to debate with greater precision the many ways in which religion is effectively intertwined to migrants' lives. This perspective challenges most of the polarities that characterise debates on migrants' religion, as the division between sacred and secular. Developing a religious identity, attending a sacred place, building relations that allow to share resources, all become practises that may broaden a migrant's sphere of action in a host society. Moreover, these processes become even more important for those who are formally excluded as irregular migrants (but who still may participate in their religious institutions).

Finally, a lived-religion approach can also help in addressing the critique on transnationalism as a "vague" macro theoretical framework (Boccagni, 2012) and of the lack of detailed data on the kinds of transnational ties and on their strength, including the range of implications involved both "here and there" (Boccagni, 2012; Faist 2013). It's becomes ever more important to observe the local-hubs of global religions, mostly analysing the experiences of their "users"; it will be possible in this way to provide more evidence for recognising the different features and levels of religious transnationalism (Levitt, 2004); features such as the travels of lay or clergy leaders, the possibility to share ideas and values, the role of virtual-connections, the activation of fundraisings to promote activities, the organisation of pilgrimages and events, which include implications in terms of civic and political mobilisation. The lived-religion approach meets these theoretical and empirical needs, allowing us to explore the symbolic and cultural role of religion in shaping migrants' imagination as well as helping in examining how concretely religious transnationalism takes part of their everyday lives (Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2002).

3.9 Concluding remarks: approaching the empirical research

As pointed out by Portes and Rumbaut in the case of immigrants, "sociologically, this significance of religion is not difficult to understand" (2006: 301). Essentially, in accordance with Durkheim and Weber, religion provides sociability, helping to avoid anomie and encouraging cohesion. It also informs human action within reality, promoting new (unexpected) processes. In its simplicity, this

quotation may seem a provocation, but it recalls the bases on which contemporary theories on religion and migrations have been developed.

In this chapter I outlined the key themes in this emerging area of research. I started from a macro issue like identity, a “slippery” category, controversial and hard to catch. Nevertheless this same category becomes a pivot around which most social processes take shape, like the genesis of a religious community because in the eyes of migrants, these sacred spaces represent indeed a “home away from home”. I presented the debates on the organisational features of religious communities, in order to show how internal and external factors may influence their structure. Being de facto social constructions that are re-established in a new context, religious institutions go through changes. Both the “sacred and secular” needs that emerge from migration process may decisively influence their development. Another key theme that I presented is the genesis of an informal welfare, i.e. a set of supports that communities are able to provide for their members’ wellbeing. I also proposed methodological tools for trying to explain the role and function of such welfare, often overlooked by the literature. I moved on to debate how religion takes other directions, influencing civic and political participation. The debates around such questions are still fragmented but nevertheless they show interesting insights on how religion can transform and develop, promoting skills and civic practices that are often overlooked. Then I presented a heuristic that has been increasingly adopted and is able to explore more precisely migrants’ religious experiences. This perspective can provide a micro-level focus on most of the theoretical debates on religion and migration. The lived religion approach can indeed help in giving more rooted accounts on migrants’ religion. Overall, we also see the need to examine with greater precision how religion becomes part of migrants’ subjectivity, a theoretical issue that is becoming increasingly central within contemporary migration studies despite how religion is never considered as a sphere of agency development.

My thesis thus advances a theoretical framework that merges some key themes selected by various researches on religion and migration; there are macro-issues typically explored within such debates, like ethnicity, the institutional forms of religion, transnationalism and welfare, and there is also a focus on the micro level, thanks to which I will be able to go into the details of each key area, in order to examine analogies and differences that my case studies present. These two levels require to be taken into account given that within Churches there are believers who aren’t just reproducers of predetermined religious models. In the next chapters I move on to empirically discuss the role of religion in the lives of migrants both in Milan and London, also exploring the features of religious communities as they emerge from their involvement.

Chapter 4. The soul of the city: a spiritual geography

Physically, an ethnic Church takes shape starting from a specific space, where migrant believers can create a sanctuary, organise a prayer group around it, regularly meet and officially begin to mould a community. In this direction, focusing on these geographical landmarks, allows us to introduce and elaborate the wide range of meanings associated to immigrant spirituality; indeed, how and in which ways new believers obtain and set up a space, are necessary starting points to explore the role of religion in their lives, both in London and Milan. In light of this, the *spatial dimension of the sacred* is the first interpretative key to understand the genesis of an ethnic Catholicism.

First of all, as the literature on this issue shows, migrants' activism is changing the local religious landscape, giving new cultural meanings; secondly, their involvement contests also a net division between sacred and secular as well as private and public faith (Knott, 2015). Furthermore, today religion has regained a new visibility in a specific spatial context, i.e. the city, where globalization processes take diverse, overlapping and contradictory local forms. In this regard, global cities have become pivotal arenas in which post-secular trends are being developed and where borders between sacred and secular are more porous and evanescent (Garbin, Strhan, 2017). In this sense, migrants are among the main protagonists of this trend. As pointed out by Vasquez and Marquardt: "Cities become places where those displaced by globalization (...) try to make sense of their baffling world by mapping and remapping sacred landscapes through religious practices like making pilgrimages, holding festivals, and constructing altars, shrines, and temples" (2003: 45).

According to Kong (2001), to methodologically disentangle this complex field of interests, one should recognise two starting macro-approaches; the first, more descriptive -*the aesthetics or poetics*- which details the new spiritual cartography of contemporary societies; the second, more interpretative -*the politics*- which explores social and political implications of these spatial dynamics. In this chapter, taking example from this proposal, a first aim is to develop it, and then advance a different *methodological approach*, tailored on my case studies. Therefore, I progressively present and discuss a range of different perspectives, that together are able to grasp the various spatial dynamics that characterise ethnic churches, both in London and Milan; the central idea is that space, per definition something which is fixed, needs a *dynamic-methodological approach*, above all in the case of migrants' religious activism. Indeed, I explore the importance of shifting the perspective around and within the space, including entry/exit practices, as well as the gradual transformation of a single place. In particular, I discuss the following perspectives:

- The genesis of a sanctuary. I explain how foreign believers "take a place", exploring the *internal rewriting* of native religious spaces activated by migrants.
- The movements of migrants towards a sanctuary. In this case, I introduce the concept of *urban pilgrimage*, exploring how sanctuaries produce a new form of urban mobility.
- The movements of people outside the sanctuary. In this case, I debate the issue of *urban processions*, exploring how migrants move out of invisibility expressing a specific form of visibility.
- The internal arrangement and "harmonisation". In this case, I introduce some "*place-making practices*" of foreign believers after "taking a place". I start to explore also how they shape ethnic churches.
- The *cartography* of churches. I explore where they are located in cities.
- The *negotiation* of a space. In this case, I debate how native Catholicism has to negotiate the presence of a new migrant Catholicism.

In the last section, I provide a theoretical summary scheme -that I have inductively elaborated from the fieldwork- useful to approach immigrants' religious activism, which in turn could be useful for other similar cases. To this purpose I formalise the methodological approach that I have progressively assembled for grasping the various spatial dynamics that characterise ethnic churches.

Finally, I outline as a new body and type of believers -*an urban mobile population* - de facto has generated *transnational spaces* both in London and Milan. In this sense, native parishes are facing a new challenge. From here, I underline the need to elaborate the subjectivities of this “body” in order to grasp more precisely meanings and functions of Ethnic Churches.

4.1 Building an (in)visible sanctuary

In order to grasp immigrants’ religious involvement, it’s important to focus on the *genesis* of ethnic Churches, given how having a sacred space available is the main condition for building a religious community. In this sense, the spatial dimension of worship opens to specific interpretive perspectives in the case of immigrant Catholicism.

Indeed, unlike other faiths, as Islam or Hinduism, in public space ethnic churches are often invisible to common perceptions, which have already incorporated the presence of Christian denominations in urban contexts. The typical religious architecture of Christianity already and historically belongs to ordinary cognitive experiences, influencing our conceptions of space. In this sense, in the case of Catholic immigrants, we can observe the same religious spaces, but with different “*content*”. This is why we don’t often take into account the vitality of ethnic churches. From the outside, what happened within isn’t directly perceivable.

Moreover, immigrants in theory already have local native Churches they can attend so the request for a separate space and time of worship represents a variant from the ordinary ecclesial pattern. Indeed, immigrants can already find established local Catholic parishes, but they look for an intimate place where they can pray and practice rituals in their mother tongue. Here we can observe an “*internal rewriting*”, given that migrants within local parishes create their own ethnic Church, providing new cultural and religious meanings to the autochthonous catholic panorama. Thus, from below, immigrants try to negotiate their presence and this kind of “multiculturalisation” may take many forms and directions.

A first crucial step is for them to bring ethnic symbols into local spaces. In this sense, I start by showing two photos collected during the fieldwork in Milan and London:



This picture shows “El Señor de los Milagros” - the Christ of Miracles- venerated in Peru; this is the main religious celebration for Peruvian believers, annually officiated with a famous procession. This image is present in Milan’s Church of S. Stefano, the official headquarter of the Latin American believers, and the place where a confraternity dedicated to this devotion is based (La Hermandad del Señor de los Milagros).

The second picture was taken in St. Anne's Church (Vauxhall), where the Latino chaplain has its official headquarter in the city of London. Also here, the Latin American believers have built their sanctuary:



We can see the same image in two different churches and cities. Indeed, immigrant believers start an internal process of redefinition, which is analogous for all the ethnic catholic communities that were taken into consideration for this research, both in Milan and London. Moreover, during the fieldwork, I visited many churches typically attended by foreign believers, and this kind of “multiculturalisation” characterises their internal architecture. It’s a recurrent pattern: if we pay attention to every interstice, often we can recognise how migrants have brought their holy images and objects, just like in the two photos below.

In the first, we can see the Divino Niño, also known as Divino Niño de Bogotá, which is another important religious image for Latin American Catholics; the second picture shows a cross built by Salvadoran community in order to create a small chapel where remember their origins (both pictures have been taken within the cathedral of St George's, archdiocese of Southwark):



Back to Italy: in the picture below shows another sanctuary built by Ecuadorans within the Church of S. Stefano:



A sanctuary that over time gave birth to a consolidated prayer group:



Finally, back in London, this picture shows another holy image:



In this photo we see “*Our Lady of Aparecida*”, a sacred image venerated by Brazilian Catholics (it’s also the main patroness of Brazil). This statuette is jealously kept in the main office of London’s Brazilian Chaplaincy; normally, the statue is shown during the most important celebrations and processions. It was brought from Brazil, and it officially gives the name to the same Brazilian chaplaincy. Moreover, within the church where the community is based, behind the altar, worshippers have added another symbol, a flag, in order to mark their presence:



Next to the Brazilian one there is also a Irish flag, given that before the presence of Brazilians, the Church was for a long time mainly attended by Irish Catholics, who created their community during the mass migration to England. Now Irish have moved away, but a new community has taken their place. So we have an image that serves as an introductory depiction of the long history of ethnic Catholicism in London, from old to new migrants. In this regard we should underline how historically religion has been an important point of reference for newcomers.

During the fieldwork in Milan and London I visited various churches in different parts of the cities collecting several photos -like those shown above- depicting sacred images and objects brought by foreigner believers. In this sense, catholic migrants bring new symbols and build new shrines to celebrate their origins, de facto transforming native Churches in *transnational spaces*. Thus, through specific artefacts, immigrants try to re-build a collective identity in a foreign land; a centre where they can feel and imagine a cultural continuity: a place where an ethno-religious community can assemble. From below, this also represents a crucial way for claiming a role within local Catholicism.

4.2 Urban pilgrimages: what's going on?

As I showed, immigrants have brought their sacred objects, placing them as markers of their presence. In many churches of both cities these shrines have in time become meeting points where immigrants come to pray; in turn, this process has progressively generated a sort of “*urban pilgrimage*”.

Indeed, mostly during the weekend -but also on weekdays- both in Milan and London it’s possible to observe this “silent” process: migrants move from all the parts of the city -and from outside the city - to visit their shrines. Here, we can find a specific form of urban mobility, driven by a religious and ethnic belonging:

Here every Sunday comes a sea of people, from all sides; they organize themselves, with their families and friends; they take trains, buses and they wish to visit and attend their community, a great mobility that demonstrates their great religious thirst ... this church in practice has changed its profile and today it has become a “hub” for Catholic immigrants (Father Alberto, priest responsible of S. Stefano Church, Milan)

Here people comes from every part of London ... and ... I mean ... London is so huge! So huge! Latinos want to attend this church ... so, they wait for this moment ... they wait ... and finally on Sunday, but often also during the week, they come here, they take trains, the underground, busses and they come here with their families and friends, to stay in peace, here they can pray in Spanish, speak Spanish, eat their foods ... these are good reasons for moving people! The distance isn’t a problem... they wish to spend their Sunday here (Father Carlos, priest responsible St. Anne’s church, Vauxhall, London)

The presence of a specific ethno-religious space entails this incredible dynamism; indeed, during weekends flows of immigrant believers regularly travel to visit their sanctuaries.

If generally global cities like Milan and London attract several national and international tourists, or those who want to go shopping as well as people who want to have fun, religion is another significant driver of urban mobility; during the fieldwork, from the beginning, these movements have attracted my attention. A local church, from silence can turn into a lively place, attended by many people who create a renewed atmosphere, highly eventful and animated. For example, attending the church of S. Stefano in Milan for the fieldwork, an hour before the mass this space is really silent:



(Large square of S. Stefano before Sunday mass)

But, one hour later, the same space is completely transformed by immigrant believers:



(Large square of S. Stefano on Sunday around the mass time)

The same transformation takes place also in London; as commented by the Latino priest of St' Anne:

Sometimes it's funny ... really funny ... you should see the expression of the English around the church ... close to our Church there are many bus stops and train stations ... but one stop is here, in front of us, and just before or after mass ... in an hour ...or so ... the stop is full!

no space! the street is completely full ... and you can see people, you can see their expressions, they wonder: what's going on? It's funny ... you should see ... (Father Carlos, priest responsible of St' Anne Vauxhall, London)

Below, Latinos in St Anne's church, just after the mass when the street is full of believers coming out of Church:



On Sunday, immigrants travel around both cities looking for their church and community. Because during weekends, when they are free from ordinary obligations, they can finally attend a unique space, which in their perception represents a piece of their mother country, now transplanted in a local Church.

In this section, I showed how migrants, moving around city, generate a specific kind of mobility. Beyond tourism and other forms of use that characterise urban spaces, religion is another significant type of mobility. In this regard, it should be noted how analysing a religious space also requires seeing the outside of the building, and capture the dynamism around it. Moreover, this kind of mobility is particularly salient for Catholicism, given that historically this denomination is based on the model of the parish, *i.e.* a religious belonging territorially defined. In this sense, migrants travelling in the city to attend their Church -and not the one where they live officially- challenge this historical outline.

4.3 Urban processions: from invisibility to visibility

Another interesting spatial process associated to migrant sacred images and objects are the processions that are regularly officiated in both cities. In the Italian case, Filipino and Peruvian communities are truly active in this kind of urban activity. The first photo captures the procession organized by the “Hermandad del Señor de los Milagros of Milan”, a confraternity established in 1996, which since 2008 has officially become part of diocesan Confraternities in Milan. Normally, it starts from the church of S. Stefano and ends at Milan Cathedral, a route of about a kilometre, covered in six to seven hours and attended by almost 6000 people.



During this procession a holy image is carried by a sedan supported by 24 men. In the following photo we can see this holy sedan hosted in the Church of S. Stefano:



In this picture it's possible to notice how the sedan is important also beyond the procession; Catholic migrants come into the Church and wish to pray by staying in contact with it. Indeed, in the photo we can see "an easy touch", which represents a bodily experience both with God and mother country. After the photo I asked a worshipper the reason for this? And he replied to me:

Remember: when you see a Peruvian you surely find El Señor de los Milagros, wherever he is ... a Peruvian always brings this image in his heart. It's in our souls, as Catholics and Peruvians ...(...) here I can pray for my family and my relatives, in this way we can stay in touch, here I can leave my prayers for them (Peruvian believer in Milan, S. Stefano)

Below, another kind of procession, organised by Filipino believers in Milan (January 2016 where thanks to father Alessandro, chaplain of various Pilipino communities in Milan, I had the opportunity to learn more about this procession):



In this case, a procession of about an hour crosses the streets of a Milanese neighbourhood; later, Filipinos return to the Church for an official Mass. During the procession, each believer can bring her statuette of *Santo Nino* that during the year is safeguarded at home; inside their house, every Filipino Catholic normally creates a small altar, where the statuette of Santo Nino takes the central seat.

In this regard, differently from other everyday situations, through urban processions migrants may come out of the invisibility that often marks their life and their job-activities, showing themselves in a public space (see for example: Saint-Blancat and Cancellieri; 2014). In this sense, the city (though only for a moment) de facto becomes a symbolic arena, where migrants can show their identity beyond the mask that local society has built for them. In light of this, religious processions can be also framed as a way to participate host societies; if typically migrants have less entitlements and accessibility to public space, and less political resources to claim their presence, here religion becomes an arena where to present themselves, to escape (momentarily) from images (and stigmas) we have created around them.

According to Alyshia Galvez (2010) in reference to Mexican migrants and their public devotions, these holy practices have wider political implications, mostly in a context where immigrants' citizenship has become a highly contested terrain. In these moments -according to Goffman- they pass from the back-stage to the front-stage. Thanks to religion, they try to show themselves in the public arena, and it becomes a way to declare their presence in our societies, as well as a way to present themselves with a different image, far from the ordinary stigma.

Nevertheless, the issue of urban processions needs to be critically elaborated; if ethno-religious expressions are often "accepted" and sometimes also "admired", attracting our attention in public streets, until what point are they really recognised? Do they simply amount to a super-diversity, as an "aesthetics of multiculturalism", or something more? In other words, on one hand, they show a significant protagonism and activism of people who are normally excluded, on the other, it seems that their acknowledgment finishes at the end of procession. It's an ambivalent issue that I will try to explore in the course of this thesis, mostly exploring in detail what happens within ethnic churches, because migrants' protagonism follows various and overlapping paths, within and outside the same spaces.

Furthermore, processions are not always only an ethnic matter; in London, where Catholicism is a minority, and where local believers are becoming fewer and fewer, ethnic churches keep alive and sustain also traditional Catholic processions. The Brazilian community continues to officiate most of the liturgical solemnities, for example in the case of Corpus Christi as the Priest clearly stated during the celebration:



"As Brazilians, as Catholics, our role is to keep God alive ... Now we can go and carry Blessed Sacrament in our streets (...) today people walk in London for everything, for many reasons they walk ... so ... we too ... we can go and claim God" (Father Paulo, priest of Brazilian church)

Through religious participation, migrants walk the streets, showing themselves in a public space, keeping alive their memory and their ethnic-background, but they also keep Catholicism alive in urban neighbourhoods, where ancient and popular traditions, once central in communitarian life, have now become marginal. In addition, this form of "public religion", is a means to challenge the

border between sacred and secular, a way to remind how the sacred is still present and alive in our cities; in this sense, they are protagonists of this trend.

To sum up, processions can be framed under various (and contradictory) interpretative keys, like a form of visibility, an informal political tool to take part in the public arena, as well as a way to maintain Catholicism alive within global cities. One can debate on different interpretative levels, it's nevertheless important to elaborate what happens also within the sacred walls.

4.4 Taking care of God: fresh flowers

I have shown how migrants build their religious space starting from a sanctuary, often invisible from outside. I have explored how they move into the urban space to attend their church; indeed, among the many users of global cities we can find immigrant believers and their spiritual needs. I also showed how they escape (ordinary) invisibility towards a public visibility through sacred processions in urban streets. In this section I now want to enlarge the perspective, introducing another view, centred on what happens within the sacred space. Starting "from inside" it's possible to show the role of migrants as pivotal protagonists of local Catholicism.

Indeed, beyond the focus on holy images or objects, the spatial perspective needs to be better explored; for example, it should be noted how migrants have often restructured the church where they take their place. In the case of S. Stefano in Milan (Latino Church), had been partially closed for a number of years due to several structural problems; but since migrants settled there, they have restructured this church and made various renovations, opening also several lateral chapels:



(A lateral chapel recently restructured by Ecuadorans)

In this Italian case, migrants have restored and cleaned several lateral chapels. As commented by the Italian priest:

Here in actual fact they did everything. This church in the past was a disaster, previous priests did some works to transform parts of this church into a sort of historical archive ..., it

was practically no longer accessible as a church, and for long time it was also abandoned... migrants came together, and in less than a year ... you can see what they have done, now what you see has still to be finished, but if you had seen it before ... you can't imagine the difference, the side chapels have been fixed by them collecting money and they also did some structural works in their spare time... then they put their images and their holy pictures, thanks to their great efforts now it looks like a real church! (Father Alberto, priest responsible of S. Stefano Church, Milan)

Thanks to their significant efforts, like offers and free work, migrants have reopened and renewed this Church in Milan, adding also their objects and images (see photo). It's important to pay attention to how migrants, (normally) with less economic resources than native population, have (with difficulty) collected money for this reason, a great effort that shows the significance of religion in their life.

Also in London, the Latin American community in St. Anne (Vauxhall) has renovated different areas rarely used by local parishioners, like some spaces that now can be used for lunches or meetings. The Brazilian community has also completely renovated the church where they are based, which was totally abandoned by local believers; practically it had fallen into disuse and ruins (like other Churches in London):

Here we fixed everything, everything ... there was only ... only old stuff ... everywhere ... on all sides, infiltrations, bathrooms closed, rooms not available ... really, it wasn't a church ... Look now! We did a lot of work ... now it looks like a Church! Even the garden ... Have you seen it? Finally ... it's nice ... flowers, chairs, tables ... (Maria, Brazilian, secretary of Brazilian Church, St. Anne, London)

(...) During the Mass we collect money for various purposes , Brazilians are really generous, really, thanks to the donations we did a lot of works here, so ... the church was a disaster, and some Brazilian men did works here on Sunday and during the week, but ... I paid them, I mean ... I don't want to have problems, but it's incredible, before it was a disaster .. Now it's a church! (Father Paulo, priest of Brazilian Church. St. Anne, London)

In light of this, such “practical” activities express specific feelings: they want to take care of their Church, they want to feel joy, harmony and peace, mostly when they aren't committed to their ordinary obligations. Moreover, it should be noted how normally they don't have much power and space, but now, thanks to religion, they can have “something”, and they can freely express abilities and skills. In this sense, this strong involvement is not only a religious matter, but it reveals other psychological meanings associated to their migration experience.

In this sense, during the fieldwork, I have always noticed how people are often present and active “in taking care of their church”, not only for the celebration:

Me: wow ... these flowers are really beautiful!

Yes... I like ... flowers, every Church should have fresh flowers ... I remember when I was a child ... my mother ... she always bought flowers ... always (...) every week I come here, I pray, I relax a little bit ... and I take care of the flowers ... as my mother taught me ... the church has to be clean, everything should be nice in a church ... (Katherine, Colombian believer, Latin American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London)

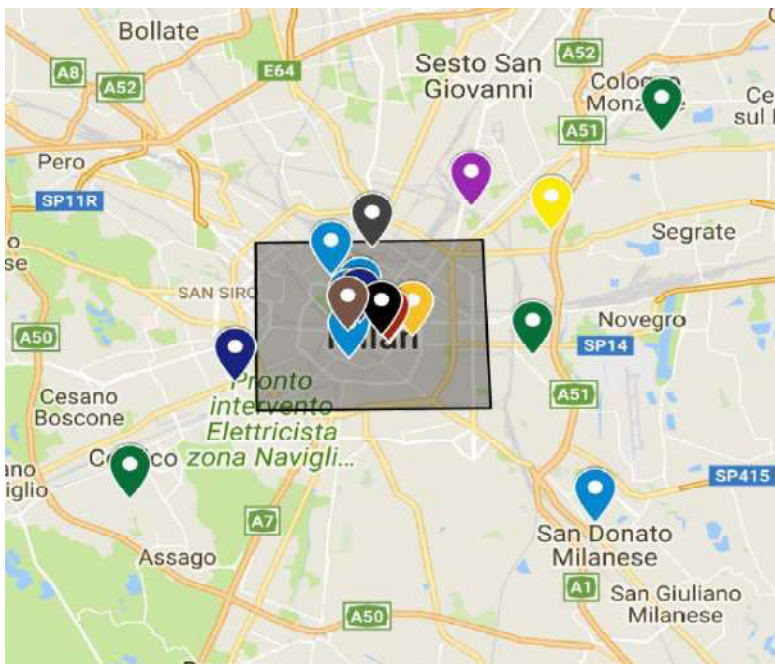
Indeed, during the fieldwork in Milan and London I observed how every Church had always fresh flowers and religious settings were very clean and well presentable; although apparently these considerations may seem marginal, they are in fact highly revealing. Indeed, immigrants' approach to space shows some of the physiological benefits that they can find in a religious involvement; they

wish to see themselves in a pleasant and comfortable place. Moreover, taking care of something through regular practices is particularly significant for those who are often marginalised and scarcely considered during their ordinary lives. Maintaining a religious space through their care gives them the idea of being engaged in something positive and constructive, keeping alive their emotions and memories. Furthermore, making a church presentable is also a way to create a sense of *respectability*; they want to present a positive image of themselves, also through the space that they normally attend. Their religious setting is their front-stage. In this sense, attending a church becomes also a moral issue, a way to express ethical principles, showing a sense of cleanliness and order where they gather (I will explore in detail this issue through the migrants' interviews). Finally, it's important to notice that by cleaning if not renovating Churches that are often marginalised (and sometimes abandoned) by local believers, migrants contribute to keeping Catholicism alive both in Milan and London. (Another significant topic that will be progressively developed in various empirical sections). Thus, in this paragraph I have discussed some "*place-making practices*" of immigrants; indeed after "having taken a place" -positioning sacred objects and images- they start to shape the context where they normally meet and pray, assembling a church where their community can develop and grow.

4.5 Urban Geography and ethnic churches

Another issue to explore is *where* ethnic Churches are positioned in these two cities; do they follow any spatial criteria? What kind of geography do they have? In this sense, it's interesting to understand where they are located within urban contexts.

In the case of Milan, to clarify their territorial distribution, a map is presented below; it shows the totality of these realities in the city:



As can be seen, most churches are concentrated in the central area of the city, which for its history is characterized by a wide and previously unused asset of religious buildings that, over time, have been given to catholic migrants, de facto becoming official ethnic churches. Indeed, Italian parishes typically possess a wide assortment of places of worship within a same parochial unit, which, due to

the secularization of Italian believers, and the demographic situation (the decrease in birth rate), today are less attended, and, in several cases, totally abandoned. As a consequence, migrants have often found their sanctuary in the central area of the city. It should be noted how these spaces are in most cases disconnected from the ordinary life of migrants, who normally live in the suburbs. In this regard it's possible to recall -and also better understand- the meaning of "urban pilgrimages" previously debated. Moreover, elaborating this concentration, with a metaphor, in the Italian case we can see a sort of "marginalization of the centre"; an oxymoron, which reveals something else:

I remember when Bishop Martini, I remember, he gave me this role, he told me: do what you want, do whatever is necessary, but please ... try to give them spaces in different parts of Milan (...) but ... in the end ... migrants are in the city centre, because there were empty churches at their disposal, I tried to ask to some local priests if they had a space ... but ... this is the situation, there were difficulties and distrust, and now Churches are here ... (Father G.Q, former head of Pastoral care of Migrants, Milan)

Although they experience religion in the heart of the city, they have practically been marginalised in this area, disconnected from their lives and more importantly from other local catholic parishes. A process that will be better elaborated and detailed further on.

In London it was impossible draw a map, due to the huge number of ethnic churches, and due to the fact that they are disseminated in every corner of the city, which is completely different from Milan, for extension, number or people, and urban characteristics. Moreover three different dioceses cover the city and each one accounts in a different way for the presence of ethnic churches. Nevertheless, also in London rarely the distribution follows the ethnic-concentration of believers; in the case of Brazilians the Church is located in an area typically inhabited by a Bangladesh population and others South Asian communities; indeed Brazilians travel from all parts of the city to visit this church.

In the case of Latin Americans, the church is only partially close to their typical residence (part of the Latin American population is settled in the centre south of the city), and the travel is easier for believers; nevertheless, most of them come from other suburbs where they live and work. In addition to this, in London there isn't a concentration like in Milan but a spatial dissemination that doesn't follow a specific criteria, as an ethnic concentration in a specific area; generally, it depends on the availability of a Church. Indeed, in Brazilian case, the Church was practically closed. In the case of Latin-American churches, in the local parish -which today sees less and less believers- is placed an international Catholic congregation that made an agreement with the diocese to create a Latin American chaplaincy.

Thus, it's possible to observe how the distribution is similar to a religious "archipelago"; a metaphor, because an archipelago generally represents a collection of islands, each of which is linked through a same religious belonging; indeed, in this case, the Catholic Church is the sea that contains a number of scattered islands.

Elaborating this issue, it should be noted that this urban cartography has another crucial implication: beyond the area where they are located, it's important to explore the kind and the "quality" of space at their disposal. In this respect, the physical connotation of sacred spaces -where they are located in the urban context, the size and characteristics of each space- is crucial for grasping the socio-religious dynamics of ethnic churches. In this sense, the availability or the lack of facilities makes it possible (or not) to exercise specific functions and performances, e.g. kitchens for meals, safe playgrounds for children, rooms for activities such as music, study or prayer, that are relevant assets to sustain the feeling of belonging and a sense of shared community.

In Milan, as mentioned before, communities are often concentrated in the central area, where there are beautiful and historical churches, full of artworks, but these spaces are less functional and useful for their activities; in this situation immigrants often find less room or facilities to organise and advance communitarian experiences:

Usually they go into free and abandoned churches in the city centre, these are ancient churches, with few spaces beyond the only chapel ... closed in a sector of the city not inhabited and frequented by tourists who usually go there for shopping ...

Thus, they don't have spaces, I don't know ... I don't know how to explain them that ... there aren't spaces, they look for spaces to organise their activities, they are really active but ... Samuele you saw how they are, some churches are old and little ... and it's really complicated ... (Father Alessandro, a responsible of pastoral care of migrants in the city of Milan)

In other words, migrants may find spaces conceived for liturgical functions only, and they try to adapt them on the basis of their communitarian activities.

In London, being the cartography of immigrant Catholicism intrinsically disseminated in various parishes of the city, communities are located within churches with more facilities: as halls or similar structures. For example, the Latin-American community shares the church with English believers and they can use a building that has a large number of equipped rooms for worship, music, study, as well as a kitchens and external courtyards:



(This is the kitchen where they cook for Sunday lunch, or where the community organises events).

The Brazilians have obtained the whole structure, given that the local English parish was practically closed; all the facilities linked to the parish are now at their complete disposal, in this way they can use spaces for all kinds of needs, as meals, parties, meetings, events, both secular and religious:



(The various rooms linked to the Church)

After the Mass, Brazilians can use all the internal (above) and external (below) spaces, activating various communitarian meetings, spending their time freely:



The *position* and the *kind of space* are also relevant perspectives to explore ethnic churches, mostly to understand how migrants “experience them”; indeed, these elements may have an influence on their activism, as the possibility to develop events or similar communitarian gatherings.

4.6 Applying for a space: a religious negotiation

As mentioned above, immigrants theoretically have already local Churches they can attend, and the request for a separate place of worship represents a variant from the ordinary ecclesial pattern. To elaborate this ethnic shift it's important to explore how it takes shape. Indeed, "demanding and obtaining" a church involves a negotiation with local diocese. Thus, this process adds another perspective: "having a space" becomes also a question of "entitlement and power", where local actors and newcomers have to negotiate a solution. In this sense, migrants' religious involvement, from below, requires a form of acknowledgment.

Normally, before definitively becoming an ethnic church, there is a long and complex transition. Typically, at the beginning, a group of foreign believers ask for a specific place where they can gather and pray in their mother tongue. This informal situation starts to attract other believers in the city, enlarging its range-action. Then, this ethnic concentration requires a solution, in order to create an official ecclesial acknowledgment (a form of institutionalisation of a collective action). To summarise: from an informal to a formal situation. Indeed, the request to have a sacred space is then managed through an evaluation process by the local diocese. This process also needs a clergy to follow their spiritual life and able to speak their language; in this regard, the local dioceses tries to find this figure within its ecclesial circuits, for example an international congregation already present -that normally has foreign clergy- as well as the local diocese who can ask to a relative counterpart -the mother country of these new believers- to stipulate an ecclesial agreement.

Then, from below, the migrants' religious activism requires a response in order to create an ecclesial continuity within the established Catholic circuit. In this sense, a transnational space needs a transnational answer, and local churches have to incorporate this internal "super-diversity". This process that affords the possibility of having a space and a regular spiritual life in mother tongue, implies an "agreement between two actors: migrants and diocese". But, in terms of power, there are different levels and positions in this relation, in other words a relation between a "host" and a "guest".

Normally, this negotiation gives birth to different ecclesial patterns; in this sense, canonical law provides and fixes different particular models. The most famous is the chaplaincy, but there are several other important outlines: like the "personal parish". Sometimes the same religious situation may remain informal, as a periodic mass in mother tongue, or informal gatherings officially recognised. With regards to my case studies, in both cities, it's possible to find various ecclesial configurations.

- In Milan, the Latin-American community has a church, which is a personal parish, shared with another Filipino community. The Milanese diocese has indeed created this (mega) ethnic church, which is a "parish without territorial borders", given that all migrants can be part of this Church. The second Filipino community is an informal community based in a personal parish, and it shares the Church with an Italian and English community. Indeed, in the past the Milanese diocese had created a personal parish for English-speaking believers, but over time Filipinos have definitively established their community here. The Ukrainian one is officially a chaplaincy, and it shares the church with an Italian community, the Salvadoran is officially an informal community, it owns a space that is based in a sanctuary, which is another ecclesial category.
- In London, we can see how Brazilians have a church, wholly at their disposal. The Diocese gave them this possibility, given that local parish was practically closed. Indeed, there were few local believers, and the church has de facto become a Brazilian church. Today it has also the head-office of Brazilian Chaplaincy of London.

In the case of Latin Americans, they are officially the main chaplaincy of London, one of the most important of the city, given the huge number of south-American catholic believers, but they share the Church with an English community.

On the one hand, these outlines should be debated from the perspective of canonical-law, given that each can provide different possibilities in terms of sacraments and religious activities. On the other, according to me, sociologically it's possible to summarise them through two main spatial patterns: "owning a space" or "sharing a space". In the first case, migrants may have a church, having the place completely to themselves. In the second case, migrants have to share the church with local believers. In turn, the second case implies the genesis of another form of negotiation: "how to share" the same church with local native community.

To sum up, migrants have to negotiate their presence, and this can follow different forms of acknowledgment. Here's what a Milanese responsible told me about this issue:

Yes ... migrants ask for a space, and then a complex negotiation starts. The diocese checks the possibility, checks the availability of a place, and also what kind of form ... It's an ecclesial issue ... There are numerous types of situation, yes, but it's a long process, we need to know if this is possible, if it is possible to have a space, and a priest ... What kind of form (...) here in Milan the situation is diverse, and it has peculiarities, there are personal parishes, there are chaplaincies, or communities can have a church for them, or others have to share with Italians ... So ... The situation is really diverse, it's an agreement ... But we must agree with migrants, diocese, local parishes ... it's not easy! (Father Alberto, responsible of Pastoral care of migrants Milan)

Also in London, their genesis is the result of a long transition:

Yes ... it's a long story ... Officially the bishop decided to create a chaplaincy here, the main office, because ... here, in this Church, there is an international congregation (The Order of Augustinian Recollects / O.A.R.) and they started to take care of Latinos ... then ... given the situation the bishop decided to create this chaplaincy, because there were many many South American believers ... And here the English priest was too old ... and the situation of this English community is ... so ... there are few believers, few, then our bishop decided to give us this possibility and now we share the church with the English ... (Father Carlos, priest responsible of St' Anne Vauxhall, London)

Here two communities share the same place, but Latin Americans are much more than native believers. Although they are guests, they are majority.

In this regard, the case of Brazilians is really significant:

Yes, officially we are a chaplaincy ... there are other communities in London, but officially we are the main Brazilian chaplaincy (...) honestly before me ... I don't know very well the story, because it is a long story ... a long transition, at the beginning a prayer group came here and then ... only Brazilians came here ... I mean ... it's only thanks to the Brazilian community that the Church is still alive, because it was closed, then the Bishop decided to give us the church officially, given the situation he decided to create a Chaplaincy... so ... there were only Brazilians and it became a Brazilian church ... (Father P., priest of Brazilian Church)

Now they have a Church at their complete disposal, they continue to share it with local believers, but they are few compared to them.

To conclude, migrants “from below” need a form of acknowledgement in the local Catholic circuits. In this sense, religion is a way to negotiate the *property of a space*. Often scholars look only at the traditionally political way to explore immigrants’ activism, but there are other ways through which they can express an *agency* and forms of collective action. Earlier, for example, I debated the role of religious performance; nevertheless, in this section it’s possible to observe how the creation of a new space is another significant perspective; beyond an external *visibility*, religion becomes a way to request also an *internal* visibility.

4.7 Conclusion: from space to subjectivity

In this chapter, I explored how Catholic immigrants have established sacred spaces both in Milan and London. Indeed, they have been able to create significant ethnic landmarks within urban contexts. In this direction, I have progressively presented various perspectives through which to grasp the kinds of spatial dynamics that characterise these ethnic churches.

Firstly, I analysed how they are rewriting local religious spaces, both through artefacts and practices, like holy-images or urban processions, as well as sponsoring a regular liturgical calendar in their mother tongue. In this sense, for Catholic migrants, it’s possible to observe a specific spatial process; indeed, they don’t actually import a new faith, but they “*re-sacralise already sacred spaces*”. It’s a different pattern from other religious processes that today can be observed within cities, as when migrants import a “new” faith (compared to mainstream panorama), sacralising and transforming secular buildings in holy spaces -“*sacralise secular spaces*”- like the case of new prayer-halls or Temples. In actual fact, catholic migrants rebuild a different Catholicism within established parishes, rewriting the local holy architecture as well as transforming marginal churches in animated places. Indeed Italian and English parishes have often in their ecclesial area of competence a wide variety of places of worship, which, given the process of secularization and the relative decrease of religious practices among native believers, today are less attended and used nowadays. But, most of all, migrants transform local parishes in *transnational* sites. Their religious practices give new “meanings” to our panorama and transcend purely borders.

Opening this reflection, in next chapters I elaborate on this activism, exploring what happens within ethnic churches. This new religious geography brings me to suggest that the issue of immigrant religious involvement should be framed like a crucial *emergent subjectivity* (see for example Saint-Blancat and Cancellieri; 2014). This will be my interpretative key. Indeed, after having discussed space, and relative spatial activities, the most important issue becomes what immigrants actually do in these spaces: how sacred practises are intertwined with migration, and mostly how this religious involvement is shaping their secular experiences in host societies.

To sum up this chapter I present a theoretical scheme that I have elaborated inductively from my reflections on space, religion and migrants:

Ethnic Churches and spatial dynamics: building a spiritual geography	
1 From inside: (1.1) genesis and (1.2) evolution	
(1.1) Genesis Taking a place	Internal rewriting of local parishes by importing holy images and objects to build an ethnic sanctuary. Metaphorically, a Russian doll: Church in a Church

(1.2) <i>Evolution</i> Making a place	Living and experiencing the space, harmonizing to the worshipers' needs, and making it adaptable and comfortable for a new community
2 From outside: two main directions, (2.1) <i>in</i> and (2.2) <i>out</i>	
(2.1) <i>In-coming:</i> Urban pilgrimages	Movements around the city towards the Church
(2.2) <i>Out-coming:</i> Urban Processions	Visible expressions of faith: going out from the Church
3 From above: (3.1) location and (3.2) negotiation	
(3.1) Spiritual Cartography	Criteria of distribution
(3.2) Negotiate a form of acknowledgment	Owning a space / Sharing a space, and other negotiations

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, this diagram is meant to address how it's possible to approach a religious space, given that it requires a dynamic methodological approach, able to grasp various spatial dynamics that take shape around the same place. In the next chapter I change the perspective, focusing on how migrants' subjectivities conceive and experience an ethnic church. In this regard, to conclude, it should be noted how the ability to create a community in a recognisable place, as well as the possibility of making it a welcoming place and characterise it with symbols that can visually inspire a sense of belonging are a first and crucial step for making evident the autonomous activism of immigrant believers: they want to express themselves in their own space, not in a local context where religious models are defined a priori.

Chapter 5. Meanings and Functions of ethnic churches

In “The Uprooted”, a classic on history of migrations winner of the Pulitzer Prize for History, Oscar Handlin labelled “*religion as a way of life*” for those who arrived in America at the time of great migration (2002:105). Indeed, religious institutions provided a refuge from the traumas of arrival and settlement, serving as a comfortable arena where migrants could find a new family, pray in their native language, rehabilitate cultural rituals and recover energies. In this chapter, I elaborate and develop some crucial aspects of this “religious way of life”.

In a similar direction, Connor (2012), in a quantitative study, has tried to identify connections between migrants’ well-being and religious participation. The aim of his study was to fill a gap in the existing literature on where migrants can find emotional and psychological support after migrating. In this sense, if on the one hand it’s commonly known how migrants may attain different forms of help through their ethnic associations, on the other hand, in the case of religious organisations these peculiarities are less known. The idea was to estimate statistically the impact of this kind of arenas on migrants’ well-being. Connor labelled the positive relation they found as a “*balm for the soul*” (Connor, 2012). Therefore, religious organisations may provide significant emotional resources. Moreover, in paper’s concluding remarks, he presents some possible directions to advance this (macro) statistical relationship, and writes that: “additional ethnographic research may also be helpful to understand why immigrant religious participation has this seemingly unique relationship with emotional well-being compared to other forms of group involvement” (2012: 150).

Thus, although religious associations don’t represent a *panacea* for all problems, it’s important to understand why and how migrants turn to religious spaces and decide to attend them in the course of their life in host societies. Therefore, thanks to a qualitative approach, i.e. interviews and ethnographic notes collected while frequenting ethnic churches both in Milan and London, and adopting a lived religion perspective, i.e. a focus on migrants’ subjectivity, I elaborate the intersections between religious involvement and migration experience. To this end, I examine the various meanings that believers typically associate to their participation to ethnic churches.

Moving from the space and relative spatial dynamics I have previously explored, the main purpose of this chapter is to progressively advance a series of perspectives emerging from migrants’ subjectivities; basically, what meanings members associate to their involvement in a religious space. In light of this, I will be able to provide an inductive-taxonomy of ethnic churches and their functions. In the next paragraph, I begin by outlining the *emotional and psychological* benefit that migrants may experience within their religious spaces. In particular, I present the role of churches as pivotal in avoid loneliness and anonymity, showing how in practice the church provides a space for surviving in a unfamiliar city.

5.1 Ethnic Church as an intermediate space vs. loneliness and anonymity

One of recurrent storylines collected during the interviews within ethnic churches both in Milan and London was a sense of loneliness. In telling their life histories, some migrants saw the Church as a significant juncture to adapt their life to a new city; indeed, during the first period of settlement they attended and used a religious space to come to terms with a sense of loneliness and emptiness. An emotional-gap, which participation Church life was able to fill.

Indeed, migration can be framed as a transition from old to new relations, from the previous social capital to the new social capital; in this direction, churches become a significant *juncture*. Thanks to qualitative interviews, I was able to identify when the relation between believers and sacred spaces was created, understanding the reasons behind this “religious strategy”. (Further on, this retrospective approach to migrants’ life courses will allow me to debate also the different

trajectories and kinds of involvement and on how the relation with a religious space can follow various paths).

In Milan -to introduce a first kind of psychological benefit- ethnic churches become a social hub for newcomers. Here's Marlene's account:

Many brothers come here for solitude, often they feel alone, here in the Church they can find a new family... Honestly today I couldn't imagine myself without the Church, I remember when I arrived, it was really hard, I knew that it was a challenge but when you realize it in practise is not so simple, your family, your relatives, your friends ... everything changes, you have to become more mature ... quickly ... suddenly you don't speak your language anymore, you don't go to your places, and you have to learn about Milan ... the underground and the streets ... and you can imagine, sometimes you feel alone... but the worst thing is when you have some free time, really, what do you do? Some friends were already here in Milan but they weren't always free, everyone has their commitments... so often you are alone ... but here in the Church I found people ... I found new friends with whom talk about everything, life, problems, here in the Church you aren't alone, here you take your time, you have friends and God ...without God I don't know how my life in Milan would be... (Marlene, Peruvian Believer, S. Stefano Milan, Latin-American Church)

Rosalie gave me a similar reason as Marlene:

I remember when I arrived ... my friends told me come here, come into the Church, here you find a family, and honestly I found a new family, if during the week you have to run ... here at least you can be free, you can talk, you can sing and pray in your language, you can chat freely and people can understand what you want to say ... normally it's difficult ... when you arrived you have to learn everything, in short time you have to learn the city, how to move, learn a new job, and when you stop you feel your energies go ... so here ... Church is like a family ... (Rosalie, Filipino believer, S.M. Carmine Milan, Filipino Church)

A similar storyline is common also in London:

I remember ... I remember... now I can laugh about it ... but at the beginning I was crying! when I arrived in London I was ... I don't know, it's strange, because you feel a need, need of something, at the beginning too many things ... finding a room in London, a room ... and a new job... so ... London is so huge ... amazing ... chaotic ... sure you feel ... so stressed and you need something, friends, someone to chat with ... this is the reason why you see many Brazilians here, you need something joyful ... to be happy, and when I arrived here (the church) everyone was so friendly... so friendly ... where else can you find the same things? I started a new life here... (Patricia, Brazilian believer, St. Anne London, Brazilian Church)

Answers like these were very frequent. For example, during the fieldwork in the Brazilian Church a typical expression used by believers that I learned was: “*saudade*” (i.e. homesickness). Indeed, starting a new life -even more so in global cities like Milan and London- also implies feeling a sense of solitude, nostalgia and emptiness that the church and its members can help to fill. A “familiar metaphor” frequently appears during the interviews, and it's possible to observe how Churches provide a reliable setting to establishing relationships beyond the labor market and ordinary obligations, giving the chance to increase their social capital. Religious communities become a sort of urban social hub, where newcomers can find mutual recognition and stable relations.

Moreover, a familiar language combined with a common cultural atmosphere are crucial reasons for attending this kind of place, where a new chance to enhance relationships intersects many symbolic

stimuli. In this sense, the following words from the responsible of Salvadoran community in Milan are really clear; she has a long history, has contributed to the birth of this church, and has seen how people turn to the religious community in order to survive in Milan:

As I told you, I have a long experience, surely in our community you can find psychological supports, people are not only “working hands”, and when they arrive here all people feel this sense of “something that was lost”, it’s normal, we are travellers, but you need something to forget about it, something strong, Salvador isn’t Milan, and when you arrive you really feel this break, firstly homesickness and then a sense of loneliness starts to rise, for this reason we are always here ... I’d say, I have seen a lot of brothers and sisters, they need emotions and feelings, all Salvadorans needs emotions to recover from daily difficulties, and this is the reason for being here, because we welcome people, who else welcomes people in Milan? We’re happy to be here and I’m satisfied to see happy people here. (Moran, leader and responsible of Salvadoran community in Milan)

This community represents a “little Salvador” for migrants, between the “old” Salvador and the new city of Milan. An *intermediary* place.

Similarly, in the course of the fieldwork in London, one of the first interviews was with Yolanda, a leader of Latin-American Church, who has lived in London for more than 15 years. The first thing she told when I met her was:

She: Samuel, do you Know London?

Me: Hem ... I haven’t been here very long...

She: Ah, good, now you can learn more ... you will learn how to live and work in London, is so huge, everyone runs, many people ... when you arrive you have to learn about London, it’s not easy, all day people travel ... they run ... bus ... another bus, and there’s things you have to do every day, travel and work ... and when you arrive home ... you sleep! And ... when you wake up the same ... travel, work and sleep, now do you understand? People feel ... often you feel lonely and your mind ... your dreams ... you starts to imagine, but ... then Sunday comes, and your life changes here, it’s amazing, for many people this is the city centre, here people find a new family, a real family, we cook ... we eat together, we pray together, we have coffee together, we spend Sunday together ... (Yolanda, leader of Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London)

It’s clear how Sunday is a way for finding a familiar space, for living relations and avoiding loneliness. But, elaborating this atmosphere, participation is also a way *to exist*, a way to escape from the anonymity experienced in a new context. Often people feel this sentiment of “being invisible”, “not recognised”; in the Church migrants can try to recover, and feel that they exist for someone even in a new society:

You know it's not easy, at the beginning I was alone, or better ... I knew someone, I had friends, but you know how situations evolve, often you don’t have the time to meet people, and the others at the end don’t have so much time for you ... it’s normal, everything depends on the kind of job you have, or where you find a room, and so ... often ... you feel lonely... but the Church is different ... in any case you can meet someone there, there is always someone ... and you feel less alone knowing that there is a place where you can go and meet someone and you can talk to freely ... and people see you ... I remember a day, my birthday ... my family was in Ecuador ... and here I found my friends...it was beautiful, I as if I was with someone ... someone to celebrate my birthday with ... (Jeanine, Ecuadoran believer, S. Stefano Milan, Latin-American Church)

In this case, the chance of share a birthday -an important celebration- within the Church provides an emotional support to this member; as she says: “*people see you*”, the first (human) form of recognition. To this regard, thanks to a long experience, the Brazilian priest can express clearly some of these feelings:

Clearly Brazilians try to be strong, but ... Samuele do you know what this means? ... when you arrive and everything has changed? The Church represents a place where you can feel at home. Here is the only place where someone asks you: how are you? But not superficially, people are really interested in you, they really want to know ...

Do you know what it means when someone calls you by your name? Or ...what it means to be accepted ... these things are exceptional, where you can feel the same emotions? Many Brazilians are anonymous at work, you are like a number ... and can you imagine?... you can't speak freely ... of course, with your telephone you can call so many people in Brazil and London, but talk ... face to face with someone ... where?

In the church you aren't a number, you are a person, and for Brazilians this is really like a gift, outside ... I don't know ... God gives you something special ... here you take your time, you take a coffee after Mass ... with your brothers and sisters (Father P. Priest of Brazilian Church, London)

So, a church gives the impression of a comfortable space where to feel recognised, accepted and welcomed; emotions rarely experienced in daily lives and job activities. Speaking face to face with a person, being called by your name, being greeted, are all elementary emotions, often taken for granted, but for a migrant they are significant supports in a foreign land. The idea of Church as a surrogate of one's family represents a recurrent narrative; to this regard, below I show a photo taken in Milan, within Latin American church:



“Holding hands” is a recurrent practice during celebration, it represents a physical expression of the feelings discussed before; “being in touch and united” shows how “*you never walk alone*”.

In this direction, for London I quote a note from my diary about the Brazilian approach to new-arrivals:

I don't speak Portuguese, but I think I understand something, towards the end of Mass the priest said something about someone, and a person went toward the pulpit ... but then I didn't understand what he said... at the end of the celebration, I asked Maria what happened

and she told me: at the end of every mass the priest always ask: is there a new believer? She said it's normal, if there is a new member he can introduce himself to the community, in this way the other believers can meet him, and he can start to know someone (...) (Field diary, London, March, 2019)

This kind of practice is really significant for it expresses the comfortable atmosphere that migrants can find and that facilitates the chance of creating relationships. In this sense churches become an intermediary place and soften the impact with the host society.

To summarise, in this section I have explored how religious membership addresses to some critical issues embedded in the experience of migration, such as the lack of relations, loneliness and a sense of anonymity, providing significant psychological benefit; but these issues need to be better elaborated. Feelings not always affect migrants in the same way and in the same moment; other emotions and tensions associated to their stories and experiences can indeed intersect their religious involvement.

5.2 Ethnic Church as a space of resilience

Here I draw from another recurrent storyline on the emotional, psychological and relational dynamics associated to religious participation, presenting a more dynamic approach than the previous one.

In this sense, tensions and problems are questions that migrants may face not only during the first moment of arrival and settlement; difficulties and anxieties often can emerge over time. Therefore, initially migrants dispose of mental forces, hopes and aspirations that can help them to face emotional pressures as well as forms of job exploitation. Problems often arise later, when migrants start to feel that their energies have been consumed (or when new problems suddenly emerge). This is the reason on why the term “stress” is useful in providing a diachronic idea of something generated and accumulated over time. In addition, in the case of migrants it should be remembered that problems aren't only “local” but often have a “transnational” profile, due to the tensions generated by the dislocation of family. In this sense, a migrant can feel different kinds of pressure from the mother country, to achieve results and send remittances, as well as from the host society, in adapting their life to new cultural and economic expectations.

To introduce this issue, I quote an interview with the chaplain of the Ukrainian Church in Milan; a space often frequented by migrant woman who work as familiar assistants, a very common occupation in Italy:

Managing migration is never an easy thing, the beginning isn't easy but neither is the aftermath nor the part after that...there are many dangers that immigrants have to face...and to which many don't pay enough attention ...because there's lots of Ukrainians who after some years, even just ten, they often feel they no longer have the physical strength to continue working, I'm speaking of the women for example, who do jobs that are physically and emotionally tough, but all the same they try to get by, they do little jobs like filling in for or helping other Ukrainians...they'll try and stay here in order to find resources and to sustain them (...) There are also other difficulties, because the distance from home will always be an issue, aside from the fact that many have problems in the places where they work, because these are tough jobs, and to these other problems coming from their home country can add up...for example the problems they might have with their children, health problems of their relatives and other social problems at various levels, and this has a very strong influence...I.e. problems arise that concern you but you're too far to deal with them...and these problems weigh on you...and from this you can understand how

often the community, and the priest, become a point of reference and often he is the only one...actually I'd say in Milan we are the only point of reference 90% of the time. (Father I.K, Ukrainian priest, Milan)

From his long experience, the Ukrainian Father is very clear in showing the range of problems that may arise over time. In particular, from this quote it's possible to debate two kinds of tension that typically can stress migrants: the demanding jobs that consume physical and psychological energies, and the issue of familiar dislocation, that can generate transnational tensions.

In particular, demanding jobs involve strong emotional pressure. Indeed, at the same time migrants have to maintain their position and manage the stress, just as a Colombian believer told me in London:

You know ... we do the same things every day ... wow ... and often we don't have any timetables ... it's usual for our job, generally: early in the morning or late, when offices close, you can't work during the day! I mean ... if you work early in the morning you have to get up early ... and if you work after closing time ... you finish late (...) and if you are "a new guy" (smiles) it becomes hard, the worst schedule is only for you ... only for you ... I remember ... I worked in the evening and then in the morning, what can I say? You can't complain... You're in London ... there are thousands of people ready to work ... I remember ... every day was so stressful, now I changed my timetable but ... it's not easy (...) here I found God and my friends, so ... I come here, we meet to pray, we have a group, and then we have a coffee, we stay together, it's my routine, you have to work during the week but then I wait for the Sunday, It's a way ... to find energies, a way to have new feelings, a different life... (Alejandro, Colombian believer, S. Anne, Latin-American Church, London)

Many migrants in London say they are "cleaners" and this is a recurrent theme; London is an ideal-type of new trends in global economy, like the wide range of services where "reach-jobs" are intrinsically associated to "poor-jobs". In this regard, working hours and demanding tasks over time test the energies of workers. Attending a Church is a way to defend themselves from this pressure. Moreover, family tensions also have implications, as Carmen, the leader of a prayer group in Milan, told me about family situations of some believers:

I have a good experience, I have seen so many people in my group (a prayer group) and many times I have heard about the same problems, I can tell you that it's not easy to live without your family, obviously, but it's hard ... at first ... when you arrive certainly you think about your family, but in a certain way, with bitterness but with strength and courage, at the same time... thoughts about your family give you strength and homesickness, but when the time goes by, and you don't see them for a long time or you see them sometimes during the holidays but not always ... you realize that your life is really changing ... and you change without your family ... as you know a family reunification requires a lot of time ... permits, documents, money ... If you just think that many people see their children or brothers or sisters growing up away from here, and if a problem happens where are you? Are you able to do something? How can you say something? You help them by sending money... but you can't send emotions ... you can telephone, you can use Skype ... but emotions are emotions ... and the distance stresses you, this is the reason why people come here, here you can talk about it, we are all mothers of someone ... we are all sisters or brothers of someone, you can share your problems... (Carmen, group leader, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin-American Church)

Family dispersal is a critical topic, and most of all "managing emotions across borders" is a challenge; recalling the Ukrainian Father:

You can't cry ... how could you? Often you can't show your relatives that you have problems, for them ... here is like "America" ...it's understandable but often for women it's difficult... (Father I.K, Ukrainian priest, Milan)

People have to manage “two faces”, two images between the sending and receiving country. They have to learn how to control emotions that at the same time these two social settings may generate; from a psychological point of view it often becomes a challenge, and religion is a pivot where to recover.

Also in London, a leader of a prayer group (internal to the Latin American church) told me:

(...) You can't take a flight when you want ... There are problems you can't face... you can't ... here in my group we share problems because we can freely speak ... here you can sit, have a coffee and every week we share Jesus, the Bible and emotions, but when people talk about family... so... you can see family in their eyes ... people have many problems, they are stressed, they have relatives in their country but they are here ... and ... I mean often you can't say 'I'm stressed', you can't cry ... If you have problems ... you can't give up ... often you have to control your emotions (...) on Saturday or Sunday we can pray, we start from the Bible ... it's a way to have a new relation with Jesus, to take your time, to relax (Natalia, Colombian Believer, St. Anne, London, Latin-American Church)

In this case -a religious group- religion and migration are intertwined during the “bible-sharing”; members can freely share their emotions, creating a sort of “informal focus-group”. In this way believers can relax and recover energies.

In this section, I have explored how beyond the role of intermediation at the arrival, the fieldwork gives the idea that religious spaces are diachronically intertwined with migrants' everyday experiences. Furthermore, this suggests that churches are *spaces of resilience*, where people can continuously mediate and cushion tensions associated to an unfamiliar place, stressful family dynamics as well as demanding jobs. This concept, namely a space of resilience, introduces the perspective that religious spaces are centres where migrants can regularly recover from adversities. In the next section I develop this issue through an additional picture and interpretation.

5.3 Ethnic church as a space of resistance against discrimination, stigma and exclusion

In this section I introduce and analyse another significant storyline collected during the fieldwork, debating how an ethnic church can represent a *space of resistance*. Indeed, attending religious spaces -sharing perspectives and representations of its members- and collecting interviews, allows me to introduce the concept of resistance, which in turn needs to be theoretically distinguished from the previous one: i.e. resilience.

Previously I have explored how a church becomes a space where people can amortise stress and tensions; in this sense, resilience typically is conceptualised through a “more passive” perspective; representing the idea of something (like a space) able to “undergo tensions without changing”. Resistance, instead, offers the idea that migrants can try to negotiate more actively the various structural dimensions they face in ordinary life. Indeed they may activate themselves in order to bypass tensions and troubles, for example activating *alternative* practices or ideas as well as sharing information and tactics inherent migration policies. In this direction, migrants within religious spaces may try to resist “social hegemonic structures”, generating a series of micro-acts of surviving. However, this perspective needs to be better conceptualised.

For a long time now, the notion of resistance (both in common and academic debates) has been generally associated with direct political actions; in this sense, Scott¹¹ (1989) is very clear in discussing the use of this concept for contemporary social theory: “Descriptions and analyses of open political action dominate accounts of political conflict. This is the case whether those accounts are presented by historians, political scientists, journalists, statesmen, or leaders of popular movements” (1989:33); on the contrary, to better conceptualise it, he has introduced the notion of everyday forms of resistance, as acts or tactics that “subordinate and marginal people” put into action to resist in front of structural pressures. Metaphorically, “subordinate” people aren’t so “subordinate”, and they are able to resist, with imagination and ability, to social pressure. Resistance, in turn, can assume several aspects, for example “gossip, slander, the rejection of demeaning labels, the withdrawal of deference” (1989:37). In this regard, I would also like to empathise how religious spaces and practices were hardly ever mentioned within this frame. (Here, for example, it’s possible to find the challenge of methodological atheism introduced at the beginning of this thesis, which has prevented the possibility of studying and collecting data on religious activism when interrelated with wider social issues).

According to Scott’s conceptualisation of resistance, I present accounts of how migrant believers try to face structural pressures associated to low-paid and exploitative jobs, dominant stereotypes and migration policies (e.g. the issue of legal status). To introduce this perspective, I recall my interview with the Ukrainian priest:

The community is also a moment in which they can talk about their struggles...it’s not just a place for celebration, the place of worship, of the liturgy, it’s not just that...people come here for various and different reasons, to speak, to tell their stories, to be listened and to listen to others, because it’s often pretty hard for them, I think there’s few Italians who know what it’s like to be close to an elderly person with Alzheimer’s, who stays awake all night, and maybe yells and screams, or there are others who are mistreated, or exploited because they aren’t paid what they are due or because they aren’t even given a decent meal while at work...and so on...but then it all depends on the experience each one has had, which is always different, I mean it can be positive...there are families who greet you properly...but it can also be less positive, or even negative, like when they treat you like a slave...so the community becomes important because here you can have your time, be free, speak to people, in order to share and talk about your problems, in a life that’s often made of suffering! (I. Krupa, Ukrainian priest Milan)

Working as a caregiver may generate several tensions, firstly on one’s “image”. Indeed, it should be remembered how many migrants normally face downward mobility, from a previously middle-class position towards a new working class position. In this sense this economic transition represents also an “intimate journey”. Therefore, they start to organise a new “self” and churches represent a space where they can try to create a new identity.

Moreover, as I have just discussed, in the workplace, people have to show a good image, but at the same time this generates tensions, given the energies that can be consumed. In this regard the church is a way to soften pressures but also a *strategy to escape* from this image, and try to build *another setting*:

You cannot give up, you cannot give up for yourself... for your family, but it’s not easy, you are always in the situation where you’re required to be careful, you can’t lose what you have, what you have achieved, often it’s not an easy job, but you tend to forget it because you have to do it, energies are put to a test, desires often have really challenged, here in the

¹¹ I want to thank Michal Garapich for helping me; his long research experience with Polish communities in London allowed me to better frame this phenomenon (Garapich, 2016a; 2016b).

Church at least you take your time, you can breathe and recharge the energies you have consumed during the week ... within our groups we share the bible but these moments become a space to talk ... there are people who have the same jobs, the same commitments, and someone talks about the place where they work ... every Italian family is different, not all are wonderful, on the contrary... not all Filipinos are lucky, but then ... we do other things, you forget it, because here ... is another situation, we get away from everything ... here we do different things, we take our time, we sponsor several activities and events ... so ... it's different here, this is the reason why Filipinos love to come here ... (Aris, Pilipino believer, Filipino Church, S. Stefano, Milan)

As know, most of Pilipino migrants work for Italian families, and some stigma is associated to their job-conditions (as that of being a good and quiet worker). An image that they undergo, but at the same time they have to use it in order to maintain their job-position. This produces a stressful condition, and they can try to avoid this “contradiction” within religious groups. Therefore, on one hand, they can share their condition, but on the other hand a Church represents mostly an alternative social setting for them, where to escape from everyday situations, and where to start another life. In London many believers gave me similar representations:

*I work in a restaurant near the city centre, in reality ... in my life ... I've never cooked (he laughs), but ... here in London I learned this job ... but I mean ... you don't need a degree to cook chicken or salad... you know what they eat ... nothing special. But from morning till late evening I live in a small kitchen ... four meters ... you always breathe fried air, all day, and clothes smell like chips (we laugh) you have a shower and still ...smell of fried fat ... and it's so steaming hot inside, your back ... and it's not easy with colleagues, don't think people sing and laugh behind tables, we argue... if someone makes a mistake, he can't say it, he can't, you're afraid, you don't want to lose hours (working hours), you know how many people I've seen in this place?(...)
But on Sunday I come here, finally I don't have to wear my uniform, that stupid dress, I don't take orders from anyone, no one can tell me what I have to do ... A salad, two sides, half chicken ... a medium cooked ... without pepper ... (we laugh) I come here, I can finally sit down, I can speak without checking my watch, I don't have to check my time, no pressure.. so here is another life, you pray and then we have a coffee, lunch and we do lots of things, often we organise parties ... like normal people during the weekend... (Antonio, believer, St. Anne, London, Brazilian Church).*

From Antonio's words it's possible to discuss some significant topics. Indeed, given the types of jobs -mainly in service economy- demanding tasks are required. Moreover, normally informal pressures outside employment contract increase, as the previous case of women who work within families, where the care provided can be emotionally demanding; or in the case of restaurants, where hours non-negotiated are required outside official timetables. In addition, employees in these conditions are rarely protected by job contracts and associations like trade unions. On the contrary, arrangements happen in a “grey-area” between official and unofficial.

In this sense, within the sacred walls, migrants can take off their working mask, “the uniform” (see Antonio), and try “to dress” their true identity. Indeed, it's possible to see how religious spaces represent a site where people can defend themselves from everyday adversities, where they are able to renegotiate the images that local society tend to fix upon them. Practically, churches serve as a *setting* where to escape from structural pressures and *freely act*. It is a social-space where sponsor various activities, not driven “from above”.

Moreover, in this setting migrants can also exchange information about how to navigate among other structural dimensions, as migration policies:

(...) Don't worry, they are smart, they are smart on these things, if there is a problem ... they find a solution, I mean ... if someone needs something ... he starts to ask how and where, if people need a room or a new house or things like that because they need information for a family reunification... you know how these legal issues work in Italy ... complicated and absurd but they start to exchange information, here they can surely find a solution, here is like an anthill (he laughs) ... they cling to everything, they ask me or they ask someone with experience or they ask me if I know someone ... it's typical ... people try to survive in their situation ... (Father Alessandro, chaplain of the Filipino community and responsible of pastoral care of Migrants, Milan)

With a metaphor, ethnic churches are shown to be something like an “anthill”, a privileged site where to exchange possible solutions, and try to find “smart” results.

In this direction also in London members act to find solution for surviving in the city:

(...) you know, people need helps for applications (speaking of visas) there are many ways, but generally people need helps, they exchange information on visas, how to apply ... it's not easy ... I mean ... you have to wise up... I remember with my relatives ... what kind of visa? Student visas are often a solution, but there are several requirements ... because they know (police) how many migrants become irregulars after their student visa expires, but it's a solution ... and you have to understand how ... what kind of study, where ... how to get information...but be sure, people here get the hang of these things ... (Lucia, Colombian Believer, responsible of a prayer group, St. Anne London, Latin-American Church)

Thanks to Lucia I had the possibility to share and understand more about this topic with some members of her group and other friends that regularly attend the Church on Saturday and Sunday. In this direction Churches serve as a space where to find solutions and information:

(talking about irregular immigrants) yes.. so ... I think ... many people don't have a visa, I mean ... they have visas but then ... you know ... visas expire and they remain, it's normal, it's the rule... but then ... (she smiles) a new life starts and they need to know how to move into London, where they can work and live, find rooms, things like that, where to meet friends I mean .. here people can find friends, relations and information, so ... they can live ... (Katherine, Colombian Believer, member of a prayer group, St. Anne London, Latin-American Church)

As pointed out by Menjívar in her study (2006), religious organisations are pivots around which migrants negotiate their legal positions. Mostly in the case of irregulars, churches create a “legal limbo”, a border zone where they can act and resist (further on I will debate in detail the issue of irregular immigrants, providing accounts on their life within ethnic churches).

In the literature, the adjective “resistance” is mostly associated to political dimensions, as when people organise mobilisations or public protests. Here I adopt this concept in order to show how ethnic churches represent a way to negotiate structural dynamics and there are many reasons to emphasise this concept. Firstly, one should be reminded of the situation that they typically experience: *accepted* in labour market -under certain conditions- and *rejected* as “full citizens”, as in refused their social and political rights (see Ambrosini, 2014). In this sense in ethnic churches they experience a different atmosphere, not dominated by the economic tempo, which makes them simple workers and subject to directives. This is particularly evident when their narratives give accounts on a concept as “time”. Indeed, by allowing them to escape from everyday schedules, churches provide them with an alternative calendar. Secondly, religious arenas show how migrants have agency; churches are spaces where they create and share information in order to face their “secular” experiences, including how to “redirect” the implications of migration policies. In this

sense, it's possible to observe a series of micro-acts capable of generating a safe-haven where migrants can defend themselves from various structural pressures. In the next section I continue to develop this perspective, providing another interesting picture.

5.4 Ethnic church as a space for an informal social mobility

In this section, to explore migrants' religious activism, I will take inspiration from the "Weberian approach". According to his theoretical framework, more focused on the individual implications of membership, I analyse how religion enters into migrants' subjectivities in a dynamic way. Indeed, starting from defence or resistance, participation may follow several other paths, leading to a proactive dimension. In this direction, I explore a kind of "benefit" which is often underestimated: beyond spiritual needs, migrants within churches can find another significant resource, often hard to find outside sacred walls, *i.e. a particular form of "social mobility"*.

By elaborating migrants' storylines, it emerges how ethnic churches can provide a peculiar type of psychological benefit, that I categorize as *cognitive*. As we shall see, within religious spaces members can develop abilities and skills that at the same time reinforce their self esteem and broaden their action range. Indeed, regular participation in this alternative social setting can help members to develop new roles. For example, the possibility of being actively involved in a group, and more importantly the chance of becoming its leader, are important gratifications against stressful and very often low-skilled experiences experienced in their day jobs; below I quote some clear evidence of this aspect:

As far as I have understood from my experience with them (Filipinos), religious activism is an important feature of their associative life... During the week they are very busy in their work but during the weekend they seem to be reborn, they find the spaces that they habitually don't have... How to say... Their "subconscious" is reactivated. Here the community is very active and well organized, there are many internal movements and groups... everything is well planned, they actively participate and often there are also frictions to coordinate all these activities... But not only here, they organize and they are in touch with other more distant communities to organise their events. (Father Prinky, S.M. Carmine Milan, Sri Lankan Chaplain of Filipino Catholic Church)

The words of this chaplain synthesize some of the cognitive benefits that believers can find through their religious involvement. Indeed, all ethnic churches -as I will debate in more details in Chapter six- are structured in internal groups, which in turn sponsor several religious and secular activities. Beyond these kinds of practices, in this section I discuss the meanings behind this internal activism, in particular what it cognitively provides to participants. As a matter of fact, generally every group has a president, a vice-president and other several positions: a complex organisational-chart, including internal tensions.

In this sense, migrants normally experience a stressful process of downward mobility (see previous sections). Whereas in their mother country, they might have achieved diplomas, degrees or similar educational qualifications, in receiving societies they typically start from a lower class. Indeed, in new job experiences they are often scarcely considered, framed as people without particular skills or without any ability. Furthermore, the possibility of social mobility is often a challenge. In light of this, ethnic churches can try to fill this kind of lacunae, offering spaces where new social roles can be gained, that in turn can provide a new "status".

The case of Filipinos this is truly considerable and provides a good example of internal social mobility. Indeed, often a common argument of discussion is their flourishing association life. As the

chaplain says in relation to their dynamic membership, it de facto represents a compensatory measure against the social-devaluation deriving from their employment as house workers. A religious setting provides a chance of empowerment to reverse a “reified-subjectivity”, widespread and consolidated in common perceptions; in this regard, in Italy it’s often possible to hear how “Filipinos are the best (and silent) servants”. Nevertheless, through religion, they can finally gain a new form of agency:

During the week I work in a Milanese family, close to the city centre, I’ve worked in this family from many years ... and...now I’m part of the family, I always do the same things, and it’s ok, always the same people ... the same routine... but here at the Church I coordinate a group, we do a lot of activities! At the beginning I was only a goer ... but over time I started to like it and gradually I became a responsible ... this involves many more commitments, because you have to organize people, and you have to organize events, also in accordance with the other groups, we share rooms and I have to understand when and what we can do, but I really like it ...these are satisfactions, it means I’m involved, I have responsibilities and I like it ... (Rosalie, Filipino believer, S.M Carmine, Milan, Pilipino Church)

A part from the Filipino case, during the fieldwork both in Milan and London I interviewed most of the leaders, and they gave me similar considerations; like in London:

(talking about her experience) Honestly ... in Colombia my family was wealthy, but the situation in my country ... was generally really difficult, I graduated in Physical engineering and then ... no possibilities, there are many problems in Colombia ... so ... I decided to leave ... and I arrived in London ...

My relation with religion at the beginning was ... I don’t know ... complicated (...) but after this first period everything changed ... really, I spent a lot of energies here and then I became another person, now I manage more than one group (officially she coordinates two groups), often I wonder why I do it. But it’s so wonderful, I feel alive, being a leader gives me so much energy you can’t imagine, really... I teach to a lot kids, I talk with their families, I organize loads of events, every Saturday and Sunday ... so it’s not easy, I have to email people, send messages to everyone, understand who is ready to do something this week, who in the next weeks ... what’s good and what’s not ...

(back to her previous experiences) I remember my last job, in a restaurant, every days ... often till late (now she is a teacher in a public school) ... but I didn’t care... It’s just a memory, if I finished around 2 or 3 ... Saturday I was here, o yes, I was here! really, at 9 with my kids! You can’t imagine what my energies were like ... (Mariutxy, Colombian believer, responsible of catechism, St. Anne London, Latin-American Church)

The story of Mariutxy is exemplar; religious involvement gives the opportunity to exercise energies and abilities that migrants can’t normally experience in their ordinary life. In this sense, sociologically churches are organisations, fields of relations that in turn generate groups and roles. Achieving a “position” can help migrants to *reclaim* the dignity often denied in daily life, and become a leader of a group represents in turn an honour for them.

Moreover -as I see directly from my fieldwork- it should be underlined how within ethnic churches there are leaders who manage complex activities, people who organise other people, planning and dictating a calendar; they send emails and messages to dozens of brothers and sisters, they schedule -often in coordination with other groups- programmes for using the Church during the year or to implement new activities. I’m speaking of skills and abilities which are *invisible from outside*:

(She was talking about previous experiences) *yes, now I'm officially the leader, I'm really happy, it's a wonderful activity, here I organise many events, we organise prayer groups and study sessions, also in other churches, I receive many people, they want to know what we do and I give information or they can call me (...) I send and receive emails ... I'm in touch with diocese and other parishes, I mean ... it's a way to experience faith, and people want to know why ... people today look for a deeper experience (...) but sometimes it's not easy ... trust me ... I can show you my agenda ... I can't do everything... but I love my job ... I work for God (we laugh) and it's beautiful, I'm lucky (Anne, Ecuadorian Believer; St. Anne London, Latin American, Church)*

The case of Anne is peculiar in that over time she has become a point of reference for organising prayer groups, a widespread activity within Latin American circuits. In this sense, all the ethnic churches of this study have a lively internal life, and several internal groups and leadership positions, often highly coveted.

Thus, these kinds of roles give a new status, but in turn it can involve also tensions; being such a precious “commodity”, members will strongly desire to reach it, and who exercise roles can also be in competition:

(we are talking about internal organisation) It's normal ... it's normal ... I have a long experience, ... it's so complex also for me, in the case of Filipinos it's the rule, they have ... I don't know ... dozens of groups and roles, and everyone wants to sponsor a different activity or organise events, but this is true also for south-Americans ... there are various prayer groups, and they have numerous leaders ... very active and often there are tensions because they do a lot of things and they attract a lot of people ... in reality these are, from my point of view, simple things, stupid things, but for them ... they have a great importance ... so you have to understand, you have to understand how and why they experience faith, and their vitality (Father Alberto, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin American Church, responsible of pastoral care of Migrants)

In this sense, membership is vitality and tension, a dynamism often invisible from the outside, but very significant. It's important to observe how those who normally work as caregivers or cleaners can be at the same time leaders of a vast group, able to coordinate many people and exercise power in an unexpected way. In addition, it should be remembered how in their mother country, migrants are normally more used to the presence of lay rather than religious leaderships. For example in Italy, the priest is normally the “king” of the parish, and the relation between clergy and lay has a different profile compared to that of South American parishes. I will detail these topics presenting another theoretical perspective in the chapter six, exploring the interesting and complex *meso*-level that animates ethnic churches from inside.

A concluding remark on this issue comes from my diary. Attending Masses I have often noted that the leaders were wearing uniforms:

Today I asked Lota (the leader of Pilipino Church in Milan, S. Stefano) why they wear a uniform and why hers is different from the others, she replayed: because I'm the president! and then she explained that everyone has a different uniform based on the rank they've reached within each group; indeed people can dress simple uniforms with one colour, other can dress uniforms with other colours, or they can have ties, or similar accessories... (field diary Milan, S. Stefano, April 2018)

In this sense, uniforms visibly recall a role, clearly showing members' status.

To summarise this section, membership can provide several *cognitive* resources, such as a sense of “being needed”, a sense of self-esteem, social status and finally the chance of practising abilities

and skills normally underused in ordinary lives. In particular, it's possible to observe how through religious participation migrants find a channel to develop a new identity -beyond the simply economic one- distancing themselves from common perception and image; de facto both in London and Milan they try to enact an *alternative construction of self*. This involvement in turn represents a form of "*invisible social-mobility*"; different from traditional trajectories, but not less significant for those who are looking for a renewed dignity.

5.5 The Sunday Best: ethnic church as a space for respectability, moral order and selectivity

Traditionally, religion is intertwined with moral issues; indeed, sacred beliefs are often associated to social norms, values and behavioural attitudes. In this regard, sociologically, for migrants ethnic churches may address Durkheim's problem of anomie, representing a communitarian pivot against the break of relations and the relative loss of cultural and moral order. In this sense, migrating implies also facing new social norms, a transition that in turn can generate different kinds of tensions within individuals. In their famous book, Thomas and Znaniecki already explored this issue for Polish migrants, showing how new ethnic parishes established in the US became landmarks for facing what they labelled as the issue of moral disorganisation. In this sense, a religious space marks a spatial dichotomy between external insecurity and internal security. But, it's important to elaborate the moral features of this "safe-space" by understating what kind of "ethical needs" migrants look for within Ethnic Churches.

In this direction, exploring this issue, I initially debate how churches are significant sites where to build a respectable image of one's self. Secondly, I show how religious spaces may offer a moral order for migrants, compasses able to sustain and soften the impact with a new society, namely a way for living ethically. To conclude I will show how while Churches represent a space for creating a common sense belonging, at the same time they can also generate a form of selectivity, excluding those who present lifestyles different from the moral ethos required. Indeed, sociologically, every group has its borders, establishing expectations on potential members, that at the same time create inclusion and exclusion.

First of all, one of the first things that has captured my attention during the fieldwork was the kind of image that migrants want to show both within and outside the Church, an image that is primarily and intrinsically a *bodily issue*. In this sense, the body is not only a biological question, and it can be framed within a socio-anthropological perspective; it isn't only the centre of physical mechanisms, but a question of symbols and representations. Moreover, people are able to "plan" their bodies, transmitting specific meanings. Thus, attending ethnic churches progressively allowed me to explore this issue; as I noted in my field diary:

The atmosphere is very animated, but a first impression is that the Church doesn't seem like a Church of immigrants; just because I know it is ... otherwise I probably wouldn't be able to notice it immediately, surely from a distance it's really difficult. The atmosphere here seems almost that of a baptism, or a similar ceremony, where people come dressed very well; many people are well dressed and well combed, the impression is almost like that of an Italian parish ... Immediately, reflecting on this, the first thing that comes to my mind is when I attended the mass of catholic Ukrainians, I remember very well the men, tall, people with big hands scarred by hard jobs and really imposing, and they wore elegant jackets and clothes, I could see how uncomfortable they were, but despite the effort of wearing these jackets, almost all out of size, they physically wanted to communicate dignity and respect: head held high and chest out ... as they wanted to show how finally today they can dress freely and well ... they had short hair, and freshly shaved beards. These aspects were a form of dignity in front of their countrymen, but also the outside world. In church they were able

to show the others that “we are fine, we are winning” ... and then, after the Church they probably went into the city centre, into the Milanese streets as local people, well dressed ... with their wives and children...

Also here I note same physical elements ... mostly the woman. I’m curious, I go to the parking close to the church. Earlier I had noticed how some people come from here, and now the parking takes my attention, some people arrive by car, and the cars surely have just been cleaned, as Italians go to the car wash on Sunday morning, these people want to show a clean car, the car being a crucial symbol of middle class and moreover, like Italians who drive a nice car, they want to park in the first lanes. I can see how they are well presentable, I get the impression they are preparing for their stage and I can see some women that are checking themselves in the mirror ... but honestly I’m thinking of when I was young and as my mother would have said, today at mass ... I can show my Sunday Best ... finally (Field diary, April, 2018, Church S. Stefano)

I wrote other similar notes during the fieldwork in various churches (both in Milan and London), and the perception is often the same: an “*ethos of presentability*”. This approach is understandable for migrants. Indeed, when they attend a church -which is also a social setting as I debated in previous sections- they tend to dress very well, sporting nice outfits, and wanting to show a good behaviour; indeed, people here are always well-mannered, polite and courteous.

This subject can be elaborated both within and outside sacred walls; on one side, they want to show how the church is a good place and not a space of marginality. Indeed, informally, when people think of migrants they often tend to associate images of something confused, dirty, noisy and mostly indigent and poor. Here, migrants instead want to detach from these common representations. On the other side, they show a good image of themselves also among each other (i.e. co-ethnics). Identity, primarily, is a relational issue; and, according the Goffman’s perspective, it’s continuously negotiated between back and front stage. In this sense, migrants seem to present themselves as winners of their challenges. In light of this, within their settings, both Italians and English aren’t their main landmarks, and instead they build their image around a co-ethnic group. When I posed this question to the leader of Catholic Salvadorans, she gave me a direction:

Ahahaah! (laughs) Really? Samuele you have to understand that people struggle every day, but when you come here you want to present yourself well... you aren’t at work, if you meet a friend or someone you know only by chance, because you met him through old friendships or similar ... as first thing you want to show how positive you are, how well you are, because there’s so much pressure outside here, but with Salvadorans you want to show how good you are and that everything is going well... people care about this... (Moran, Leader of Salvadoran community, Milan)

Continuing in this direction, it’s possible to progress this impression. This image of *respectability* is also a substantial part of church life. Indeed religious participation is a “way of life” also from a moral perspective: seeking an ethno-religious community isn’t just a cultural option, but also a way to frequent social groups that share certain moral values. A religious involvement is a tool to prevent social-stigmas and attain respectability; in light of this, migrants try to detach themselves both from an “amoral” ethnicity and the dangers associated to new “amoral” society:

(...) Religion is a pivot against the disorientation of the person ... maybe must people don't have a relationship with the church and prefer to meet at the pub, while we are here, at the pub or at the park and they drink saying that they have fun, and then ... they become alcoholics ... you know ... some of them have this kind of relation with alcohol, and during the weekend when they are free from their hard jobs they let go themselves ... it’s easy, sometime some wives come here and speak with me ... because their men create problems in

family and at work and their wives send them to speak with me... one man told me: Father I have to come to you and promise with my hands on the Gospel that I will never drink again... something that is not provided for liturgy! But ... seeing the situation ... I talk to his wife ... and I ask her: why do you send him to take this oath? No father, he must do it! Biblically ... (he smiles) it's not allowed, but when people make this kind of promise: I will never drink for a year ... you can understand these kind of problems, so for many church in this sense is a safe place ... (Father I.K, Ukrainian priest, Milan)

The Ukrainian Father tells a story of a man, but he also shows the relevance of problems that migrants can face in their experiences. In this direction, elaborating these subjects, during interviews and attending church it's possible to see and perceive from the atmosphere how migrants try to express specific moral meanings. Sometimes these are expressed directly, other times indirectly.

In London, for example, communities try to present themselves as safe spaces, different and distant from other social settings that migrants go to in the city, including the behaviours associated to these places. Indeed, there are other numerous ethnic fields, and churches are only a religious type of these aggregates:

(talking about Latinos in the city) ... I mean ... you can see it... if you go in some places you can see ... pubs for example ... and men drink a lot ... is not good, not good, why people wait for Sunday only to drink? We wait Sunday for God, it's different!!! Alcohol is really a danger for many people, you can see London, a danger for our spirit, a danger for relations, for your friends and family ... because they drink and then ... they create troubles (she refers to Elephant and Castle, a typically Latin-American area in London, where there are various bars or restaurants) God created us to pray... not to drink! ... I prefer my friends, I prefer to follow God ... really I like spending Sunday here ...we have a lunch together, we pray and we have fun in a different way (Anne, Ecuadorian Believer; St. Anne London, Latin American, Church)

(talking about common behaviours) In London there are many Brazilians restaurants, near to my flat there is a famous Brazilian pub ... (she is talking about Willesden area, where there is a high concentration of Brazilians, including various restaurants and dance halls) but I don't like it, I mean ... honestly when I have some free time I prefer come here, not go to a pub ... you know ... when Brazilians go in these places ... they drink a lot or they start to chat and chat ... you can imagine, you know ... Brazilians love dancing and having fun but I prefer having God, praying with my brothers, having fun with Jesus, but I see them, they spent their weekend doing stupid things ... and then ... a lot of problems, they cry, they cry because they don't take care of Jesus, really ... I'm not interested in these things ... I'm happy, here I found my friends, I share the Bible ... so it's a different way ... (Mariana, St. Anne London, Brazilian Church)

In this sense, Churches become also contexts in which cultural representations of national belonging are criticised and re-negotiated; where members try to “mark a border” between their co-ethnics and other's immoral behaviour. Moreover, it's also a border in relation to an “immoral” city like London.

In this sense, communities try to address the moral *liminality* implied in the experience of migrating that can generate various tensions and transitions: a space where migrants try to create an image of respectability and order, where try to resist external pressures, and where to create a (strong) behavioural attitude, also selecting the kind of relationships they want to entertain. Moreover, this pattern can lead to developing certain visions of life, that I will elaborate in chapter six, exploring the complex moral geography that takes shape within ethnic churches. Indeed, although all contests

taken into considerations belong to the same religious denomination, i.e. Catholicism, membership can follow different moral-paths. Finally, this perspective on “moral order and respectability” recalls the first paragraph because for migrants, “networking” is a crucial strategy in facing everyday challenges, and the relationships are not created by “random choices”.

5.6 Conclusion: a taxonomy of interpretations

Starting from migrant subjectivities, I have selected some recurrent and significant storylines collected during the fieldwork. I then explored these topics, in order to present the main features of migrants’ religious involvement. Clearly, during the interviews, these issues were intrinsically intertwined, and I tried to disentangle them in order to show how members perceive the churches they attend.

Below I present a table that I have elaborated inductively and that emerges from migrants’ storylines. Moreover, like in the case of spatial dynamics (chapter four), such kind of proposal allows me to show more clearly the line of my discussion, and at the same time continue the elaboration of my data:

An inductive taxonomy to approach Ethnic Churches			
<i>From</i> migrant subjectivities			<i>To</i> Interpretations
Loneliness, Nostalgia, Emptiness	Need for relations and friendships: a new family	Anonymity, non-recognition	Church as an <i>intermediate</i> space
Facing everyday pressures and expectations	Medium-term: accumulated stress and anxiety	Facing familiar tensions between local and transnational	Church as a space of <i>resilience</i>
Job Exploitation	Stigma	Legal and political Exclusion	Church as a space of <i>resistance</i>
Activism and Self-worth	Developing Abilities and Skills	Status, Honour	Church as an <i>alternative</i> space for (informal) social mobility
Anomy	Respectability	B-Order	Church as a <i>selective</i>

			space
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Starting from this preliminary vocabulary, in the next chapters I will be able to elaborate these topics widening their role and value for migrant experience.

But finally, also another significant function of ethnic churches should also be considered; as pointed out by Warner (2000), churches represent a *free social space* for those who are normally excluded and stigmatised. In this regard, I would enlarge this vision, because both from migrants' storylines and from given the opportunity to visit these spaces, I can state that churches also represent also *spaces of joy*. A feeling often overlooked when the focus of debate are migrants. Churches are arenas where people freely experience joyfulness; the possibility to sing their holy-songs, play instruments, organise parties and meals, dance and celebrate birthdays or similar ceremonies are all situations that create a rare atmosphere; a sentiment that enriches migration experience and a way for migrants to defend themselves. In this regard, it should be remembered how migration is not desperation, but aspiration.

Indeed, reading the interviews, I noticed how words like "happiness" and "joy" are recurrent, just as much as how attending Masses and events in the relaxing atmosphere was one of the first things that caught my attention. I know that other feelings are more interesting than joy, but this will becomes another topic to elaborate, and in due course I will provide an interpretation of this issue.

Chapter 6. Experiencing God within ethnic churches: *transplantation is also transformation*

In the fourth chapter, I introduced a perspective for framing the spatial dynamics associated to ethnic churches, elaborating how a new body of believers has changed the profile of native Catholicism, turning local parishes towards transnational arenas. In the fifth chapter, drawing from migrants' subjectivities, I examined some of the meanings associated to their religious involvement. In this way I inductively outlined the functions that characterise ethnic churches; but it is also important to elaborate on the spiritual activism that takes shape within these spaces. This perspective allows us to explore the "internal life" of an ethnic church, outlining also the types of beliefs and practices that nurture migrants' religious involvement.

In reference to these matters, previously (see chapter 4) I introduced some ecclesial categories established by canon law, such as the chaplaincy, personal parish, sanctuary or similar profiles. Indeed, local dioceses have to organize this internal "super-diversity" giving an ecclesial outline, i.e. a formal recognition to migrants' requests, which in turn are mixed and embedded within a local parish territorially defined. These canonical categories represent the official responses of the Catholic Church as an institution, according to what Levitt defines as the "extended transnational model", able to harmonize centrality, capillarity and diversity. However, these ecclesial outlines - defined by canon law- deserve to be debated sociologically in order to understand empirically what one can "find" within them; beyond the "*form*", it's important to elaborate also the "*substance*". Indeed, it's possible to identify the presence of various kinds of believers and religious activities, as well as different and varied relational fields, which in turn play an important role in strengthening the sense of community and also the participants' social capital. In light of this, in this chapter I will analyse both the spiritual engagement of migrants and the "model" of Church that arises and takes shape from migrants' involvement. I will start by discuss how Catholic migrants experience the sacred in the receiving country, moving on how their dynamism may impact on the organisational outlay, elaborating on the kind of religious forms that emerge *from below*. As we shall see, the internal lives of churches reveal an incessant process of adaption and negotiation.

To analyse these religious issues, I will initially present and discuss some of the challenges faced by the clergy. I will introduce these topics by drawing on interviews made with priests both in London and Milan seeing how they try to adapt Churches in order to address the various needs of migrants. Indeed priests within the "Catholic transnationalism circuit" represent the "ecclesial-junctures", i.e. those who face and try to coordinate migrant religious activism. Then, starting from their stories, I will analyse the spiritual dynamics associated to membership, debating the kinds of engagement. Elaborating the interviews collected with migrants, I can explore as well the changes in their religious approach, a fact that has an impact on the kind of community that is re-created in receiving society. Subsequently I introduce a *meso-level* perspective, able to capture the relational patterns that enliven ethnic religious spaces. Thus, from subjectivity (chapter five), I shift the focus on "subjectivities in motion and relation" to show how in this sense and sociologically, Churches are mainly relational processes, i.e. settings composed of dynamic networks. Here I will explore the directions of immigrants' networking and the relative genesis of various internal groups. As will be shown, migrants pose, from below, a congregational challenge to the traditional church-model. In a certain sense, migrants' membership is different from the classic model of parish, in some respects similar to a congregation that in turn merges with local established Churches and creates an hybrid. To use an oxymoron the result is similar to a congregational-parish. Obviously this is a model that must be better analysed.

Thus, starting from these perspectives, I can analyse the types of membership, the relational activism, the genesis of sub-groups internal to the church and the activities that they sponsor. I decided to debate these perspectives given how migrants, by transplanting a religion intrinsically generate shifts; they don't reproduce an a priori model, because the same migration experience moulds significantly the idea of Church that is created in receiving country. In light of this,

“*transplantation is transformation*”. Therefore, religious spaces are continuously moulded by members’ dynamism and challenged by needs that are both spiritual and secular.

6.1 Voices from above: challenges in ethnic Churches

In this section I introduce some of the religious experiences that animate ethnic churches; in doing this, I draw from interviews with priests. In this sense, they are both migrants’ spiritual leaders and “mediators” between ethnic churches and local dioceses. Recalling Levitt, and the model of Catholic transnationalism, i.e. the continuity between a hierarchical institution and local capillarity, formally they embody a role, as ecclesial-junctions for organising and coordinating the internal diversity. In this regard, priests’ stories can provide interesting insights on how religion and migration are intertwined, and their first hand experiences introduce some of the challenges involved in ethnic churches.

A first significant tale is their relations with a body of believers different from native ones, not only for nationality and language, but also for internal composition, very plural and complex. Not all believers have the same religious background and not everyone looks for the same spiritual experience. Priests face a multifaceted profile of members, and this represents a challenge given that they have to understand their “customers”. Moreover, they face an (unexpected) dynamism:

God called me for this, sometimes I wonder why! But I know that God guides me in this challenge, it’s not easy, others follow different paths but I ended up here, over time you learn how to do it, how to face ... how mediate their activism ... learning about their stories is an emotional challenge, when you come in contact with migrants in person, not with the stories told by media... it’s really different, moreover you face different traditions and approaches ... and their faith is a challenge, a challenge also for how we normally are used to thinking religion, from outside you can’t see ... but from inside you can see the role of religion for them, it’s really important, and they are so active, there are different groups ... it’s a hive of people ... who have different religious backgrounds, not all migrants have the same approach, the same ideas, the same practises ... (the interview continues further below) (Father Alberto, Priest of Latin-American church, S. Stefano Milan, also head of the pastoral care of immigrants in Milan)

I travelled a lot ... also in Italy! (He studied for many years in Italy -like other priests met on my journey. It’s well known that Italian is an important language for those who study Catholicism- and most of the time he wanted to interact with in me in Italian, including the recorded interviews, also as a way of not losing his knowledge of language) And after a long travel now ... I’m here (...) I know what religion is for migrants, I learned, I can understand, migrants find everything in this experience, the church is a comfortable place, they can speak Portuguese and pray with other Brazilians...the church is a place to share experiences, to pray together. Migrants are really dynamic, they organize a lot ... a lot of activities. There are different groups, training groups, prayer group, for Brazilians religion is really important, in their souls there is God (...) I’m the priest and I follow them in this spiritual experience, but everyone has an experience ... often completely different (...) believers come from different regions and cities, everyone has an approach, and people have styles and traditions, and some of them find religion in London, some find God here ... for most of them the church is the only place they can attend, it’s an amazing place and it’s wonderful, but when you listen stories of Brazilians ... you find problems ...pains ... and this is the reason why church is so important ... (Father Paulo Priest of Brazilian church, London)

According to priests' interviews, and on the basis of my experiences gathered during fieldwork, a first significant issue is migrants' religious background; on one hand, cultural traditions and styles, on the other, migrants' different approaches to religion: there are people who want to transplant the same model, who rediscover religion in migration, who intensify their degree of involvement or those who look for new spiritual meaning. Within the same contexts there are migrants who are strongly engaged and others who need religious training because it's the first time that they meet God:

(This follows the previous; here I analysed some insights) You have to organise ... try to mediate ... there are people who try to reproduce the same model, the same idea of religion and do so stubbornly, there are famous devotions ... and there are differences and tensions also among people who profess the same devotions but associated to specific cities, there are people who have discovered the faith here, because they cling to religion given their situation and their emotional condition ... or they promote prayer groups, we have different prayers groups, of all types (...) their styles, approach and theological ideas are often completely different from local outlines, also for me it's a challenge to understand everything... and there are people who leave religion ... migration stresses religion in different ways ... it's a different situation from a normal parish (Father Alberto, Priest of Latin-American Church, S. Stefano Milano, also head of the pastoral care of immigrants in Milan)

Thus, both in London and Milan priests introduce some topics that should be elaborated. In this direction, a significant tale is that ethnic churches are lively and dynamic: a space for migrants' agency, which is a more difficult issue to perceive from outside. Indeed, churches could appear only as ethnic spaces, where people share the same language. But from inside, they reveal a widespread (and unexpected) activism. A chaplaincy isn't only a chaplaincy; on the contrary, migrants physiologically tend to create internal groups and sub-groups, based on various criteria. It's a typical pattern and priests have to organise this internal fragmentation and autonomy. Therefore, on the other side of the coin, this dynamism implies also an "independence" of believers from the same priest; in some cases, like the Pilipino case in Milan, the chaplain has an ambivalent role. He is certainly respected but is at the same time marginal to the community:

The case of Filipinos is striking, honestly their chaplain is a dear friend of mine, really we are friends, but he knows nothing about them, he celebrates the mass and in practice ... this is the only thing he does. I once asked him information about the community and he replied: "You should ask the community ... I don't know" ... Do you understand? He is the Priest but he knows nothing of them (...) some communities have their life already set ... and lay leaderships organise independently the activities ... (Father Alberto, Priest of Latin-American church, S. S. Milan, also head of the pastoral care of immigrants in Milan)

The case of Filipinos in Milan, in both communities taken into consideration (S.M Carmine and S. Stefano), introduces two significant topics. Firstly the issue of kind of relationship between priest and community, often taken for granted. Secondly, it shows how the life of an ethnic church is animated by the presence of lay-leaders. Not only in the Pilipino case but also in other churches, for example in the case of South American Catholicism, where the role of laity is generally central. These figures organise the internal religious life, promoting the exegesis of sacred texts and organising various activities, both inside and outside the church. For priests, it implies a negotiation with them, at least a confrontation aimed at balancing their activism.

In addition, clergymen face the various needs of believers directly, from the spiritual to the material; a migrant church is at the centre of also a continuous flow of requests for information. Moreover, as can be seen from the previous interviews, personal stories of believers about their

migration experience can be emotionally touching. As I showed in the fifth chapter, a church is a specific setting, where people can share feelings and concerns. In this sense, beyond the ritual of confession, priests have to be ready to listen to them. The clearest examples are stories about irregular migrants that are particularly challenging given their critical situation. In light of this, “working” with migrants represent a journey, a “unique experience”, and all these subjects imply shifts and challenges for the traditional role of priest as “locally framed”:

When you listen to some stories it's really challenging, it's like a battleground, a church like this is different ... you hear incredible stories, over time I learned how to face these challenges, but sometimes it's not easy, you have to be ready to listen to their experiences, problems, and mostly a certain type of problems, like stories of abuses or demanding job conditions, and also family problems, with sons ... you can understand what I face everyday ... (Father Alessandro, chaplain of Filipino community and responsible of pastoral care of Migrants, Milan)

In Milan, father Alessandro gave a clear picture of his role; “battleground” is a significant concept when associated to a church. Nevertheless, also in London priests have to face various challenges:

You know ... Samuele ... at the church you can find incredible stories... really, I can't tell you everything ... but you can imagine (...) living as an overstayer is a challenge, a challenge, you have to be strong and pay attention ... I'm speechless... but I try to help people ... they are brave but it's not easy (I will recall this discussion in chapter seven, when I explore in depth the irregular condition of some believers) I can't question the law, I respect law, but I try to help them ... I learned how to face these stories, it's not easy, people face dangers, face huge challenges, this has implications for their feelings and emotions, and they want to share this with me, I see people crying ... I know their emotions, I see their hopes, and there are also beautiful stories ... it's an incredible experience ... (Father Paulo Priest of Brazilian Church, London)

Among the various themes he talks about, the Brazilian priest introduces another crucial challenge, that of migrants in irregular conditions, a specific kind of believer given its legal status and his or hers relative spiritual and secular needs.

Moreover, both in Milan and London, it's possible to elaborate how they embody this role. A “sense of mission” emerges, that in turn becomes also “the practical sense” for those who work for a specific challenge: taking care of immigrants. But it's not easy, it requires abandoning “perceptions” and learning what migration is in its everyday aspect:

Samuele... if you don't understand migration, if you don't understand their stories, you can't understand their religion... do you understand what I mean? (Father Alessandro, chaplain of Filipino community and responsible of pastoral care of Migrants, Milan)

Thus, all these matters introduced “from above”, from the perspectives of priests who see directly the life of their communities, show significant differences from the model of native parishes. A migrant church has a complex body of believers; it has to open up, leaving space to internal groups and their activities and meetings that in turn often involve other believers belonging to other groups or ethnic churches. Thanks to the clergy's voices, I can now elaborate these topics, starting from the kind of spiritual engagement they experience.

6.2 Migration as a theologizing experience: from roots to routes

In this section I explore how the *liminal* experience of migration may affect forms of spiritual engagement. If in the fifth chapter I outlined the functions of ethnic churches, now I analyse their intersections and implications for migrants' religious life. Indeed, these matters cannot be framed as unconnected from their spirituality. Attending a holy space to escape loneliness, to negotiate a new image of oneself or to find a moral compass in a new social order, cannot be separated from the search of God, both as the intimate demand for transcendence and more importantly in terms of religious practice. Within ethnic churches the secular and sacred are intrinsically intertwined.

To disentangle these intersected areas, I recall the lived religion approach. Following a micro-level focus, the aim of this section is to elaborate the trajectories and the types of religious involvement that migrants experience. In practice, I don't adopt an institutionalised idea of religion (from above), but I adopt an inductive approach (from below). Starting from individual narratives and practises, I investigate how migrants, with different backgrounds, experience the sacred in a foreign land. In this way, I can detail how religion *de facto* enters into migrants' agency, how they try to reproduce and practice it, and what kind of implications these processes have in turn for the model of ethnic church that migrants enliven in receiving societies. In this way I can provide a profile of the "migrant believer". Consequently, religious beliefs and practices should not be considered as unchangeable models. In this direction, there are different theoretical hypotheses in the literature on what happens to religion after migration.

For example, it's important to recall Timothy Smith (1978); in a famous study on the intersections between religion, migration and ethnicity in the US, he labelled migration as a "theologizing experience", meaning that crossing a border is also a spiritual journey. Indeed, periods of separation, confusion, disorientation may have an impact on religious involvement of migrants. In light of this, one view suggests how migration can decrease religiosity (Connor, 2008), due to the fact that migrants come into a secular context, completely different from that of their mother country (Massey, Higgins; 2011). In this sense, migrants are transplanted in a society where religions have different profiles and roles, and where migrants can lose spirituality given that previous religious stimuli are lacking. Another view suggests instead that migration can emphasize religiosity, transforming migrants' approach to the sacred in a stronger engagement, or can even bring to a conversion to another faith as a strategy. Between these views various nuances exist; in this sense, the literature provides various and contradictory outputs, given that migrants' religious participation is also a *contingent process*, where multiple variables can intersect possible directions. According to the data collected in Milan and London, I face these questions showing the existence of plural trajectories. Clearly -according to my qualitative approach- I can't give a representative picture, but the aim is to reveal the existence of various religious patterns. Indeed, the respondents' sample is composed of believers who decided to attend and become part of an ethnic church. Nevertheless I will explain this process in depth, also through a *diachronic* perspective, which includes motivations and reasons that led migrants to attend a religious space. In this sense, migrants don't leave one church to then enter "linearly" another. In particular, I explain how religious involvement takes different forms, as continuity, renewal or discovery; how it becomes symbolic, expressive and intense and how it entails a break from the past and a new approach to the present. The "liminal" experience of migration has indeed various implications for the kind of engagement.

In this direction, for some interviewees, religion was already a significant part of their life in the mother country and attending a church in a new land represents a continuum for their spiritual adhesion. But this involvement in the same religious denomination changes in the host country; and it does so sociologically. Because reproducing a process in a new setting involves a form of transformation. In light of this, with an oxymoron, it's possible to observe a *new-continuity*; in this

regard, it's should be noted that migrants no longer have the previous context available, including structures and stimuli, and instead face a new panorama, where the same religion is experienced in different ways. Intrinsically, the faith adhesion becomes a voluntary decision, linked to new symbolic reasons; in the case of Catholics the ethnic belonging is a first explicit pull-factor; as mentioned by the priest of the Latin American Church in Milan and by the priest of Brazilian Church in London:

Most people were believers in their country, others not, but the situation changes here, the context is different, it's completely different from south America, in every part of the world faith is locally merged, and people learn religion where they live, everywhere, religion, culture and ethnicity are linked; habits, practises and devotions, and here in Italy ... for them it's different ... clearly they look for their approach, their mother-country, and here they find gestures, prayers, practises able to recall their origins. Religion is linked to practises, and staying here means remaining connected with their country ...clearly, you can't pray in another language ... how could you? How can you confess? This is the reason why they are so strongly engaged here, within religion they find everything ... as if they discovered God for the first time, and Sunday for them changes ... they wait the Sunday ... (Father Alberto, Priest of Latin-American Church, S. Stefano Milano, also head of the pastoral care of immigrants in Milan)

Faith doesn't change, people are Catholics, but the context changes, you are detached from your country, from your church, from your family and relations... and you feel insecurity, you are far from home, and ... your relation with God changes ... inevitably ... but here they can find what they need! God ... and Brazilian people, a new family, friends, they have new motivation in following God and in their eyes you can see this emotion ... you can see how they approach God ... in everything, here people stay all day, they organise a lot of things, you can see Brazil from the morning to the evening ... they can speak in the same language, they can cook their foods ... they can sing and pray like in Brazil (Father Paulo, Priest of Brazilian Church, London)

Within global cities like Milan and London, churches are ethnic landmarks for migrants, where to piece together the threads of their belonging. Participating in a Church becomes a communitarian and immersive experience, where ethnicity is the glue. Moreover, as I showed in the fifth chapter, staying connected with religion provides various benefits in facing a new experience. Therefore migrants look for a specific atmosphere that is *different from* what they would find in pre-established Italian or English parishes. Religion, both spiritually and culturally, expresses a way to stay connected with the past in order to live the present. Participation becomes a way of experiencing a space that represents a piece of motherland, as Emilia tells:

When I arrived, I looked for our people ... at least a place where I understand the language, and a friend told me come here, near Duomo, in the city centre, there a lot of Peruvians... and I started attending that church, in Santo Stefano ... and you can understand, here in Milan there are a lot of churches but I prefer pray here, I can pray better, I can find another style ... here I feel better ... I'm with my brothers, it reminds me of Peru... it's important to feel you are in a relaxing atmosphere when you are with God (Emilia, Peruvian believer, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin-American Church)

S. Stefano represents a hub for Peruvian believers in and outside Milan; as I showed in the fourth chapter, it has become an urban landmark over time. In the church there are many symbols that can recall Peru, and the Mass is in Spanish.

In London, a similar ethnic pull-factor is clearly provided by the Brazilian church, as Tania explains:

You know ... religion for Brazilians is life ... is in our soul, you can see the joy and happiness in our Church... God is with us and from Brazil God followed me here, when I arrived ...my friends told me to come here! So ... why not? So ... I mean, here you can pray in Portuguese, you can sing in Portuguese, you can pray like you do in Brazil, the Sunday here feels very special ... I found my place... (Tania, Brazilian Believer, St. Anne, Brazilian church)

“Finding a place” clearly shows how a church becomes a pivot around which migrants can structure part of their experience in a new land. Religion represents a powerful and unique set of symbolic meanings and practices intrinsically associated to the mother country. Thus, in this approach we find a symbolic continuum, where religion and ethnicity are simultaneous. Migrants in London and Milan, decide to attend a specific church that can provide specific symbolic references.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that ethnicity has also different levels of “intensity”. In this regard, it’s possible to perceive a high sense of common ethnic belonging within Salvadoran and Filipino community in Milan; in London, instead it’s particularly sponsored within Brazilian church. The first case -i.e. Salvadorans- is peculiar given that they are disconnected from the other pan-Latino Church of S. Stefano:

My dream was that the diocese would take care of us by giving a space... The consequence was this place where we are now, but only for Salvadorian ... there is a long and complicated story behind it! Before we were in another place, which was a room in another building, where we were a small group, only Salvadorans. Then, one day, after a hard battle (...) we had this place only for us ... (Founding member of the Salvadorian Catholic church)

This ethnic approach is clearly perceivable from the words of its founder-leader; indeed for Salvadorans the will to have their own space -where to recollect their national belonging- was fundamental for the genesis of community. Moreover, over time they have continued to “defend” their presence so much that formally they aren’t a chaplain nor do they have any other type of ecclesial-profile. They are an informal migrant community that can make use of a church. Paradoxically, for the canonical law they don’t exist within the diocese.

Still in Milan, Filipino churches express a similar sense of national belonging:

Here it’s incredible, You should see, Filipinos can’t wait Sunday, they wait for Sunday only to find their ideal atmosphere, it’s like being in the Philippines (she smiles) here the people come to pray and to stay together, they work a lot during the week and then on Sunday they look for their people, religion is a way of staying together and speak the same language, to find the same traditions, songs, foods, the same activities. They look for this atmosphere on Sunday, normally here they arrive in the morning ... and after mass the real life starts, most people stop for lunch, or for other activities, we do a lot of things, all is well organised ... it’s not only the mass ... the real life starts later ... on Sunday they want to do everything they haven’t done in a week (Michelle, secretary and member of Filipino community, S.M. Carmine, Milan)

Finally, on Sunday, Filipinos can find their atmosphere: “it’s like being in Philippines”, through several activities they experience what they can’t do during the week. Songs and foods are a typical combination for recalling traditions. It’s also possible to note how the Mass is an element like many others of this cultural offer, quite ancillary; a subject that I will recall in the conclusion of this reflection.

In the case of London, the Brazilian church shows similar aspects. Indeed, beyond the role of the Portuguese language, the “Brazilianness” is a pivotal factor. For example, the community prints a weekly bulletin for its members, where they inform of events and activities; all the practises tend to evoke Brazil, from music to meals:

It's just like Brazil here (she smiles), we sponsor many activities, Brazilians are so busy here, so busy ... they look for these things, from food to music, we have groups, choirs, a lot of things ... people like things like that, and in the last years here we've been growing, there are new activities, we sponsor a huge festival, really huge, not only here but in other Churches, in south London and in another Church in north-west. During the festival Brazilian cook traditional foods and organise meetings, prayers ... the name is: festa junina ... in June... June is a holy month for Brazilians, there are celebrations and Brazilians cook lots of traditional foods. It's a huge event... last year there were a lot of people like... a little Brazil in London (Maria, secretary of Brazilian Church in London)

Brazilian churches, like the Salvadoran and Filipino in Milan, have created this kind of cultural setting, where members can experience and find their “mother-country” again. Everything is aimed at promoting a common sense of national belonging. In this regard, in the photo below there is the brochure distributed at Brazilian churches to sponsor the annual festival (mentioned in the previous interview):



By attending the festival during fieldwork I could observe and experience this sense of “Brazilianness”. The following photo shows a moment from the festival, where there are various stands that sell typical foods, and a courtyard where families can gather and relax during this Brazilian party:



The Brazilian church in London has become a point of reference for reproducing a cultural belonging in the receiving society. In this regard, these three cases -Salvadorans and Filipino in Milan, and Brazilians in London- are quite different from the other Latin American communities, where a common language generates a sort of pan-Latino atmosphere, i.e. a form of belonging of “second-level” where people from different countries coexist and pray; in these churches the common national belonging is sponsored in different ways by internal groups, in a less homogenous way. Nevertheless, this consideration brings me to suggest additional reflections on ethnicity, also in order to avoid possible reification of such a (slippery) category. One can indeed observe how within Churches the same ethnicity is experienced in various ways, something that needs to be better explored. In this sense, ethnicity per se is a complex “container”, and isn’t a “take it or leave it” subject. Those who frequent churches can decide to experience only some aspects, or to attend only some celebrations, or take part only to specific devotions.

In this regard, two macro approaches can be identified. Firstly, ethnicity generates the model of “*magnet-parish*” (for a similar discussion on this model see Wedam: 2000); migrants come from suburbs into a place where to recover and affirm their cultural background. Such spaces represent urban landmarks for the spiritual geography of migrants because they know that in these churches they can find a welcoming setting and at the same time they can claim an ethnic belonging. In this sense, the model of magnet-parish can also attract people even just for the liturgy, like a pilgrimage in the city (as I explained in the fourth chapter). In this case migrants come into the church and they decide to attend the single Mass to reconnect with their mother country. This becomes a custom for them, an appointment on their calendar as a way to remember their origins.

For others, religious involvement goes beyond the moment of liturgy, and it takes a wider and complex profile. In this case, as I explained in the fifth chapter, ethnic churches are sites where various meanings and functions are intrinsically intertwined. Here ethnicity takes the profile of an immersive familiar experience, and it transforms the *extension* of religious involvement. Indeed, it’s possible to observe how “the Sunday changes” and the worship take on new meanings for immigrants and inside churches migrants create a lively social life. Proof of this is how this religious involvement is often described by the people using words like “family”. Everywhere there are recurrent and pervasive performances of conviviality and music and the pivotal moment of the

Sunday is the lunch, usually organized alternately by different groups. This is followed by various activities that go from music to prayer groups. The liturgy becomes only the “*climax of the day*”. Nevertheless, beyond the *extension*, for migrants also the *intensity* of participation changes; these concepts aren’t mutually exclusive, providing the possibility of experiencing God in various ways. For many attendants, spirituality becomes more pivotal than the just a shared belonging; in Milan a leader of Latin American church introduces this subject:

*(...) It’s not just a question of practice; here we have created a way of experiencing God ...
(...) it’s not only a question of famous devotions, as clearly these are important for all Latin Americans, but this is a community for sharing the word. But the practise is not enough for our souls and here people look for intensity, an intensity necessary for their spiritual experience. So during Sunday we stay together to study the word of God, we read the bible, we share the words of our Lord, and we try to understand the role of Jesus in our lives ...
(Carmen, responsible of Latin American community, leader of an internal prayer group, S. Stefano Milan)*

In this sense, “an ethnic church is not only an ethnic church” but a specific setting where to pursue religious aims and needs. Churches are also sites where complex theological experiences can take shape.

Similarly, also in London the chance of developing a certain type of spirituality is a pivotal activity; as in the Brazilian case:

(Speaking about the prayer group) Sunday or Saturday is the time for experiencing God in all his glory, we are like a family ... like a real family where we can meet God and share his holiness. This gives us joy for our souls, so ... the Lord is always with us and we share the joy of having God in our life (...) normally someone starts to read the Bible and we study the readings ... we follow the readings and we try to understand how to bring Jesus in our life, how we can live with Jesus, it’s like a training ... and it helps our spirit in making our life better. (Natalia, member of a prayer group, S. Anne, London, Brazilian church)

“Sharing God” is a widespread activity in all contexts. Indeed, experiencing an immersive and profound spirituality characterises the internal life of ethnic churches, where there are numerous groups that organise this kind of involvement. (In the next sections, I will analyse in depth the diffusion and role of such groups). Thus, additional meanings characterise migrants’ religious participation. The cultural background is only a first pull-factor, representing a wider framework where several spiritual processes take shape. Within ethnicity, subjectivities embody and redirect the experience of the sacred.

From the interviews often it emerges how attending an ethnic church is an intimate and reflexive choice, that grows over the course of time. More than just a habit, participating is an option which has specific reasons. Indeed, a recurrent phenomenon is that migrants have changed their relation with the church, and over time have rediscovered faith. For example, as a member of a prayer group of Latin American church in Milan tells:

(From Carmen’s same group, previously quoted for introducing the spiritual subject) At the beginning, when I arrived I didn’t come to church, only few times, I was too busy, I was always at work, and honestly I didn’t realize I was losing God, but then God grew inside of me, I think it’s difficult to explain, how can you explain God? Sometimes words cannot explain ... but a feeling was born, and I started to come to this church. Initially I was speaking with a friend about life ... and she told me: come to the Church! And I started a new relationship with God, like the first time ... and now I’m always here... God is my soul,

and now I can't imagine my life without God ... (Rosa, member of a prayer group, S. Stefano Milan, Latin American believer)

Similarly, recalling Natalia for the case of Brazilian Church:

(speaking of her experience in London) Usually ... In Brazil I used to go ... but ... when I arrived in London the first thought... wasn't religion ... so, religion was in my soul, God was always with me, but at the beginning I had a lot of problems, work... and then I changed room and friends, I mean ... London is always a challenge, but then ... I finally found my time and here I found God again ... It's a blessing ... now God is my life ... now I can have my time, I can share a new joy (Natalia, member of a prayer group, S. Anne, London, Brazilian Church)

Migrants often recount of how at the beginning of their experience material needs were more important, and only over time they recovered a spirituality. In this sense, the initial challenges associated to migration tend to push subjectivities towards materialism. Indeed, they experience a sort of limbo, dictated by migration, a period when the secular needs have priority, but later the intimate search of a deeper sense pushes their subjectivity back towards religion. In this sense, the “rational asceticism” involved in migration turns into a “religious asceticism”, and migrants face a transition from *Homo oeconomicus* to *Homo religious*.

In light of this, among the interviewees, a common and significant storyline both in Milan and London is how migrants initiate a more active participation. Indeed, in receiving countries, migrants frequently tend to change approach, not only as a “social-way” for meeting co-ethnics, but due to the fact that the liminal experience of migration implies an intimate “need of God”; in Milan, at the Latin-American church I found this spiritual transition:

In my country ...all in all ... I wasn't too involved, sometimes I went to the Church, but only a few times, for the main celebrations, like funerals, weddings or festivals for the patron saint. When I arrived in Milan over time this thirst was born, I felt the need for something more intense, I felt the need to seek God, and here I can say that I found God for the first time... and I found myself ... (Jorge, Ecuadorian Believer, member of a prayer group, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin-American Church)

It's difficult to explain, I wasn't too interested ... sometimes ... but at some point I felt this need ... I don't know, as God called me ... but I didn't let him in, only later I realized that something was moving in me, I'm sorry but only later I understood ... and now God is with me ... now every day I pray ... I can't imagine a life without God ... (Hernan, Peruvian Believer, member of a prayer group, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin-American Church)

Migration for them has had implications in terms of religious participation. In receiving country they started to experience religion with a different approach. Initially it's more similar to the formula of “belong without believing”, but “at some point” they start to have a deeper involvement, embracing a new spiritual path.

I found stories like these also in the Latin American church in London:

(talking about her religious experience) In Colombia ... honestly I didn't go (to Church), only few times, with my family ... but when I arrived in London ... something was born... really, at the beginning I was too busy, you know London, you have to find a job and other boring... but later ... something is born, you start to think about life, you start to think ... where am I? I mean ... the sense of your life, and in that period I started to pray here ... and

so ... I found God and now my life has changed... (Diana, Colombian believer member of a prayer group, S. Anne, London, Latin American church)

As can be understood from the interviewees words, such as “a thirst was born”, or “something is born”, these examples suggest how migrants have re-discovered Catholicism in a new context. Indeed, during the fieldwork I met people who had a weak relation with the Church -a nominal belonging associated to an inconstant practise- but in the receiving country “the need for God” progressively grows. If initially the approach was superficial and religion was taken for granted, here it becomes an essential part of their new identity. In this sense, an initial reason to attend a Church was an “internal vacuum” or disorientation, once they have discovered God their approach changes completely, embodying the sacred.

For those who have rediscovered faith a new spiritual journey starts and a sort of theodicy is created, where God guides the subject in facing secular experiences. As is well know, migration is a challenge, the result of hopes and ambitions, which in turn take place also in a religious framework; In the words of Hernan:

(talking about his new way of experience) every day I think to God... every day I pray, I have goals and I'm trying to do my best. I can face my experiences thanks to my faith, it's not easy, sometimes problems are so big, but thanks to my faith in God I can face difficulties, I feel stronger, I find new energies and when I wake up I feel that God follows me in my life, people often forget these things today, but if you follows the example of Jesus you can face the challenges of life, in the middle of difficulties you can't forget Jesus ... (Hernan, Peruvian Believer, member of a prayer group, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin-American Church)

Faith permeates Herman's experience, as it does for Diana:

(I asked her why her approach to religion has changed) Because now I pray every day, every mornings when I wake up I pray, it's my way of starting the day, when I wake up I pray and I feel better, I feel better and I can start to work, it's not easy (Diana works as a cleaner) the days are so long, and you feel so tired, I mean ... the same routine ... but I know God follows me, sometimes it's really difficult, I know ... I know and I see my colleagues, they seem lost ... without feelings, empty, I wonder why.. but I'm sure ... with my faith I can live my life in another way ... (Diana, Colombian believer member of a prayer group, S. Anne, London, Latin-American Church)

Having embodied the sacred as the first time these believers embrace religion with a new approach, both inside and outside the same church, it becomes also a everyday practise, as a way of life.

To conclude this section, starting from migrants' accounts, it's possible to outline different religious patterns; clearly, the *ethnic-model* is present, coupled with the possibility of finding a cultural atmosphere where to practise a specific kind of Catholicism, able to evoke the mother-country. However, ethnicity can be experienced in different ways; there are members who prefer a more extensive practise, where social-relations and spiritual moments are continuously alternated, or those who decide to attend only the mass, in a more “figurative” way of belonging. On the other side, the model of “*questioning faith*” also emerges. Migration can change the approach to involvement and members can start an intimate spiritual journey.

These patterns *cohabit* within ethnic churches that is to say that various reasons work around the religious involvement of migrants. Moreover, also within the same narratives, these elements are often balanced in various ways. In this sense, religion is a question of roots and routes, whereas a simple ethnic perspective is a static view of understanding Churches, an individual focus can show how migrants may undertake also new spiritual routes. In the next chapter, I advance this

perspective and I present other religious approaches that I found during the fieldwork, showing how sacred involvement takes still more routes.

6.3 “Born-again” in Milan and London

During the fieldwork, both in Milan and London, I found how a renewed participation can lead believers towards a more intense spirituality, in particular also deciding to take part of a Charismatic Movement. As is well known, these kind of groups, differently from a more “conventional” Catholicism, encourage a specific “intimacy with God”, developing an immersive religious experience. Indeed, such movements “share God” through collective prayers, dances, choirs and personal testimonies, stimulating a greater enthusiasm and fervour able to exhort members toward a collective joy. Furthermore, such movements create an emotional and touching setting where to soften and “console” members who are suffering. In this regard, charismatic groups are present in all ethnic churches, both in Milan and London; their structure and role will be detailed in the next section, when I adopt a meso-level perspective to explore and explain the churches’ internal life. In this section I maintain an individual focus to continue elaborating the degree of migrants’ spiritual involvement.

In this regard, in Milan, I didn’t find the opportunity to take part in a charismatic ceremony but I had the chance to interview some (Latin-American) charismatic believers; I was luckier in London, where I had the possibility to see with my eyes what a Charismatic ceremony involves:

*It’s the first time for me, I only read some papers on this movement (...) I was struck by the atmosphere, the church is the same, but the atmosphere is completely different. One can understand from the eyes of the people that something different is happening. Also from the energy that I can feel in the church -the event is organised in the central nave of the Church. I was able to access from a lateral chapel, where I met Ana (see next interview)- and the church is enlivened by an euphoric choir (...) Everyone was dancing, their hands were in the air, people moved together like an single body ... then some people went in the centre to speak, I imagine they were talking about their experiences of faith -I was very sorry because I don't know Portuguese, but I understood that they were talking of something that was really intense- and people were praying for them ... I’ve never seen such a type of ceremony ... but now I can really understand what my interviewees have often told me in Milan, something unique: at the same time an immersive experience of joy and pain, joy and sorrow, where human sufferings can be alleviated by the possibility of experiencing God intensely, like a religious *catharsis* (Note from my field diary, London, Brazilian Church)*

Thanks to Ana -having just interviewed her before such charismatic ceremony- I could see this group in action. Moreover, her story is interesting given that she has moved from a weak religiosity in her mother country to a charismatic movement in London:

Honestly ... before ... I didn’t attend Church like I do in London (laughs) yes, really! Only for the Mass (she tells something about her history in London) but when I met this group my approach to God changed, really ... and my life is changed, before it was too material, now it’s spiritual, it’s completely different ... really ... I like this style ... now I go to every meeting, so I feel I’m really praying ... I’m more focused ... it’s a different from a mass, it’s another way, I can feel vibrations, it’s amazing ... (Ana, Brazilian Believer, member of a Charismatic group, Brazilian Church London)

The charismatic movement gave to Ana new “vibrations” to experience religion. Indeed when I met members like her, by hearing their history I saw how a new approach to spirituality clearly emerges. Like Ana also in Milan, at Latin-American Church, I found a similar story among believers who belong to Charismatic groups:

I was Catholic, but not like I am now... it's different, when I met this Church I started to come more and more ... and then I met a friend and thanks to my friend I started to get really curious ... he suggested me to come... and yes ... (I elaborate on Charismatic membership) I feel the prayer inside me ... it's something different, more intense (...) in this group we share faith, but in a different way, we can pray together, stay in touch, you can feel the spirit, it's more intimate, we share the bible and we can do exercises for improving our spirit, because you have to learn how to do it, and we stay together to be more in touch with our spirit (...) then we participate to others meetings, bigger ones, here ... there is only a group, but there are other much bigger meetings that I attend (...) (Viviano, Ecuador, member of a Charismatic group, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin-American Church)

Also Viviano became a Charismatic in Milan, finding a new direction in his spiritual journey. He was a “normal believer” and now he is strongly engaged in all Charismatic activities sponsored within and outside the same Church.

Thus, such groups are present within all ethnic churches taken into consideration both in Milan and London; their ceremony can generate a “transcendent” atmosphere, and believers feel there are directly in contact with God; in particular, those who guide the group trigger particular body movements and collective excitement. During the worship, speeches of leaders are alternated with continuous sensorial and bodily stimuli. This kind of approach is able to grasp the attention of those who desire to develop a stronger religious involvement, and for migrants, who often experience an “everyday materialism” it provides an alternative atmosphere.

However, beyond cases of a new-membership discussed above (Ana - Viviano), i.e. those who have faced this kind of transition in the receiving society, Charismatic groups are very widespread, and normally they act at a transnational level; moreover, for some migrants this belonging follows them from the native to the receiving country. Further on, I will discuss more in depth the role of Charismatic movements in relation to the context where they act, but a first consideration is that both in London and Milan Churches have to open their doors to this kind of religious approach. In a certain sense, these movements pre-exist and co-exist compared to ethnic churches. Another time, it's possible to observe how migration implies that different styles and groups coexist within the same context, creating “hybrid sacred spaces”.

On this path, I collected another interesting narrative about the kind of involvement; for some of those who have rediscovered faith in Milan and London, narratives are often marked by expressions like “I was lost”; in this case, religious involvement represents the “break” of old life towards a new life. In this regard, as I mentioned in the fifth chapter, migrants within Churches often look for new moral orientations:

I've lived in Milan ... for more than ten years, but only here (in this church) I feel better... before it was difficult, I was lost, I was lost and in my life I didn't experience God in this way ... God wasn't my main interest ... and sometimes I did a lot of things that today I would never do again ... if you live without faith you are lost in materialism, in consumption ... and you go only to certain places ... you can see Milan ... all things that today affect people who live without thinking of faith ... but in a period of my life I felt the need for something more intense, I wanted to change my life, I didn't want to live that life any longer... and here I found something new, I changed my life ... I can interact only with people who share God.

Now my free time is spent only with God (Carlos, Peruvian Believer, S. Stefano Milan Latin-American Church)

Carlos' life changed and religion was pivotal in this transition; it gave him a new direction against "materialism" and "certain (disreputable) places". I found a similar narrative also in the Latin-American Church in London:

(...) I needed something new, completely new ... before I was ... alone ... and inside myself... I was lost, but a friend told me to come here, there were good people (talks about his friend) initially I came ... but ... sometimes with some friends I used to drink ... only drink ... and you know ... when you drink you surely do stupid things, but I wanted something new, secure, something of more spiritual ... and I decided to come here again and ... yes ... Here I found a new way ... I feel better not doing those stupid things ... (Diego Colombian Believer, S. Anne, London, Latin-American Church)

In these storylines one can find how a moral issue was a significant reason to initiate a new religious path, mainly linked to an embodiment of specific behaviours. According to the interviews, an ethnic church often provides a moral framework against an immoral city. Expressions like "before" and "after" as well as "old and new path" or "bad and good" are recurrent. These verbal dichotomies state a transition towards new lifestyles. Here we can find the category of "born-again believers".

Moreover, the detachment from the "immorality" experienced both in Milan and London, is also a detachment from other co-ethnics who are involved in "corrupt" behaviours. In this sense, ethnicity becomes an *ambivalent-issue*. During the interviews, I found different stereotypes associated to the Latin-American lifestyle, as well as a certain type of Brazilianness; targets like alcohol, drugs and sexual behaviours were recurrent. Therefore the Church becomes a sort of moral border; as the leader of Salvadoran Church told me in Milan:

We are among ourselves... away from our countrymen who like to drink ... as you know some of our countrymen have this bad habit ... and when they drink they lose the control, as gangs, sometimes you can read news on this but ... we don't like this kind of stuff. We are always careful ... we don't want this kind of people... (Moran, founder-leader of Salvadoran Church in Milan)

Also in London, in the Brazilian community I found a similar argumentation:

(...) For those who arrive in London there are many risks, it's a huge city, where people drink a lot, where few have a spiritual life, I mean ... for many the pub is like a church (we laugh) ... in London alcohol is the norm ... and when you drink ... you know ... (I think he refers to sex) ... and the young, you can read it in the press, there is a huge problem, our church is a place where people can keep away from this life, I heard stories about Brazilians, they go to the pub, they drink and dance ... you know ... for Brazilians dancing is a daily thing... and prostitution, a real drama for us, when they leave Brazil girls can fall in this life ... but it's different here, people don't follow these things ... (Maria, Brazilian, secretary of Brazilian Church, London)

Generally the interviews have provided representations on how ethnicity is more than a neutral issue; in this sense, an ethnic church tries to mark a border to prevent dangerous behaviours and to build a certain type of ethnicity. However, borders by their nature produce not homogeneity, but tensions. Additionally, ethnic churches are internally complex ecologies, where rhetoric and practise may not completely overlap, an issue that I discuss further on when I debate the inner

diversity. In this case, I want to underline how religious involvement intersects moral attitudes and expectations on members' behaviours.

In this section I outlined how involvement may lead migrants towards a more intensive engagement, like a Charismatic group. I explored how some people have rediscovered Catholicism like a transition from an "immoral life" to a "new moral life", and I discussed how ethnicity is an ambivalent issue within religious spaces; to conclude this reasoning, I underline how such individual transitions in some cases had interested also lay leaders. In this regard, rediscovering a faith can bring to an unexpected involvement that in turn stimulates the subject in achieving new roles. For example, in Italy, the Filipino responsible of the largest community in the city, told me during the interview:

Honestly, in the past I'd never been so religious ... -Me: really?- Yes! (smiles)... really ... only here in Milan I started to be really religious ... but, at the beginning I wasn't interested, sometimes I went to Church and sometimes not, I'd never been that interested, but over time I found new motivation, I felt so well that over time I became the responsible, sometimes I wonder why, because being a responsible means having many commitments, but this is my life ... (President of Pilipino community in S. Stefano, Milan)

The leader of Salvadoran community in Milan also has a similar story:

I remember when I was young ... sometimes with my friends I laugh about it ... I'd never been really religious ... I wasn't engaged like today, but when I came here, when I faced migration I experienced suffering and pain, and I saw the pains of my countryman, and this led me to become religious and believe in God, I found new strength, and I became the mother of this community, by now the grandmother ... I saw the community grow and I'm happy, but I remember very well, when you experience suffering you find in religion something new, all my countryman here have found a unique space where to overcome the pain, sometimes I think God guided me here, I'm not married, but God gave me hundreds of children (Moran, leader founder of Salvadoran Community in Milan)

In London Mariutzky, a leader and catechist -one who guides other believers in their religious training- in telling the story of her involvement gave me information on this specific transition:

When I arrived in London I didn't believe (...) my sister started to tell me: come Mariutzky, but I wasn't sure ... only after I started ... at the beginning only the mass, then I initiated a spiritual training and it was wonderful ... and now ... (I will recall the interview later) (Mariutzky, Colombian leader and catechist, S. Anne, London, Latin-American Church London)

Clearly, not all leaders have the same backstory, but these few cases are representative of how religious participation can intersect migration; in addition to being a secular-journey, newcomers may undertake a spiritual-journey, changing their life. In this sense, "the ways of the Lord are infinite".

To conclude, in the last two sections I showed the multiple ways in which Catholic migrants both in Milan and London may experience religion. Firstly, it emerges how migration intrinsically impacts the relation with spirituality. In this regard, if in the fifth chapter I have explained some crucial meaning and functions of ethnic churches, here most of their religious counterparts are explained. These considerations show how various patterns can be found within the same contexts; migration *de facto* stresses sacred involvement, and ethnic churches become multifunctional also for migrants' religious needs. Nevertheless, the balance between these positions becomes an issue to better

debate. In this direction in the next section I will introduce another perspective to elaborate the internal dynamism of ethnic churches.

6.4 The emergence of a congregational-Church: internal groups and activities.

In this section, I adopt a “meso-level” approach in order to discuss the internal dynamism of ethnic churches; specifically, “networking” will be the theoretical key to elaborate migrants’ religious participation. Indeed, the genesis of internal groups is a typical pattern for all the ethnic churches taken into consideration. If in the previous sections I often mentioned this peculiarity, now I can elaborate it.

Migrants tend to create clusters on the basis of various criteria. These are units that in turn can promote both secular and religious activities. In light of this, sacred spaces aren’t an undifferentiated mass of believers, but arenas of ideas and initiatives that become pivots around which several migrants’ groups take shape. This tendency is boosted by various motivations; as I debated, churches are alternative spaces, where people can act without external pressures, where believers can carry out their abilities; moreover, the possibility to confront themselves with others, to share same needs, to create new social ties, to carry forward same ideas, beliefs, and cultural traditions are all opportunities that strengthen this relational tendency.

This focus shows another significant feature of ethnic churches, invisible from outside. In this direction, on one side, the genesis of groups poses a sort of congregational challenge; on the other side, it provides another resource for migrants, such as the possibility of strengthen their social capital. Therefore, a group -a micro field of relations- facilitates mutual recognition as well as reciprocal trust, and finally provides the opportunity to share crucial information on their mundane experiences.

Elaborating this dynamic, transversal for all ethnic the churches that were analysed, the groups’ genesis is characterised by various reasons; nevertheless, I’m able to introduce common traits; in particular:

- There are units based on typical criteria such as age and gender as well as groups of parents and families. The reason is mainly aggregative one. In this case, within churches migrants stay together in order to share stories about their experiences and to organise recreational events. (social-groups)
- Every church has a well-organised musical group, often more than one, such as choirs and bands. Indeed sacred spaces and music is a traditional binomial, and within ethnic churches this is a widespread practise. In this regard, migrants organise several activities that animate masses and other events. (recreational-groups)
- It’s possible to find several groups dedicated to catechism, both for young people and adults. In the first case, parents consider this activity crucial for passing on both religion and ethnicity. In the second case, it should be noted how not all members have a religious background, as I discussed above, and that some migrants discover faith in the host society and this requires a training for receiving sacraments. There are also several prayer groups, dedicated to the exegesis of texts and engaged in a continuous spiritual training. Other groups are typically associated to specific devotions, often linked to their mother-country. (religious-groups)
- In all the churches analysed there are Charismatic groups that in turn are connected with other Charismatic movements, at local, national and international level. These units are well

organised, they sponsor weekly prayers and they plan several events on a monthly basis, both within and outside the Churches where they are formally located. (Charismatic-groups)

- There are groups based on “secular” needs; firstly, units that organize religious structures, which need to be cleaned and prepared for every event. Furthermore, communities have a formal or informal support group, dedicated to the needs of their members (support-groups).
- There is often a group that represents a sort of organizational platform, a core that has become a reference point for communities, that organises and coordinates the internal life, a sort of Parish-council; this entity organises for example the social aspects of the church, from the major events to the most important fundraisings. Some churches have also defined a secretariat with a staff. (reference-groups)
- There are units that have a different profile from the previous groups: the cells. Often, migrants, on a religious basis, organise micro-clusters both inside and outside the same churches, for example at someone’s home, where people can share the bible and pray together during the week. (Cells)

This complex internal infrastructure may be analysed under various points of views; indeed, groups can be functional to the various needs of migrants, such as the chance of creating a lively social life where to reinforce personal ties. Moreover, groups generate a specific religious atmosphere, where migrants can address their spiritual needs, from traditional devotions to spiritual trainings, including Charismatic movements. This tendency towards an informal congregationalism based on voluntary participation characterises all ethnic churches. But this tendency needs to be better framed. Moreover, in the specific case of Catholicism, it’s important to analyse the kind of balance that takes shape internally, exploring how all groups may cohabit under the same “parish-roof”.

This perspective adds a crucial perspective for discussing ethnic churches. Therefore, a first consideration regards the types of relationships among groups; through this view I discuss how ethnic churches are also *spaces of tensions*. In this sense, it’s important to avoid the tendency to romanticize the meaning “community”. To elaborate on this issue, I recall how churches provide the possibility to develop migrants’ agency, including new images and roles, that in turn can lead to generating a strong lay-leadership, which is another typical feature of the Congregationalist outline. Moreover, this subject involves the presence of different “visions”, not always in harmony among each other. In this sense, ambitious leaders can also generate tensions, and the practises sponsored within groups don’t necessarily always have the same direction. From a methodological point of view, the chance of identifying and analysing tensions was rather challenging; this wasn’t initially the main focus during interviews with believers or lay leaders, as well as with clergy, but over time, thanks to fieldwork and the trust developed with churches I was able to identify some forms of friction.

In Milan, a preliminary consideration regards the Salvadoran community. As I mentioned, although there is in Milan a (pan) Latin-American Church (S. Stefano), the Salvadoran community has an autonomous space to use. Nevertheless, I found Salvadoran believers both in their own and in the Latin-American Church. In this regard:

You know, some of them, I don’t know why ... but some of them go to S. Stefano, some of them have good relationships with the priest, they are crazy about him, (shows disappointment), there is ... but I’m not sure ... a prayer group, where the priest helps them in praying and in reading the bible and holy scriptures, they like it ... but this is another issue, here the community is different ... (Moran, leader founder of Salvadoran Community in Milan)

Some Salvadoran believers come here, it's normal, I think that ... they feel better here, but I don't know, I'm not sure, these are ... difficult issues... here the community is ... different ... not so closed as over there, it's a question of style or ideas, or ... here there are prayer groups that can develop a spirituality and share the Bible...people here look for another style compared to the other situation ... (Carmen, responsible of Latin American community, leader of an internal prayer group, S. Stefano Milan)

In this case, tensions concern both the ambivalent role of ethnicity and the spiritual needs of believers. If a “strong” ethnic-profile may generate a “strong” pull factor, at the same time, for other migrants it doesn't represent an incentive for attending such types of religious space. Moreover, more than ethnicity, some believers -as I debated in previous paragraph- look for a community where they can develop a certain type of spirituality; for these reasons, they look for a specific kind of engagement inside another kind of ethnic church. In this sense, not for all migrant believers the balance between ethnicity, identity and religion is the same.

In a similar direction, the Filipino community is another interesting setting where to elaborate internal dynamism and the great (unexpected) vitality expressed on Sunday may create tensions among groups. Below, thanks to an interview with a chaplain of various Filipino communities in Milan I am able to analyse this issue:

Here, groups are well organised, and each group is autonomous, and this is also a problem for us ...

(Me): Sorry, why?

Because it generates tensions ... and there is a tendency to separate ...

(Me): Can you elaborate ... ?

I'm not sure ... I don't have studies or research to corroborate my ideas, but, starting from my experience, I have a theory... but it's only my idea. For all their life ... or ... for most of their life, Filipinos are subjugated here, always submitted, but pay attention ... we also have degrees, we have studied in our country, some of us had good jobs in our country, but due to the situation ... they have to come here, and when you've had the possibility to experience being “above” you don't want go “below”, you want to remain “above” not turn to “below” ... and when you are “above” the acknowledgement from the other people is really important ... but ... in theory ... in the church this situation couldn't work in this way, because it becomes politics...

(Me): Can you give an example ...

There are conflicts and tensions! For example, if a leader has a problem with another leader within the same group, he breaks with the group and he creates another group... and he starts a group identical to previous one ... normally problems are personal problems... “I don't agree with you” ... and then he creates a group, it's not a question of doctrine or a theological issue ... we believe in the same God and same Saints, and they attend the same Church ... but there are these situations ... (Father Osial, Pilipino chaplain Milan, priest of various Pilipino communities in the city)

This interview with a Filipino chaplain shows how migrants' religious dynamism generates a number of internal groups as well as tensions between them; nevertheless, these groups cohabit “under the same (holy) roof”. Another interesting topic is the “status” gained by believers within Churches. If they normally experience a downward social mobility, through the groups migrants can achieve new recognition. And here the role of lay leaderships emerges clearly:

The role of lay leaders is central, and it's well developed ... we could leave the community to laity and the church would go forward... Sometimes they also call other priests, and they organise the community's life autonomously ... many activities, each group sponsors

activities, and from outside they call other believers, it's a vibrant context ... at the same time they have a strong devotion for me ... I don't need to cook or do the laundry... they do everything for me ... (Father Osial, Pilipino chaplain Milan, priest of various Pilipino communities in the city)

“Paradoxically” the church could “walk” without clergy because the role of lay leaders is crucial in structuring and animating the community. On one side, the priest is marginal for the social life of Church, on the other, believers have a strong devotion for him but only as a liturgical figure. In this sense, social and liturgical levels are intertwined in different ways. The internal life follows various paths and the priest is ancillary to the existence of the same community.

I found the same group dynamism in London; “from below” socio-religious units play an important role in brightening churches, also posing questions on internal balance. Moreover, groups tend to develop a “vision”, a certain “style” in being religious. In this sense, Catholicism can be experienced in different ways. Starting from the Latin-American Church, a catechist and the priest give suggestions on this issue:

Not all groups have the same ideas and ... sometimes you feel diversity... there are groups with a specific idea about ... relations and society, I can understand, I'm catholic like them, but ... wait ... we believe in the same God ... and we belong to the same Church (smiles), hey! it's not easy to live in London ... it's a challenge ... Often I discussed with them, groups can't organise things without thinking about other people, nor can they tell off or blame people for ... their life ... wait ... living in London is difficult, people can experience troubles ... (Mariutzky, Colombian leader and catechist, S. Anne, London, Latin-American Church London)

Each group has a vibrant life and it's beautiful ... really ... beautiful because in our church religion is a strong experience, and for me is beautiful, you can see a lively church, wonderful but ... I need to ... organise them (he smiles), I have to understand activities, groups are so ... dynamic, people are so engaged, it's normal ... groups have a life, but sometimes ... you see problems, people come from different cities, they have different styles, and they have a different approach to religion, they organise a lot of activities, for someone religion becomes a lifestyle with specific ideas... You can understand, not all people have the same ideas, but sometimes it's a challenge ... (Father Carlos, priest of S. Anne, London, Latin-American Church)

Regarding the case of Brazilian Church:

The priest is careful to what happens ... he provides a space, but he wants to know, he wants to know what they do and what they say ... (informally the interviewed suggests something with her facial expression ...)

-(me): groups are dynamic ... and ...

Yes ... for example the Charismatic are so dynamic Samuele ... we are used to their presence, and we know very well this type of activism, it's amazing, it's a way of praying ... but ... we are a church, and ... father P. organises very well the situation, he has to understand all activities ...

-(me) sorry ... a “parallelism” ...

(facial expression) ... yes ... they attract a lot of people, they are well organised, but father P. always comes to have a look ... he wants to know... He helps them, really, he always welcomes them during services and ... yes ... you know ... it's a particular way of living faith, and there are famous leaders, not only here .. they are really famous in London, in England and Europe, also in Italy ... in France ... I know there are huge groups in Italy (...) generally

Charismatic attract many people from London, from many English churches, and they organise huge services ... (Maria, Brazilian, secretary of Brazilian church, London)

In both churches we can see how the dynamism of groups may follow parallel paths, also “de-bordering” from conventional outlines and how priests have to pay attention to these directions, working for unity. Specifically from the interviews it’s possible to centre the attention on two major issues; the *first* is the role of moral orientations, a question that I have already discussed in different parts, as in the fifth chapter, exploring the “image of respectability”, and also in the previous section, showing how migrants look for new moral-compasses, often steering clear from other “immoral” co-ethnics. The *second* issue is the role of Charismatic movements; a subject that I previously explored with regards to their approach to spirituality, capable of attracting those who are in search of an intense and intimate experience.

With regards to the first issue, I want to focus on how some groups may develop certain ethic visions. Indeed, they tend (or want) to become a sort of “benchmark of morality”. Previously I outlined themes like the temptations of the city or behaviours associated to co-ethnics; in this regard, I can also underline other matters that are intrinsically linked to migration experience, as sentimental relations, in particular: “living outside marriage”. In this sense migration experience may have various implications for conjugal relationships. Migrants indeed experience the situation of “three families” (Ambrosini, 2011): before leaving their home country, whilst separated from their families, and after the reconstruction of nucleus. Moreover, families may be separated definitively or rebuild a new relation in the host society.

These changes intersect also the religious experience, creating possible ambiguities in the case of catholic families; with regards to the interviews from the Latin-American Church that were quoted above:

(...) I know very well about these situations ... people can start new relationships, Samuele, do you understand what I mean?... When you face this challenge (migration) when you are alone for a long time... a lot of ... families are ... “stressed” ... in London people start a new life and ... then new problems, I know I know, if I can ... I try to help people, they want to share with us their stories, they look for people to talk about their problems, it’s not easy, they look for friends to talk about such situations, but ... others blame them -she refers to a prayer group similar to Charismatic- and I discussed with them, I knew very well that person, I knew she had real problems and I know she is a true believer ... I don’t like gossip... why? I mean ... it’s not easy but why accuse one another? (Mariutzky, Colombian leader and catechist, S. Anne, London, Latin American church London)

In this case, a friend of the person interviewed broke her marriage after migrating, but is still a Catholic and looked for help within a group as well as still going to some events organised by the church. For her it’s an ambivalent and difficult psychological situation, given that she experiences what may be termed by some co-parishioners “a life of sin” At the same time, someone condemns this situation which corrupts the image of purity and coherence so important for these believers. This subject is indicative of the moral tensions that there may be among groups. Migration can impact on different aspects of sentimental life, with (unexpected) implications for the religious life itself. In this case, living alone for a long time can stress families and lead people to look for new partners. In this regard, some women cling to the Church to achieve a moral security: because they work and live alone they need a point reference to avoid “temptation”; others can find another parallel and secret life, creating new relationships able to fill or accompany women in their long and difficult solitude.

Also in Milan, the Filipino priest made similar considerations on same circumstances, mentioning the effects of “gossip” around this issue:

(...)gossip within Filipino communities is common, some leaders hint at issues like these and say things like in your group there is ... and she is ... she has a new relation or she had a relation with... or similar, it's happened ... people are alone and often stressed by their experiences ... within groups this can become gossip ... (Father Osial, Filipino chaplain Milan, priest of various Pilipino communities in the city)

In both cases sentimental relations of churchgoers may arouse internal reprobation or gossip; some groups create expectations of certain behaviours by acting out their moral values.

For what concerns the second issue -the role of Charismatic groups- a question mentioned before in the case of Latin Americans and Brazilians is that they tend to live a “parallel life” with that of the Church where they are based; moreover they are highly dynamic and organise various meetings, also with other local or international groups. In these circumstances, priests try to manage the situation, giving space but controlling their role to avoid excessive autonomy. Priests know how some migrants look for this kind of spirituality, but at the same time they have to protect the “Church unity”.

In the case of Milan the priest of the Latin American Church was really clear about this issue:

One day ... they (migrant believers) asked me: father can we organise meetings here? I don't know why ... but I answered yes ... (smiles) sometimes I wonder why? But ... I said yes. Then, they told me: father, do you want to come to our meetings? Do you want read the bible with us? ... and they gave me a book of their movement... I said: Ok guys, you can, but not the book ... please ... if I read the book I'll say no,... I say yes now but under these conditions ... I said yes because I know this kind of spirituality, I have experience, I know that in south America it's widespread, and I understand their need for spirituality, I understand it, but at the same time I know that I have to pay attention ... I know their approach ... for example... miracles ... things that we don't follow here, but they follow this path ... and moreover they organise a lot of meetings. To our Italian eyes their spirituality is incredible, and the same group with other groups organises a huge service every two weeks... and other events in other structures ... (Father Alberto, priest of Latin-American church in Milan, and responsible of pastoral care of migrants)

In this sense, priest gave a space and the possibility to create a Charismatic group within the Latin American church, knowing how significant its role is for some members; at the same time he is cautious to avoid an excessive “protagonism”. As I showed, under the same (holy) roof various groups cohabit. Therefore ethnic churches at the same time show unity and diversity. This peculiar situation creates a sort of hybrid, a congregational dynamic within a conventional Catholic outline. Once again, migrants' religious protagonism represents a (continuous) challenge.

To conclude this section, I'll broaden the perspective on the *kind of activities* sponsored by groups within churches. The internal religious life is multifaceted and complex. In first instance, as is clear, it's possible to find the central Mass on Sunday, but, beyond it, churches have liturgies during the week: in Italy, normally only on Sunday, and rarely during the week. In England Masses are instead organised almost every day, thanks to the fact there is space available here. Moreover, internal groups can organise various moments of prayer and there are liturgical services managed by Charismatic figures. Often these religious meetings -depending on the availability of spaces- are scheduled also on Saturday and sometimes during the week.

As the fieldwork showed, Saturday is another central day for ethnic churches. On Saturday mornings, as a primary activity, migrants clean and arrange the church. During the afternoon, they typically organise catechism for the young and the adults. After this activity -or at the same time- some religious groups -depending on how many people are available- start to assemble and pray by reading the bible and lay leaders gather to organise a calendar. In the middle, each group organises a lunch or a coffee break. Here we can see how ethnic churches de facto create a sort of “*oratory*”,

where social occasions for families and children are intertwined with several religious activities. Furthermore, Saturday is the day when musical groups and choirs gather to train for their performances. In this regard from my field diary:

Today (Saturday, 3.00 pm) I met Mariutzky for the second time, I asked her whether she was available for an interview, I want to ask more about some aspects of our first informal meeting (on Sunday) and she was waiting for me in front of the church. As always, she is very kind.

When we entered, some believers were cleaning the floor of the church, then, as we were walking to the building where she normally teaches, I met Yolanda -one of the first interviews in this Church- with other two people and with a lot of shopping bags, she told me that she was going to cook some food for Sunday lunch.

We then walked towards a huge lateral building attached to the church, where on Saturday groups gather ...I'm pleased today because thanks to her I've had my first chance to gain access to the "back-stage" of Latin-American church. Everywhere in this huge building there were children and two women were supervising them, creating a beautiful atmosphere. Marizutky explained to me that on Saturday, aside from the catechism, they organise activities for young people, as games or similar. Mariuztky is really precious for me and she accompanied me in another room where the choir normally gathers ... I'm truly impressed by the organisation here (...) (Diary note, London, January)

In this case -as it's possible to note- the Latin American church is a lively context also on Saturdays when several activities are organised. I was able to observe these activities given that the interviews were conducted both on Saturday and on Sunday inside churches. Indeed migrants' free time for the major part is concentrated on weekends and they gave me their availability right in the middle of such activities. In this way I was able to have access to the church's "back-stage" and to see and take notes on what they did in these additional spaces.

I have already discussed how the extension of migrants' religious participation changes within ethnic churches, mixing holy moments to leisure time; in this regard, exploring the place on the Saturday gave me the opportunity to add more accounts on such experiences. In particular, drawing example from the previous diary note on Latin American church in London, I want to mention the significance of some activities. Firstly I underline the role of catechism, which is a widespread activity, mostly in London. In Italy it has a more ambiguous profile given that normally the diocese requires that catechism for migrants' children is organised by the local parish of residence. But also in Milan migrants have created parallel activities for young, and in the case of Filipino these are very well organised:

It's a beautiful group (...) they (the parents) want this group, and they want it to be well organised, they want for kids to have the chance to improve their religious background here, it's important for them because this is the community that they normally attend, and it's a way of sharing religion among people, to create intense moments within the group. Parents are afraid they may lose their religion and connections with religion. Plus, it's a way to stay together and in touch within the Church (Rosalie, Filipino believer, catechist, S.M. Carmine, Milan, Filipino Church)

In London the catechism is a well established and organised activity, and very busy both in the Latin American and Brazilian church:

*This year ... more or less ... one hundred and fifty children ...
(me: really?)*

Yes! ... Parents (Latino American) want to enrol children here, they want it, because in our Church children can speak Spanish and attend catechism, two things that are really important for them, they want this activity ... sometimes it gets tricky (he laughs) because we have a lot of people and I have to organise classes and documents for sacraments ... (Father Carlos, priest of S. Anne, London, Latin-American Church)

Parents want to send their children here, it's a way to pass on religion and Brazilian culture. This is very important for the parents... they look for catechism in Portuguese ... and they want to transmit faith ... here people come from different parts and they call me for information ... their look for this kind of service ... (Telma, secretary at Brazilian Office, S. Anne, London, Brazilian Church)

It's interesting to see how catechism is a way to transmit simultaneously religion and ethnicity; for families it becomes a pivotal activity sponsored by the Church, and is in high demand. Moreover, in a foreign land, it's interesting to see how churches are often the *only spaces* where to provide this double-continuity. They represent urban hubs for both for cultural and religious reproduction. Moreover, catechism sometimes is also for adults, because some of them don't have all the sacraments or a well-defined religious background, as in Milan for Ukrainians:

(...) Here we have also adults ...you should understand that some people learn to pray only once they get here, it sounds strange, but it's the reality. I meet Ukrainians that don't know how to do it, you should understand that there are different backgrounds, and different styles and ways of praying, not the same from one country to the other, and moreover some people don't have a specific religious background ... not all the sacraments ... not all migrants have the same training and they want to learn here in a different diocese ... (Father I.K, priest of Ukrainian Church, Milan)

An "ready-made oratory" takes shape within churches, mainly for young people (and sometimes for adults); this shows how churches have to provide answers to the various spiritual needs of members. At the same time, lively and entertaining events constantly intersect religious activities, reinforcing social relations and a common sense of belonging.

Within the religious sphere, the churches also sponsor pilgrimages, both for "local" religious sites (e.g. Loreto in Italy and Walsingham in the UK) and in foreign countries (e.g. Lourdes). Indeed, migrants organise several holy-trips, sometimes with other groups. They also sponsor spiritual retreats or similar religious activities, and -following a Catholic tradition- they sometimes organise religious holidays (a sort of Religious Camp). Often these activities -pilgrimages, spiritual retreats and holidays- are intertwined, once again blending religion and leisure time.

In the Latin-American church in Milan groups are very active in sponsoring such activities:

In Italy we've often been to Loreto to pray, it's very popular ... normally we share ideas on where ... and then we organise whole coaches that we always fill up completely, other times, we organise spiritual retreats ... we ask the priest if they know a free place or if someone already has contacts with other groups and we ask to organise a retreat for two days. It's a moment for sharing our faith, as Jesus wants. So normally groups are very active, they organise a lot of activities. People are often too busy with their jobs ... but if possible they participate, other times, during the summer, we organise retreats, a week where people can gather to pray and to stay with their families, often in the mountains ... people organise themselves and participate! (...) (Irene, Ecuadorian, member of a prayer group, S. Stefano Milan, Latin American believer)

Also in London the prayer groups of the Latin-America church organise pilgrimages and retreats:

Last time we went for St. Rita's Day¹², (22nd May), a beautiful celebration in honour of St. Rita, we organised... four coaches, all full, it was really beautiful, we took hundreds of blessed Roses in honour of St. Rita (...) and we regularly organise pilgrimages, in Walsingham or during the summer ... it depends, Poland, France or Italy, every year we change destination, many people participate. Often we add a trip, last year we went to the seaside, it was amazing,.. families with their kids ... a beautiful experience! (Jolanda, member of Latin-American Church, London)

Pilgrimages are a widespread activity among ethnic churches. These are obviously very different from the “Urban pilgrimages” I mentioned in the first chapter to refer to how migrants travel in the city on Sunday to visiting their ethnic-shrine (see Photos in Chapter 4). In this case I may enlarge the frame, discussing how they look for shrines also beyond the city borders -e.g. Loreto in Italy, Walsingham in England- and moreover also beyond national borders. In this sense, at the same time, they are both migrant and pilgrim always on route to search for God. Additionally, also in this case, one can observe how social and spiritual life are intrinsically embedded; religious activities represent occasions in which migrant can also relax and enjoy time with families and children. To conclude, in this I have explored the “front and backstage” of ethnic churches, describing the various ways in which migrants can experience God. I showed migrants’ religious protagonism, the genesis of internal groups and their activism, as well as the wide range of practises sponsored within churches. In doing this, I highlighted the transformations, challenges and tensions that generate here. In the last section, recalling the main findings, I provide final remarks on these various subjects.

6.5 Concluding remarks: ethnic churches as a work in progress

Starting from the interviews with members of the clergy I discussed some of the religious dynamics that enliven ethnic churches. One can see how the concept a monolithic and romantic idea of community, as a solid and homogeneous arena, is now out of focus; nevertheless, this concept can still work as a preliminary starting point, given that, around these ethnic centres, migrants give birth to several groups and activities. Indeed churches aren’t spaces that are “set up once and for all”, but instead relational fields where believers continuously act by generating organisational transformations sometimes also challenging pre-established internal structures.

A first issue regards how a plural body of believers animates religious spaces. The spiritual experiences of migrants follow various paths. To this regard, according to Levitt: “Not only is the faith immigrants bring with them not monolithic, its size and shape is very much a work-in-progress (2007: 94). Indeed I discussed how migrants, during their settlement in a host society, may change their approach to Catholicism; for example the degrees of involvement, the reasons for which to attend a church, the balance between holy-beliefs and mundane-experiences. Exploring believers’ storylines I outlined extension and intension of their involvement. I started from the ambivalent role of ethnicity, concluding with moral issues. In doing this, I showed also individual transitions, analysing how for some believers migration was an intimate spiritual journey. Indeed within the same church one can find those who are experiencing Catholicism for the first time, and also Charismatic believers, engaged in creating lively spiritual events. Moreover, migrants are in search of “new” meanings for facing a “new” life, for escaping from their everyday-materialism. There are also believers who are in search of new moral compasses to avoid disorientations. In this sense,

¹² I have a beautiful memory of St. Rita’s day when a leader gave me a blessed rose for my thesis.

religion is a “complex box”, a theological question, a matter of holy beliefs, but it’s also a wider frame intrinsically intertwined with migrants’ mundane challenges.

Churches are internally shaped by these patterns; for this reason I adopted a meso-level approach in order to advance the elaboration of ethnic Catholicism. Different practices and groups cohabit under the same roof. For the clergy this requires the ability to organise different internal collective dynamics and coordinate lay-leaders. Some migrants over time have reached significant roles and gained a new social status. Indeed, the presence of lay leadership is a common trend. For the traditional Catholic model it requires harmonizing different initiatives simultaneously. Moreover, Charismatic movements have gained a great centrality. In this regard Churches have to confront such religious forms, providing and scheduling spaces, also opening their doors to visits from other priests or groups as well as providing a space for special events. I also explored the wide range of activities that are organised in ethnic churches such as the catechism and pilgrimages. We’ve seen how informal oratories have been generated, where religious and recreational moments are intrinsically intertwined.

Ethnic churches are dynamic and hybrid spaces, continuously adapting in accordance to believers’ spiritual needs. Within religious spaces that are animated by migrants one can find tensions and transformations, preservation and mutation. In other words, churches are social processes and are de facto continuously moulded by the migrants’ activism. Finally, it should be noted how thanks to this internal complexity, immigrants have a better chance of fulfilling their needs given how they become embedded in networks where they continuously share experiences and information on everyday life. In this direction, in the next chapter I analyse the evolution of such internal activism, showing how churches have become multifunctional in addressing the material needs of members.

Chapter 7. The role of ethnic churches as providers of welfare

In this chapter I will debate how ethnic churches provides what I have labelled *informal welfare*. In the European literature this subject is only rarely taken into consideration and formalised and “welfare” is mainly associated to the study of public policies, to the market -as well as the mix between state and market- and finally to the role of third-sector (e.g. charities or voluntary organisations). In this chapter I argue instead how the term “welfare” may be applied also to the case of churches established by immigrants within host societies. Therefore, this “theoretical extension” represents another significant perspective in discussing intersections between religion and migration.

In the third chapter I introduced this issue quoting works that have been internationally developed. Now I want to explore this subject by conceptualising it in a tailored outlook: on the one hand, in light of a general processes of transformation of welfare within contemporary societies; on the other, in light of challenges that migration poses to social-citizenship, *i.e.* foreign population’s entitlement to access the national welfare. With respect to the first issue, the contraction of public resources -especially in times of crisis- and the progressive outsourcing and privatization of services are bringing to the fore the increasing relevance of an “intermediate space”, represented by various civil-society actors who have become pivotal in compensating, supporting and sometimes replacing the offer of public welfare. With regards to the second issue, immigrants’ citizenship rights often emerge as a matter of contention, like the issue of “welfare-shopping” -an increasingly central issue within public debates on immigration- as well as the critical case of migrants in irregular conditions, who are not (generally) entitled to national welfare although they live (and work) within its formal borders.

In this changing panorama, a new galaxy of actors -both religious and not- are today contributing evermore to the production of welfare, trying to address new social needs. In recent times what has been framed as a “post-secular welfare geography” is taking shape (see: Beaumont, 2008; Beaumont, Cloke, 2012). That is to say that also religious organisations are becoming providers of services in areas that were conventionally secular. In this direction I discuss how faith communities established by immigrants can be fully enrolled within this kind of panorama, taking an active role in generating support tailored on members’ needs. Nevertheless informality -and the public invisibility- characterises such provision, complicating both the collection of data and faith communities’ recognition as actors of an increasingly fragmented welfare state. In order to be recognized, services generally require some kind of formalization. Therefore, in the case of ethnic churches a pivotal question becomes how to identify and categorize the support they provide.

In this chapter I face this controversy. In particular in the next sections I progressively advance a schematization that may inductively define the welfare activities that religious communities provide to their members. It is a classic inductive procedure: I identify the various kinds of resources allocated and then I analyze the internal mechanisms that generate them. In this way it’s possible to capture the range of action of such resources. Starting from the interpersonal trust that feeds religious social capital and in light of the data collected, I go into the details of this informal welfare. In addition in this chapter I debate also the relations between ethnic churches and migrants in irregular conditions. Given their specific situation I explore the ways in which they turn to religious arenas as a strategy for surviving.

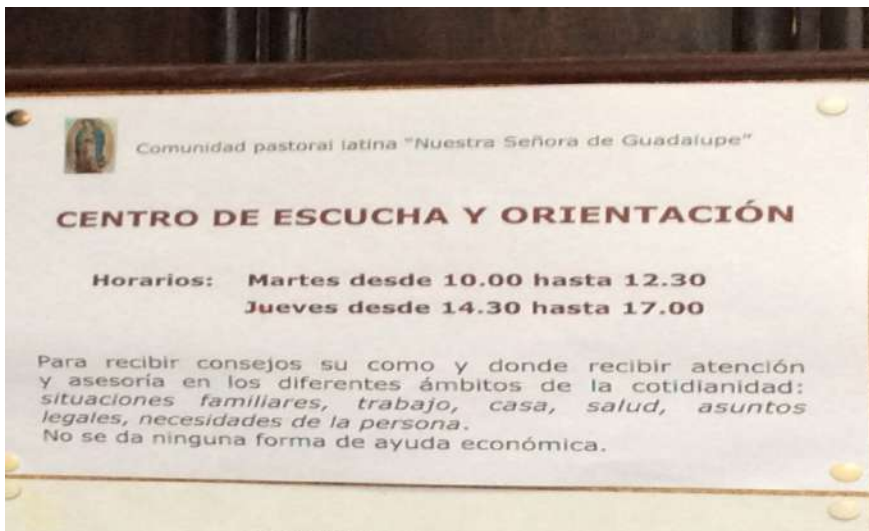
I wish to conclude this chapter discussing the implications of these processes, both for advancing the state of art on these studies and to underline the role of ethnic churches as actors able to sustain the social inclusion of immigrant population. Therefore this chapter on informal welfare provides another significant perspective to study ethnic churches. It shows how they have become *multifunctional* to migrants’ needs. From below they are indeed able to mould religious spaces into arenas of support.

7.1 Psychological counselling: helping lost souls

Habitually, when people experience concerns and pains they turn to religion as a spiritual strategy for finding support. For example, as I showed in the fifth chapter, a typical storyline during interviews with churchgoers was the sense of loneliness that characterises the experience of moving from the mother country to the city of Milan and London. Such feelings are particularly felt in the first period after arrival, when people face -in practice- the decision to migrate in search of a better life. During interviews, migrants have indeed described different kinds of difficulty, e.g. not speaking the same language or facing badly paid jobs. In this sense, religious spaces are points of reference for avoiding loneliness, disorientation and declassing.

Nevertheless the role of ethnic churches goes beyond, making available many types of emotional and psychological support. In first instance, they serve as a free space, a forum where people can talk about their problems. Some churches have often provided information-points; a sort of office that people can use in order to find solutions. A space where migrants can try to address various types of needs associated to their experience. In particular, in the case of Milan:

There is a listening centre here, where people come if they want to speak, speak about their problems. Often a person is alone and has critical concerns about their family, tensions, violence, or problems with children, they are really stressed, there are a lot of psychological tensions, it's not easy, people want to talk with someone ... and we are here to listen to them, trying to understand if it's possible to find a solution. In a certain sense, here you can do it better than elsewhere, confiding is not easy... some people have physical problems that create also psychological conditions... like depression, this is the reason why we have a "listening centre" ... people can come here freely, and we try to understand how ... sometimes we can help, we start a relationship with them ... finding true relationships these days can be difficult. Other times we can provide a junction with other associations that have greater means to help them ... (Secretary of S. Stefano, Latin-American Church Milan)



(the picture shows the office hours, Milan, S. Stefano, Latin-American Church):

In London, the Brazilian church provides a similar service:

We are open from Monday to Friday, from early morning until early afternoon ... normally I receive people for many reasons, if someone wants to talk they can come here or they can call me and I try to schedule a meeting ... somebody tells me something ...like ... there is a brother who needs ... there is a new brother in the church, they give me information ... and I'm here, it's my role (...) sometimes it's really hard to listen to these stories, you can understand ... loneliness, tensions, problems in the family ... health problems, or people without visas, prison, detection ... not good ... not good things ... Last week it was really hard, a friend told us that a woman, an irregular ... now ... (disappointment) detention, and we are arranging something for her, who takes care otherwise? The priest sent a message to a prayer group and people are going to visit her every day, it's a way to help, but it's really hard, is stressing ... living without a visa is really stressing, often you are alone in this situation (...)

But we can help people at the hospital, if you are alone because your friends or relatives don't have time ... who can help you? It's really hard, hospital is a sad place, we organise something... visits or helps ... (for example ...) there are a lot of groups ... I can call or send a message and people are ready to help, we are a Church, we know that troubles are part of our life ... (Telma, secretary of Brazilian Church)

In both churches just mentioned -Latin-American in Milan and Brazilian in London- there are specific offices, where migrants can freely turn up. A sort of listening-centre that tries to provide support. In the other religious contexts this role is carried out by a group or sometimes by lay-leaders who have a long experience and have become points of reference within churches. Elaborating on this subject, it emerges from the interviews how psychological difficulties go beyond the sense of loneliness. Troubles can indeed arise during different stages of migration experience, such as tensions within families, mental distress as well as the experience of being an illegal immigrant. The latter case is truly critical, and the church becomes a shelter for those who are formally excluded by host society. Furthermore, psychological support is important for conditions such detention or hospitalization. For example, in Milan a leader of Latin American church organises assistance for sick people:

My group often organises visits to ill people at hospital, often people are alone, or their relatives are far, maybe they don't live near the hospital or they don't have time, or some don't have licenses, it's not so easy, we go and we pray with them, we keep them company and we bring them something, a small help ... but when you are sick it's a way to stay happy (Carmen, responsible of Latin American community, leader of an internal prayer group, S. Stefano Milan)

The interviews show how internal groups are flexible and receptive. In this direction it's important to understand *how* churches try to address this kind of situations. Psychological counselling is often implemented within the same communities through the activism of their members. A main solution is to put people in contact with internal groups; as I explained in sixth chapter, their presence and role is widespread and significant within churches. Thanks to these internal organisations, migrants can find assistance and help for their troubles. I found this practise in all the communities:

Those who turn to me are often in need, and I try to help them, firstly, I try to communicate the closeness, a rare sentiment in our society, secondly, I don't reject anyone, I have a long experience here, I know very well about problems, over time people can experience strange emotions, frustrations, and sometimes familiar tensions consume you, often families are divided, and some problems emerge only later. People can also get sick, over time your energies can be consumed ... try to think to those who work for Italian families, suddenly they can change the place where they were working and living, losing relations (...) a first

thing is to put people in contact with each other, it's human, for example, I ask them: what are you doing this weekend? I know that women are often alone during the weekend, well, they can come to us here, at the church, this is a first step, then they can start to speak with me or my friends, it's a way of making things better, they stay alone during the week and also during the week-end, you can imagine, and often you have only a room, do you know what it means to be living in single room for a long time? ... it's frustrating... people experience depression, in this way they can share their number with whatsapp ... and they can start a relation or they can start to attend our group or another ... (Carmen, responsible of Latin American community, leader of an internal prayer group, S. Stefano Milan)

(Discussing the most common problems in the church) often I meet people here (at the Church's hall) ... when you are in a bad situation and when you don't have nothing ... people go to church ... we are used to see people in this situation... people always look for God when they have problems, last week I met two women here, Samuel ... a sad situation ... one has problems in her family, you can imagine, with the husband... she was crying and can't find a solution, she has two kids... not good, and the second one is unemployed, she's got nothing ... no visa, she was really depressed, not good (...) in this case I sent a message to my friends, whatsapp is amazing, it's a prayer group, in this way she can talk to someone, this group is really helpful, they put Jesus before everything... even if they've never met the person they try to help... (Yolanda, leader of Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London)

Lay leaders with long experience have often become points of reference, and, in case of need, they can organise forms of support. These leaders operate as confidants, firstly, understanding the type of need, and then by trying to provide a possible solution for alleviating such feelings. In this sense, within churches, formally and informally, psychological counselling is undertaken. Although it is “artisanal” and self-produced it becomes highly precious for people who face social exclusion. Moreover it should be noted that this type of counselling plays a significant part if migrants don't have crucial resource such as an extended family. Indeed, among native population, emotional supports can be normally found within proximity networks, like households or friends, to whom people (generally) can freely turn -in a same language and with a common cultural background- and share intimate concerns. In the case of an immigrant population this opportunity may instead represent a challenge. In this sense churches fill a (relational) vacuum and provide a rare form of help.

In addition, interviewing the clergy of each community, I found as they cover a similar role of “counsellors”. In the case of ethnic churches the borders between spiritual and psychological assistance are very blurred. As I introduced in the sixth chapter, migration may pose a challenge to the traditional role of priests, and in these cases he can transform in an emotional point of reference. For example, recalling father Alessandro who works in close contact with migrant believers in Milan:

Today, before your visit, I saw this young man, I don't know ... it's really a touching story, he's had problems with drugs, and now he is alone, completely disoriented, he didn't explain me what happened in detail, but I can imagine, he is facing a dramatic moment, he was crying and now he wants to change his life ... I met him at the Church last week, and then he called me and he asked me ... father I need help! Can I speak with you? ... so ... I'm here (...) three days ago a woman called me, I know her quite well, sometimes she comes to Church and now she is in a sad situation, she has become an irregular ... and last week the police gave her a document for expulsion, and now? Can you imagine? Before she was happy, she was calm, suddenly her life has changed ... moreover she is quite alone ... now

I'm trying to find a solution but ... it's not easy, she was crying and crying ... and it's really a sad situation because now she has no options... it was psychological shock to her ... (Father Alessandro, chaplain of the Filipino community and responsible of pastoral care of Migrants, Milan)

As I told you ... I try to help them, mostly women, many of them work in Italian families, they stay all week alone, without relations ... only with an older person ... practically ... they can speak only with them or their relatives, and they can see their family only with Skype. Over time this situation bring you in a bad psychological condition. Often they come here and they speak with me, so ... is like depression, you realize that you have worked for years helping your family but without the family, and ... people cry for this, I have seen many tears in the confessional ... (Father I.K Ukrainian priest, Milan)

The experience of migration may also pose unexpected distresses. In this sense, both in Milan and London, ethnic churches can work as listening centres as well as provide groups of believers prepared to listen, which includes the role of the clergy who sometimes reinvents itself taking on a new role. Together these various activities represent a sort of “emotional welfare”. As the fragmented literature in this topic shows, churches are able to provide a form of “spiritual therapy” (McMichael, 2002); religion intrinsically becomes a way to face problems, where people can turn to alleviate pains (Gozdziak, 2002). This kind of support is crucial for various emotional situations, from loneliness to stress, from family tensions to psychological diseases, and also in critical cases as detention or irregularity, addressing a role that is often totally disregarded by the rest of society. Within churches it's possible to find direct help by many “workers of compassion” (Kim, 1996). Finally, this support can be also considered under the spectrum an emergent body of research on “migration and emotions studies” (see Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015), a subject that has achieved a greater theoretical and empirical formalisation. In this regard, religion and emotions are intrinsically intertwined and such findings can help to open a window on how migrants can face their problems thanks to religious institutions.

7.2 Platforms of settlement services

In this section I analyse how ethnic churches play a significant role in providing a multidimensional set of resources, tailored to migrants' secular needs. Indeed, by encouraging and supporting interrelations, religious spaces represent arenas where to share pivotal information, such as legal advice, job vacancies and available housing, addressing the essential needs for the experience of migration.

With reference to legal advice, as I just debated, Churches can provide information points, or as an alternative, members with a consolidated knowledge about juridical issues can help their “brothers” in moving within the legal framework of the host country. Moreover, ethnic churches have established relationships with local catholic organisations or with other charities with whom they collaborate in case of specific situations, like in the case of Latin-American church in Milan

Here aside from religion, people come to pose questions about legal status ... I'm joking ... I might say that for our members a resident permit is important as much as their faith (smiles), for example ... the case of a family reunification, which is much required, because it's quite complicated, but they also ask about where to find information about social-security, or ... when you apply for a visa renewal you have to present a lot of documents, about residence or tax returns, it's not easy, and if you don't speak very well Italian ... it becomes very difficult, but when the situation is complicated we ask Caritas, they have a

specific office... and it's close to our Church, this is a wonderful coincidence (Secretary of S. Stefano, Latin American church, Milan)

Also in the case of the Latino church in London the priest gave me similar answers:

I mean ... visas are the most important thing ... so ... they need information, and our office tries to help them, some believers have a long experience, they know very well how these processes work, and we have also a lawyer, a wonderful woman, really ... a beautiful person and she is super professional, super, I think ... she helped many many people here ... because in England it's not easy, and in general these things are not easy if you don't speak very well English and if you aren't able to write very well what is required, there are also many ... many legal paths ... amazing ... initially they ask to someone within the community, and often they ask me for a meeting with our lawyer, if the situation is critical ... I can call Charities, there are a lot of catholic Charities in London... (Father Carlos, priest of S. Anne, London, Latin-American Church)

Ethnic churches serve as a “social forum” to support believers in their applications to obtain a legal status and function as platforms where to exchange information about complex processes. Indeed in these churches, one can find lawyers, or believers with a long experience, as well as valuable connections with local charities. Ethnic churches try to activate themselves as best they can, and they are strongly connected with local catholic networks that in turn represent a significant shelter for migrant needs.

In this regard, the issue of a *legal status* inevitably recalls that of an *illegal status*, a situation widespread within these churches. During the fieldwork, through interviews and informal conversations with churchgoers, I was able to observe how religious spaces play a pivotal role for the survival of irregular immigrants, becoming a sort of “paralegal-arena” where they can confront and tackle this critical situation. In Italy, in the past, when the political situation was (quite) different, many amnesties were regularly sponsored (seven in twenty-five years) and Churches helped migrants in obtaining official papers, supporting them in finding a “sponsor¹³” -necessary to guarantee the access to legal application- or linking migrants directly with local organisations:

(Talking about legalisation process) I remember the last amnesty, nearly six years ago, officially I wasn't the responsible of Pastoral Care, but I remember very well, when the news on amnesty has spread ... oh ... wow ... people were continuously asking about how to apply ... where to find solutions, where to find a sponsor ... you can imagine ... here there are a lot of believers ... and people continuously looked for information, obtain a legal status is like having a real life, it's incredibly important ... and we helped them or we sent them to Caritas. Those were good days! Not like today, and pay attention, migrants today continue to be illegal... here we still have a lot of people who are irregular ... (Father Alberto, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin American Church, responsible of pastoral care of Migrants)

In London the issue of irregulars is a critical issue among sacred walls. A question that afflicts and torments believers as well as the clergy; a condition highly diffused. Given the chance to request a legalisation -which is an individual process, unlike Italy, where it was mainly a collective procedure- migrants in irregular condition need several and appropriate documents to meet the requirements, as the length of residence, their family relationships, or the type of local inclusion. In this regard priests can try to provide documents to reinforce migrants' application, by which they

¹³ In summary, amnesties were granted to employers who declared to have hired an immigrant without papers and to want give her/him a regular contract.

can demonstrate their presence or their inclusion in local circuits, as Church membership. Priests can provide letters that represent a sort of reference to corroborate the demand:

(while discussing about irregulars) So ... we try to help them, but it's really difficult, the main solution is ... to marry someone, it's easier, or ... migrants can cling to familiar relations ... providing documents on their family status, but honestly it's really difficult, you have to prove a lot of things, and it's a complicated process ... we try to do something ... (I try to insist on this subject) ... our church can do little things, but we can try to demonstrate... for example ... a Brazilian is well established here, he is a regular ... or children are regular because they follow catechism here ... or we can help them providing references ... but it's difficult, the law is really inhuman... (Father Paulo, priest of Brazilian Church, St. Anne, London)

Therefore ethnic Churches in various ways intersect not only the religious life but also the secular experience of their members, accompanying them in achieving or maintaining a legal status. Religious spaces represent arenas where to mediate and resist to state laws, for alleviating their impact on migrant life, also for supporting who is completely excluded and vulnerable as irregulars are.

In this direction it's possible to observe others forms of help. Indeed all sacred contexts sponsor activities to support immigrants in finding jobs or available housing. For example I collected similar advice within churches:

Job reference	Job title	Dept	Hours of work	Closing date
0018-70425	Caritas Communications Assistant	Caritas	17.5 hours per week	21/06/2019
0004-70140	Health and Safety Officer	Procurry	35 hours per week	21/06/2019
0018-21	Music Co-ordinator	Carnden Town	8	21/06/2019
0022-702	Brazilian Kitchen Assistant	St Ignace House	30	28/06/2019
0075-9017	USA (Woodstock)	Caritas St Josephs	6	28/06/2019
0077-0096	Catechetical Co-ordinator	Haringey	30	28/06/2019
0079-9017	Life Long Learning Manager	Caritas St Josephs	28	28/06/2019
0060-9017	Social Enterprise Manager	Caritas St Josephs	28	28/06/2019
0061-0064	Salerno Mass Organiser	Hammersmith	see job description	28/06/2019
0075-0075	Bookkeeper	Haringey North	10	12/07/2019
0078-0018	Catechesis and Youth Co-ordinator	Harkhamstead and Tring	20	12/07/2019
0009-118	Parish Organist	London Colney Parish	48 services through year	ongoing
0017-9017	Dianna Fabro Co-ordinator	Caritas St Josephs	7	ongoing
0015-9017	A Place to Learn Co-ordinator	Caritas St Josephs	6	ongoing
0022-70427	Relief Support Worker	Hakula House	as required	ongoing
0042-70427	Relief Night Contact Worker	Hakula House	as required	ongoing

Please visit our website at <https://jobs.edocw.org.uk/>

(St. Anne, Brazilian Church, London)



(St. Anne, Brazilian Church, London)

Configuring themselves as reliable settings for the exchange of information, religious communities become essential hubs for participating in several social fields of the host society, such as the labour market. In this sense, the circulation of resources as job offers or advise on available rooms is linked to the circulation of reputational resources, of which the church is a sponsor, acting as an intermediary. In this case of job offers, ethnic churches operate as “brokers of trust” between labour supply and demand. Recognition and respectability obtained through church-membership becomes indeed the foundation to participate in the exchange of information. In the Italian case, this mechanism is particularly significant, given the diffusion of domestic and care work:

They (Italian employers) call here if they need a caregiver or a domestic worker and I spread the info to the various groups, as the choir group or the Bible readers, I send them a message: there is a job offer... Is any of you available? Otherwise Filipinos may ask me ... and I know who is looking for a job and when I hear an offer ... I put people in contact ... (Michelle, secretary and member of Filipino Community, S.M. Carmine, Milan)

Job offers here... they're like a prayer, it's the norm! ... people look for information ... do you know someone who's available? We try to help each other, there are groups within the community...If you need a job we can spread the voice within groups and sooner or later an unemployed person finds a job! (Raquel, member of a prayer group, Latin American church, Milan)

(discussing the economic situation of the community) The jobs of our members are the usual ones, many women, as you probably know, have hard jobs as care givers within families, men are often construction workers, factory workers, drivers and warehouse workers (...) here people exchange a lot of information, I think it is one of the main activities ... of course ... after praying! (we laugh) ... yes, there is a great movement of information, they look for jobs and other members look for people available, some of them have also started their own businesses and they know that here there are good people ... or often people ask me if I know someone who need an employee... I for instance always say this: if you see someone in difficulty, if someone has been without a job for a long time, don't give a job to a friend who

already has two or three, and instead give the job or the info to the person who's struggling!
(Father I. K, Ukrainian priest)

It becomes important to analyse such subjects given that they are highly representative of migrants' situation in the Italian labour-market. Normally their economic participation has mainly occurred informally, without the role of public institutions or formal processes of regulation (Ambrosini, 2001). Ethnic-networks generally represent fundamental mediators, becoming junctures between labour supply and demand (Ambrosini, 2017). In this direction ethnic churches are indeed pivotal spaces where this informal process takes shape, where the exchange of information on vacancies and the production of references based on trust have become a regular practise.

For example, many migrant female workers -but men too- are involved in the supply of care services, especially for elderly population (Ambrosini, 2016). A kind of job that is unattractive to the native population, due to the "social status" associated to it. Indeed the Italian care regime -as well as in other south-European countries- is mainly anchored to families (Ferrera, 2006), which still remain the main nucleus of care. In this sense Italian women have changed their role from "care givers" into "care managers", and female immigrants have took their place, assisting, regularly or irregularly, the elderly population (Ambrosini, 2016). Thus ethnic churches serve as a site where one can obtain information on available workers, where migrants continuously exchange information on employers and their requests. A similar process of intermediation interests several other labour sectors, as agriculture, small factories, urban services and construction, where migrants are typically employed. These are all jobs where the reliability of worker is more important than his or her official skills (Ambrosini, 2011). In this sense ethnic churches are highly efficient, regularly allocating jobs. Paradoxically though, in turn they produce ethnic-niches: "a self-perpetuating mechanism".

Nevertheless, this informal and "chaotic regulation" of the labour market also characterises London:

I think ... a typical job is "cleaning" ... I think many people I know are cleaners, really, it's a typical job, I mean ... have you seen London? London is like a huge office! It's amazing, there are offices everywhere ... (we laugh together) and the English need workers to clean then! Normally they don't like this job ... cleaning is not a typical English activity! I know women who work also with English families (...) here (church) surely you can find a job, sure, people regularly ask: do you know someone who is prepared to work? Do you know someone available? (we are talking of regular/irregular employment) Even irregular ... a lot of people don't have a visa but they work, or man normally work within restaurants ... chefs or dishwashers ... if you need you can ask, often they say: my cousin, my brother needs ... you know? He is a good guy... (Maribel, Bolivian member of Latin-American Church, S. Anne, London)

I think ... a lot of Brazilians are cleaners or they work in restaurants, or hairdressers, generally ... services ... here normally people share information about vacancies, we try to make this exchange easy and safe... if someone is looking for a job we can share information, sure! Or we send a message to someone ... (Telma, secretary of Brazilian Church, London)

Also in London ethnic churches serve as "informal employment agencies"; they function as a site where migrants can turn to look for a job and obtain information on vacancies. Like in Milan, such information regards specific sectors of labour market, typically in demand within Global cities, i.e. low-level services. In this regard one can see how churches -clearly- don't have specific economic aims, nevertheless the possibility to freely share a place also entails the chance to share pivotal information on labour market. Furthermore, the reliability guaranteed by religious involvement becomes an important requirement, probably the most important in a migrant's "curriculum".

In addition, such internal exchange of information relates to another fundamental issue for migrant experience, i.e. the possibility to find available lodging:

An informal rental market is a classic pattern, or... news about rooms, about their price, if they are comfortable... Here you can also find temporary rents, it's crucial for their life ... because people need rooms also for their documents (residence permits) or for requests of family reunification... (for which a regular place of residence is a requirement) Adequate accommodation is not always easy to find... They host and they are hosted (...) (Father Alberto, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin American Church, responsible of pastoral care of Migrants)

Rooms are a critical issue ... I mean, Samuele do you know London? Finding a cheap room is ... a challenge, how much do you pay? (... also for me...) for Brazilians it's really a challenge. We try to help, we have also rooms here, few ... but in case of need they are a resource... and we usually work with religious Charities or congregations that usually have more rooms, safe rooms! Because ... there are many risks for Brazilians, I heard stories ... five or six people in a bedroom, inside small flats, or Brazilians exploited by other Brazilians, they ask a lot of money for a miserable bedroom, we try to give them information, somebody can also share a flat with another believer, a safe place ... and clean ... (Maria, secretary of Brazilian Church, London)

Speaking informally with believers during coffee breaks a recurrent topic was “how to find a room” in London, which is a typical subject among newcomers like me, who face “similar” problems given that prices are particularly high. I was indeed intrigued in knowing how migrants found a room in the city, what type and where. In this regard, through informal discussions I was introduced to the ‘three Rs’ motto : people need room that can be Cheap, not too expensive, Conformable, a clean and harmonious space, and Close, not too far from the job due to the high costs of transport services. In this sense migrants try to find specific solutions also through their network of churchgoers, in order to avoid dangerous places and unwelcome tenants, whose lifestyles don’t fit with their expectations.

To conclude this section, one can observe how ethnic churches mediate the access to housing and work, which are among the most important needs for migrants. Churches are crucial spaces for attaining information or references. In this sense, beyond religious matters, religious spaces take a profile as “informal employment agency” and “informal estate agency”.

7.3 Church and Charity: poor but generous

Legal status, residence and employment are crucial and daily issues for migrants’ quality of life; nevertheless it’s possible to observe how within churches other forms of help take shape, such as the organization of meals or events to raise funds. In fact, during the fieldwork, I observed how collecting money for different purposes was a recurrent practise in all sites. In this sense, fundraising is a typical religious activity, and within ethnic churches this practise is even more important given members’ needs.

In all the contexts I explored, it’s an ordinary, recurrent and widespread activity. Moreover it’s rather surprising, given that members -in most cases- aren’t a wealthy population. But the general atmosphere of solidarity -both in Milan and London- is able to promote numerous forms of collections for who is in time of need:

Here, in case of need, they organize themselves, it's normal for them, they organize meals or events to collect money, they often do it, for example ... if there is a need ... they cook an huge quantity of food and typical dishes to raise funds, the community, if necessary, tries to mobilize for all eventualities ... (Father Alberto, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin American church, responsible of pastoral care of Migrants)

Generally we collect money before and after the mass and we sponsor different kinds of activities, on Saturdays and Sundays we regularly organise parties (...) generally many groups organise collections, it's normal, often they share ideas about a necessity...and then they collect money for that need... (Gabriela, responsible and member of family-group, Brazilian church)

In particular, a recurrent storyline was correlated to cases such as critical diseases that can require expensive treatment and make it difficult for the person to continue working; money is also collected to help those who are unemployed. Thus, internal groups, also thanks to whatsapp, sponsor informal self-financing. All the communities in Milan activate such informal types of help:

We try to support each other, for medical care for example, because medicines cost a lot, and often people don't have enough money (...) usually the message spreads, and we organize a lunch, a dinner, during which we collect money, we try to give help, of course, what we can do ... (Rosa, Ecuadorian member of a prayer group, S. Stefano Milan, Latin American believer)

Here we regularly raise funds for everything, it's a typical Filipino activity, generally if there is an target, the Filipinos will surely achieve it. Groups are really active (discussing about forms of help) we have also a group ... if people are facing a period of unemployment or a difficult period in terms of money ... they can do activities within the Church, like cleaning or setting up Church for the lunch or an event, and we give them money ... only a small help, but it's something... (Lota, responsible Filipino church, S. Stefano, Milan)

In Milan, both in Latin American and Pilipino Churches, migrants organising collections in case of need. It's a form of self-help based on small but significant resources. I found that fundraising was often activated to pay for expensive medicines, and help these people who can also become partially unemployed; within the Pilipino community, which is highly organised, there is also group for helping people who are looking for a new job, as a micro-form of support.

Also in London, I observed how people are always prepared to collect resources:

Every Sunday our group has lunch together, we cook and we collect money, it's free, people have fun and they can buy food and ... offer some money ... what they can do ... but we always collect money, I know other groups on Saturday or Sunday organise collections, everything (...) often for medical care or medicines, and sometimes for people ... people who need visas for example, you can understand the situation ... the priest... if there is a critical situation... he decides what to do ... here we are poor but ... remember Samuele... we are generous ... poor but generous ... (Yolanda, leader of Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London)

“Poor but generous” may summarize the charitable philosophy that animates ethnic churches. Although these helps are often “symbolic contributions”, they can be truly helpful for people in need.

I participated regularly to the lunch organised by Latin-American community and I was struck by what they are able to collect in terms of money (of course I also gave my contribution). In this sense the Brazilian priest gave me a similar response:

People don't know what we are doing... I think it's incredible, you can't see much from the outside ... and ... honestly you don't need to see anything (he smiles), this is the right way of doing charity, quietly! Many people criticize this place! But, I'd like to say ... what are you doing? Jesus works in silence, managing money is not easy, here there are people in trouble, just think to overstayers ... but here, in silence, and thanks to our charity ... we do something, of course, we cannot talk about what we do, but we help ... much more than other people... here Brazilians are well organised ... (Father Paulo, Brazilian Priest)

“Jesus works in silence” is a significant expression for framing what happens within Brazilian community. A shared charitable atmosphere helps members in helping each other, a practise which is invisible from the outside. In the condition of “living in the dark”, such activism was clearly expressed also by the leader of Salvadoran community in the city of Milan:

I blindly hold on to this, and hope I never change my mind, “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”, that is you shouldn't do something in order to be praised, you only should try to do your best, and that's it. (Moran, leader of Salvadoran community)

At this point it's important to focus on how such “charitable-mechanism” works. In first instance, starting from quotations, two recurrent subjects are often mentioned: “WhatsApp and food”.

The first is a famous messaging platform that enables people to stay connected and share contents. It's widely adopted by believers. Every internal group uses this platform in order to be continuously “updated” on activities and needs. If a member wishes to share information or organise a meeting as well as advance a request, he can freely use this resource. Today WhatsApp is a global tool adopted by the people to create and reinforce ties; in this case, migrants use it for religious and material needs. Moreover it provides flexibility, improving internal coordination.

Secondly, “food” is one of the “practical ways” through which believers can collect money. First of all it attracts people, both for cultural reasons, given that believers prepare typical dishes of their mother country, and socially, given that food creates convivial moments, where people can freely gather. Food (within many cultures) is indeed intrinsically incorporated into sociality. Migrants can cook and sell food, a democratic and smart activity, not expensive and a means for easily collecting resources. As I observed during the fieldwork, Churches de facto become “informal lunchrooms”. These two elements combined -WhatsApp and food- “feed” an informal welfare.

But, to elaborate on how the “charitable-mechanism” works, another critical point is the access to these resources that are painstakingly collected, this being a topic that I tried to elaborate in order to comprehend “the borders of solidarity”. Money for medicines or expensive therapies, forms of helps for those who are in time of need, such as unemployment or unforeseen expenses, may attract too many people being very precious as resources. In this sense, access to these resources is intrinsically linked to the trust established through the continuity of church attendance. Membership becomes a selective filter both for avoiding ambiguities that an indiscriminate use could imply and for preventing that religious identity is overshadowed only by material needs. As pointed out by a leader from the Latin-American church in Milan:

We try to help as we can, but we do it only for a specific needs. For example: if a person has an expensive medical treatment to sustain... we raise funds and we pay for that. If someone has an economic problem, he can call those who are in our group, for example ... normally he says that he will cook something and then we talk to each other and we buy everything ... these are people that we usually see and that we know very well... But then, you know...

Sometimes a person tells you a touching story, and we give help and then ... we never see them again or maybe we see them somewhere else, we cannot trust everyone, but we welcome everyone, we talk to everyone and then we let the relationship grow... (Carmen, leader of Latin-American church, Milan)

Indeed, during the fieldwork, one of the subjects was to understand the mechanisms behind the circulation of these forms of help. From the previous words of Brazilian priest: “*you can't see anything from the outside*” it's possible to glimpse some of the grounds. From one side, solidarity is an ethical and theological principle that animates believers, stimulating cooperation. From the other side, this kind of atmosphere becomes ambiguous given that it can attract too many people, creating tensions on how resources should be allocated. In the case of Brazilians (see the previous quotation from the priest) it's possible to clearly recognize this fine balance. The word “silence” recalls the fact that it's accessible but first of all this charitable circuit needs trust.

Moreover, this consideration opens a window on how within churches this fine balance is in turn negotiated. In Milan, internal groups seem to be more autonomous, whereas in London priests are more engaged, in order to give an unambiguous direction:

So the Father ... yes ... in reality he is suspicious ... you know, money can be dangerous, this is the reason why we build a relation before, but he tells us to pay attention ... (Carmen, leader of Latin-American Church, Milan)

Within the Latin American church in London:

(asking on how it works) so ... Father C. often give us more details ... I mean, money attracts people and sometimes tensions ... but he can say ... pay attention, or ... this is a good reason, or ... he takes care of the situation, deciding who and how ... (Maribel, Bolivian member of Latin-American church, S. Anne, London)

Also within Brazilian church the priest tries to give a direction:

(talking about collections) father Paulo pays great attention, because ... you know ... money can create problems ... yes, he's careful, in this way we don't have problems (Maria, Brazilian, secretary of Brazilian church, London)

Two elements regarding charitable activities emerge from the interviews. The first is that -once again- priests can take a different profile beyond spiritual assistance, assuming a role of an informal accountant. This consideration in turn opens another window. From the point of view of priests, there is great attention in preventing that religious communities be reduced only to service-centres, trying instead to save the main religious identity. It's a delicate balance, continually subjected to tensions and negotiations due to the needs that believers bring within communities.

Possibly, more so in Italy, they would indeed avoid this practise given how they know that it may create problems, but the internal activism combined with migrants' needs, generate de facto such forms of help. Also in London priests are very cautious, trying to give directions to charitable circuits in order to prevent tensions. Nevertheless the balance is continuously subject to negotiations, given that migrants inevitably import their needs within community. To conclude this section on internal charity one should consider how a general atmosphere of solidarity facilitates social cooperation, but also how this requires a filter in order to avoid and indiscriminate use of resources. Therefore religious identity and charity inevitably coexist within ethnic churches.

7.4 Churches and family needs: conciliation, education and orientation

Another relevant form of support promoted within communities is childcare, an important issue given the lack of extended familiar networks that can assist migrants in parenthood -as grandparents do for local families- or difficulties in affording this kinds of helps, as well as eventual bureaucratic problems linked to their legal status that can complicate the fruition of public resources (especially, the irregular condition).

As I showed in sixth chapter, each church sponsors several activities for children and adolescents, a sort of oratory that promotes both leisure and religious activities, such as organised games or catechism. In this sense immigrant parents appreciate this space given that it represents a way to reproduce both ethnic and religious belonging. However, even *socially* these spaces become significant for immigrant parenthood. For example, the Latin-American church in Milan has promoted an informal day-care where mothers can leave their children during working hours. At the same time these spaces can also provide answers and advice for concerns about the new educational system they find in Italy:

We tried to build a kindergarten for mothers because often they don't know where to leave their children during their working hours, and they don't have grandparents with whom they can leave their children ... How do they do it? They try to organize their time schedules but it's difficult... I'm also very committed to addressing educational matters, the orientation of children in a new school system they don't know... (Carmen, leader of Latin-American church, Milan)

Within churches, members can provide this informal support for immigrant mothers who are strongly engaged in job activities. Moreover, given that their familiar networks are often uncompleted or disseminated, these alternative solutions may help them in case of need.

The role of ethnic churches for parents takes other significant directions. Immigrant families, given they are exposed to difficult relational dynamics made of repeated re-joining and breakups, look for a specific kind of environment that may accompany them through these critical transitions. Children can indeed face the critical passage between the family from which they start and the family in which they arrive, and a recreational space like an ethnic-oratory sponsored within churches represent a way for alleviating the difficulties of this phase. As a Latin-American catechist told me in London:

It's not easy for parents, "becoming a family" in London often is a challenge (she smiles)... sometimes families are disoriented, there are difficulties, they work hard, they are stressed, here they can bring their children, relax, stay in a nice place, and there are good people ... also for me it was difficult, I remember ... being a mother and a worker ... wow (...) here kids can enjoy themselves, parents can speak, take a coffee ... I mean ... we can't do a lot of things, weekends ... it's expensive, but here you feel okay, your kids are okay and mothers can stay relax ... (Mariutxy, Colombian believer, responsible of catechism, St. Anne London, Latin-American church)

Families often feel the need of such kind of spaces that represent both a way to relax and a safe place where to leave their children. Mostly during the weekend it addresses a relational need of parents, where they can also talk about the challenges faced in host country. Being mothers and workers is a hard balance, and a recreational space is a precious social and psychological support. In this regard it emerges how ethnic churches represent also "safe-spaces" where to find recreational and educational agencies that can compensate the lack of several resources that are usually available, as grandparents or the money necessary for private courses. In Milan, in the Filipino community, this need is particularly crucial:

Here I'm a catechist of the group of young boys, I'm also their coordinator ... I must say that it's really challenging, I have to prepare myself ... you have to study if you want to coordinate teenagers ... Educating is an important role in my life, and it's really important for us Filipinos ... they (parents) want this group, and they want it to be well organised (she speaks of the reasons further on, quotation used also in chapter n.6) family and youth are big issues for us and here I try to face these issues in the best possible way... parents ask me a lot of things about the school, they ask me if their children are capable and concentrated, how they are going at school, if they follow... critical questions for them, and your answers are important, parents are concerned, and often they can't follow them very well being all day at work...

-(me) can you elaborate on this issue?

People don't know how it works here (the school system) and they believe in me, I have more experience, but they don't know how it works here, and they work all day, they aren't able to follow them at school ... how could they? They don't speak Italian very well, and they don't have experiences about school here ... at the same time for them it's really important, they want the best for their kids... this is the reason why they always ask me about their kids ... (Rosalie, Pilipino catechist, S.M. Carmine, Milan, Filipino church)

Immigrant parents look for council in order to learn about a school-system that they don't know and seek information about the educational performance of their children. In this sense churches represent an alternative place for supporting their parenthood given their lack of knowledge.

In London this issue was particularly salient, also due to the English school system:

For them (parents) a catholic school is the best option, they want to send their kids there (the school is close to the Church), I help them, I fill the forms for their applications, I give them information about the school. Without me they wouldn't be able to make an application, and ... so catholic schools are considered the best, in London they are famous, and for parents is the best, it's what they want ... (Father Carlos, priest of Latin-American church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London)

One of the main jobs for me are references ... I help parents in dealing with applications, in this way they can send children to catholic schools, you know ... in London catholic schools are the best, when applications are open I receive many people, also English ... I don't see them at mass during the year but only during the application period (...) Brazilians want the best for their children, you can understand ... and I try to help them ... (Father Paulo, Brazilian priest)

In London, catholic schools are very renowned for their status, and priests help migrant families with their children's applications. Moreover, this kind of schools are seen as a safe-space, as a way for avoiding troubles associated to adolescence, and where parents also try to construct the social mobility of their children.

As pointed out by Cao (2005) in her famous ethnographic research, ethnic churches become something like a "surrogate family", supporting several educational fragilities. It represents a space where to compensate the weaknesses of immigrant -working class- families, sometimes replacing their role. In a certain sense, these schools provide the "cultural capital" the families don't have. Thus ethnic churches become a way to sustain parenthood, representing spaces conceived as *safe* for them and their children.

7.5 Spiritual embassies: if not here, where?

The church is like a spiritual embassy, only here irregulars can find help ... the police doesn't come here, Brazilians know that the church is a safe place, here they can relax, have fun, find true friends and help ... where else could they go? If not here, where? (Maria, secretary of Brazilian Community)

In several sections of this thesis I mentioned the irregular condition of some believers. In this paragraph I debate this subject in a wider and more detailed perspective. If ethnic churches provide various supports to members, this informal welfare becomes even more significant for those who are in irregular conditions. Ethnic churches represent crucial pivots to sustain their precariousness. In particular here I explore how religious spaces intersect their surviving strategies.

Therefore, as Maria's statement clearly illustrates, church is a unique space for those who experience irregularity. In this sense, sacred walls represent a border where the state's action range is halted. As the juridical concept evokes, generally an embassy is extra-ordinary space that enjoys a full extra-territorial status. Irregulars, although formally excluded from the state, are instead formally included within the borders of ethnic churches, finding a safe space where to survive. As pointed out by Menjívar (2006) in examining the effects of an illegal status in Latinos' living in US, religious spaces represent focal points (1026: 2006). If the state transforms people into irregular immigrants, for catholic ethnic churches "nobody is irregular". Indeed, between the state and the migrant a "grey area" exists (Menjívar, 2006), where various actors, such as churches, operate in their defence.

In this direction it should be noted how both in Milan and London many catholic believers were and are in irregular condition (of course, for the state but not for God). I faced this critical issue with the clergy of immigrant Churches, and they expressed a clear position towards irregulars. As Brazilian priest told me:

Many believers are overstayers, many (expression of regret) ... its' a typical pattern, they arrive in London with visas and then ... their visas expire... it's a sad situation, sad ... Samuele I can't go against the law ... no ... but laws are ... unjust, I see people, I speak with them, the situation is really sad, why? People have to face this dangerous condition ... I can't do anything illegal ... but ... we can do something respecting laws ... (shows perplexity) we ... don't judge anyone ... the role of God is of welcoming people ... and we try to help them, for Brazilians it's frustrating but here they can breathe ... they can stay away from exploitation, because they are really exploited, also from others Brazilians, they are exploited because without a visa you don't have anything ... and you have to accept everything ... (Father Paulo, Brazilian priest)

A condition of irregularity affects the life of many Brazilians, but inside Church they "can breathe". Father Carlos expresses similar feelings with regards to irregulars within the Latino-Church:

It's a big issue ... too big, so many people are overstayers, without visas, but ... they can find something here, the Church welcomes all believers, no differences, we respect them as human beings. Many want to find peace here, share their situation, because it's really sad, having to survive, here they find relations, they can have happiness without exploitation (...) my mission is to create actions for their situation, we work very well with the English Church, we try to help people to make their position regular and get the visas (Father Carlos, Latino priest, London)

In Milan father Alberto expressed an identical position and approach:

Samuele ... in Italy the irregular condition is the regular condition (we laugh) ... we have rules that make people irregular (...) for them church is a salvation, they cling to the church, they cling strongly to the church, it's a safe space where they can find help, and we try to help them with everything ... waiting for a regularisation ... while they are irregular someone will have to take care of them ... with Caritas and others local associations we try to do something, they are human ... and ... they are here and they also work here ... in our midst there are irregular women and men... (Father Alberto, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin American Church, responsible of pastoral care of Migrants)

As can be seen, ethnic churches regularly come across an irregular condition, welcoming people notwithstanding their legal status. As far as possible these arenas try to defend and support them, waiting for a possible regularisation. In this direction, a first approach is to give them *new dignity* as a human beings; irregulars are indeed employed in low-paid jobs, like “cleaners” or other services and they work on building-sites or as couriers. Moreover they often live on the margins, often in overcrowded locations, with no access to welfare services (like basic health care or other subsidies). Churches represent an alternative space, for preventing forms of exploitations, also by co-ethnics; recalling the Brazilian priest:

You know London, London can be dangerous ... for irregulars even more ... if you have few options ... Brazilians run the risk of becoming criminals, so ... for example ... women, some become prostitutes, if they don't have options ... they fall ... in dangerous places, or Brazilians encourage them to take this kind if job ... easy money! They risk ... exploitation ... they need money but they find troubles (Father Paulo, Brazilian priest)

In this sense, the Church membership can also represent, for Brazilians, a way to resist:

(talking about living as an irregular within Brazilian Church) they are volunteers here, really, during Sunday mass they help the Church in many ways ... having a Sunday means being happy, a way to forget, a way to smile ... have a coffee, have lunch ... for them faith is a way to escape ... (Gabriela, responsible and member of family-group, Brazilian church)

Also in Milan, intimate life represents for migrants an opportunity. Indeed, as previously mentioned by the Italian father, most irregulars are involved in church activities -“they cling to the church”- in order to soften external pressures:

The friend you just saw is irregular, he arrived ... more or less ... two years ago, generally most Salvadorans are irregular, they remain here after the visa expires, in our group he isn't the only one, other guys are without permits, but they work in Milan, in Milan you can find opportunities, not steady employment ... but there are possibilities (talking about their experiences in this group) for them real life is on Sundays, finally they can be free, and speak freely with other people, it's important for them because you can't go around ... you can't go where you want, the group is their life, some are readers ... here people don't judge you, you don't have to follow orders, here Jesus is the only authority... (Rosibel, Salvadoran believer, Salvadoran Catholic community)

Church membership is a “psychological and moral” way to resist as well as a way to (momentarily) create a new image and religion is a chance to socialise “freely and safely”. Through religious membership they try to negotiate their illegal status. Moreover churches help them directly and materially, as the Latino Church in Milan:

Here -(the Church has some rooms)- I hosted several people... when there is a critical situation I help them, we are really lucky, there are spaces in the Church, and we are connected to the main office of Caritas, in this way they can find a room in case of need, I hosted people on several occasions until they found another solution, you can't leave people alone, you can't ... and we try to give them something, I work in connection with other association -like Caritas- it's a circuit ... basic helps, but for irregulars these are really important ... (Father Alberto, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin American church, responsible of pastoral care of Migrants)

Thus beyond a “chance to breathe” -a “precious commodity”- and a place for socialising, churches also provide material resources like rooms, food and clothes as well as offering legal protection given their established relations with others catholic Charities.

Because illegality is widely diffused among believers, ethnic churches de facto have become a sort of spiritual embassy. In this sense, a religious membership is a way to resist to external and structural pressures, and a place where to find resources, but it also represents a *tactic* for “practising invisibility”. Elaborating this framework, according to the studies of McIlwaine (2016) on Latinos in London, invisibility is a strategy of entry, but it's also a survival strategy that gives to irregulars a “degree of agency” (2016: 183). From one side, invisibility can lead migrants to being exploited and marginalised, but on the other side it can represent a way to resist structural dimensions such as a restrictive immigration regime. In this direction, developing McIlwaine's reflection, one should consider how churches -par excellence- represent a significant space; therefore, attending a church becomes another strategy of invisibility and settlement, widening significantly migrants' “degree of agency”. Recalling Broeders and Engbersen (2007) and their famous study on the (various) counterstrategies of irregular migrants, religion is another dowel to add to the “weapons of the weak” (2007:1958).

7.6 Concluding remarks: piecing the “welfare” puzzle together

What I have labelled as an “*informal welfare*” characterises all ethnic churches analysed. An internal dynamism, animated by solidarity, activates a relational mechanism capable of feeding various support activities. Now it's important to better formalise such informal welfare.

In this direction, a first topic is the role of migrants' social capital. As I often underlined, sociologically a church isn't just a space of transcendence but a social-hub: a relational centre and a pivot where migrants have created various sub-groups (i.e. micro-fields of networks which coexist within the same space). In this sense, churches represent an alternative arena of social participation. Indeed, beyond the private sphere, such as families, the economic sphere, as the labour market, and the public sphere, politics, beyond these, churches represent an arena of action and cooperation (see also Chapter 6). Within this arena migrants can find new relations or re-centre previously established relations. Therefore they may start new friendships and churches function as the base for re-territorialising existing -scattered- relations. In this regard a church is crucial for building or reinforcing migrants' social capital. Taking stock of these considerations it's possible to underline some implications that feed the functioning of informal welfare:

- Churches provide a forum for newcomers; in this sense, they represent an arena for building new relations, and where they can find information and resources. (creating relations)
- Churches provide spaces for re-centring existing relations. Church represent the pivot where to gather and reinforce co-ethnic relations, often scattered in the city. (centering-relations)
- The tendency towards the creation of various internal groups provides a “bonding social capital”, which facilitates mutual recognition and trust. (strengthening-relations)

- Churches also provide a “bridging social capital”. Lay leaders can facilitate contacts with other groups (horizontally) and clergy members may facilitate ties with catholic Charities that in turn can provide resources to church members (vertically).

These possibilities provide believers with a “*religious* social capital” (Foley, Hoge, 2007; Stepick, Rey, Mahler, 2009); in each context these elements are present and merged in different configurations. In all cases, this religious social capital provides a series of possibilities to members (like information or references), and it can also evolve, activating cooperation for sharing and exchanging help. These relational mechanisms enable the development of an *alternative, parallel* and *informal welfare* that addresses various needs of migrants.

To better frame this subject, it should be initially noted how normally when scholars debate the issue of welfare they rightly consider it as a *formal* process that mostly comes “from above”, i.e. from the state, through public policies (welfare-state). With regards to ethnic churches, differently from ordinary services, there aren’t well-defined rights of access or official programs. In this sense this was the first (methodological) challenge, that of “capturing the informality”. Nevertheless I have “sociologically and inductively” explored the possibility of generating welfare resources through internal relations. Below I start to summarise some features able to better frame this informality:

Less formal, more effective. Compared to other institutions, the religious communities generated by immigrants are often small and un-structured, but due to their organizational flexibility they are able to respond quickly and effectively to various needs of believers. Networks indeed don’t have to manage formal procedures or negotiate programs with hierarchies in order to provide a “service”. Paradoxically, this informality isn’t a weakness, but a point of strength. Such dynamism is often crucial for needy people because it becomes more receptive than formal policies; in a certain sense policies and needs have indeed different “timing”.

Dynamism and contextual contingences. It should be noted that in the lives of immigrants, valuable resources as the regularity in the legal position, the continuity in employment and the stability of residence are strenuous and difficult achievements, and moreover they often are not even definitive. Regressions and advances are recurrent characteristics experiences in the life of migrants, and attending a religious space can also support these dynamics. In this sense the church is the house whose “doors are always open”. As a corollary of the previous point, networks are sensitive to adaptation and readjustment on the basis of political, economic and familiar contingences. Indeed they are able to allocate resources with flexibility and effectiveness according to the needs that may arise in the migration experience.

Who can provide these resources? This is a crucial question: who can provide the same kinds of resources offered by ethnic churches? In this sense migrants have entitlement that enable them to access to national welfare, but resources as emotional and psychological support, recreational and educational help for mothers and children, references for a job or a new room, loans for medical care, are all far more difficult to obtain within public provision. In addition, in the case of immigrant population, several formal and informal barriers may complicate their interaction with public institutions. Finally, for irregulars churches are pivotal arenas, where they can find allies for their survival strategies.

Who are customers? This is another crucial question. Who is authorized to use welfare resources? Who can use the financial help that is painstakingly collected through communitarian fundraising? Who can access to the precious information about a job or a

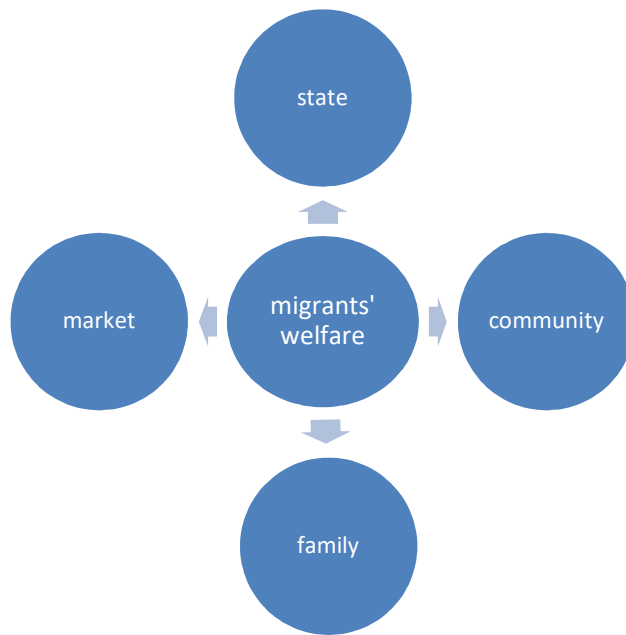
new room? The main answer is: those who belong to internal networks. Nevertheless communities can provide welfare support also for migrants who don't belong to their consolidated relations. In this sense the intrinsic charitable tension can move the "horizon", opening the borders of solidarity (through the establishment of a relationship) for those who are in need. In this sense the religious principle of solidarity questions group boundaries, and these can be negotiated and enlarged through a relational process.

An impossible transition. It's difficult (if not impossible) for this informal provision to assume a precise formalisation. The border between religious or social activities is really thin, and exposed to tensions. Religious communities can't transform themselves in another kind of organisation given that this could generate a "misunderstanding" about the main religious identity. Ethnic churches receive and manage social requests that come from their members, and try to provide resources as best as they can. But, an possible evolution could only attract needy people and change their main identity. This is a difficult balance, regularly subjected to tensions.

These findings stimulate additional reflections. Indeed, the existence of such welfare can be analysed under different points of views. As I discussed in the introduction it becomes theoretically salient in relation to various contemporary debates, as the "recalibration of welfare state" and the controversial issue of migrants' social citizenship.

In this regard a first reflection concerns the "value" of these helps produced by churches compared to other actors that normally support migrants. In particular, in Italy, as elsewhere in Europe (for UK: Davis et al., 2007; for Spain: Itçaina, 2006; for Germany: Laubenthal, 2011), generally, among the main welfare providers for migrants, historically established religious institutions take a relevant position. In this case, the relationship between "religion and immigrants" becomes asymmetrical (because helps come from above). Moreover, even at the micro-social level, within the support activities run by volunteers within historic churches, the "social distance" between donors and beneficiaries is the rule. A significant aspect that I have analysed is instead the mutual help between people who share similar social conditions. Within ethnic churches I found immigrants who help other immigrants in search of work, housing, shelter and emotional support.

Starting from these considerations it's possible to better analyse the "welfare-diamond" (see theoretical chapter and graph below), a perspective normally adopted by scholars to analyse the origin of resources necessary for individual wellbeing, where each corner -state, market, family and community- is a welfare provider. Nevertheless, if the first three corners are more clear in terms of who can provide services, in the last one scholars tend to include "all that remains", as third-sector, voluntary associations, Churches, neighbourhood relations. A plural "ecology" that in turn is nowadays becoming increasingly important given the recalibration of welfare, economic crisis and the genesis of new social risks. Moreover in the case of immigrants, this corner assumes a specific value, since a more complex relation with the other sides of the diamond (entitlements, economic possibilities, scattered family units). In this sense, also ethnic churches take a specific position within this last corner of the diamond by showing peculiarities compared to other local providers (see the characteristics discussed above).



This internal dynamism also bears specific importance proper to Italy; if in many areas, such as the political one, there is limited chance for migrants to become protagonists of social life it's instead possible to observe how, through religion, immigrants are assuming an unprecedented active role; at least, at the local level within their religious circuits of mutual aid.

Finally a last consideration concerns the issue of social citizenship. It should be observed how today its relation with national policies is becoming more and more complicated. This is particularly evident in reference to a widespread neoliberal agenda especially after an economic crisis and even more so during the rise of populism that in turn try to pose a “nationalist” border to welfare services. A slogan like “natives-first” has implications in terms of migrants’ social rights. Consequently ethnic churches -informally but efficiently- try to fill significant gaps, providing a social empowerment to immigrants.

Chapter 8. Patterns of Catholic transnationalism: ethnic churches as sites of nested circuits

In the previous chapters I discussed empirical findings mainly *oriented* on how religious participation affects the migration experience *within* the contexts of arrival. In this chapter I want instead to enlarge the framework, discussing empirical findings more oriented on how ethnic churches act on a transnational level.

I have principally associated this theoretical perspective by analysing spatial-dynamics, explaining how migrants have been able to transform local churches into transnational arenas. Indeed -as I explored in the fourth chapter- religion is a pivotal way to shape a landscape able to evoke the mother country. In addition, migrants -as I showed also in the sixth chapter- in such spaces re-enact several religious -but not only- practises associated to their ethnic-background (like masses, processions, and events like meetings, lunches or parties). Nevertheless within these contexts various transnational networks take shape, circuits able to link sending and receiving countries, in which in turn various kind of resources can circulate.

In this regard, starting mainly from the works of Peggy Levitt, I have introduced the theoretical debate on “religious transnationalism”, outlining topics typically explored by scholars, as the genesis of ties among communities beyond state-nation borders, the relative circulation of various types of resources (i.e. remittances) as well as the genesis of transnational identities assembled and reinvented within such religious spaces. In light of this, sacred communities founded by immigrants in the foreign land have become *a privileged point of view* to advance the debate on transnationalism (Khagram and Levitt, 2008). Such contexts represent indeed a “dense” relational field, where affects, emotions, values, ideas, resources and identities are activated thereby combining and involving at the same time the sending and receiving countries. Being so multivalent, *i.e.* full of overlapping transnational meanings, religious spaces in turn become both a theoretical and empirical challenge. In a certain sense, from the point of view of researcher, adopting a transnational perspective requires the ability to move nimbly, also using concurrently multiple research tools (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2003). Therefore to avoid the methodological-nationalism -that I presented as one of the main contemporary epistemological challenges- it becomes important to explain how migrants may experience several “realms” simultaneously, given that intrinsically their life moves continuously between more than a single landscape, in terms of culture, politics and -in this case- religion (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). A theoretical dichotomy as “here” or “there” is the least useful approach to study such kind of contexts and processes. Furthermore, religious communities established during migration, might act at the same time both at a local and transnational level.

Nevertheless, to develop transnational studies, a field that is increasingly gaining relevance these days, it’s important to analyse how such international networks are activated and experienced, even because otherwise such perspectives risk to become only a sort of social-philosophy. In this regard, two significant directions have become particularly salient. Summarizing these wider debates: on one side, several scholars have underlined the need to contextualise transnationalism providing a more *grounded* profile. In this sense the matter is to elaborate the *spatial-scale* where a transnational religious community takes shape and acts (Levitt, and Jaworsky, 2007). This need addresses mainly the critique of transnationalism as a process that is difficult to analyse being “too” macro and elusive. Instead, starting from a local level, it’s possible to provide a more rooted-framework, informed on how the local panorama can affect the type of transnationalism that arises from migrants’ agency. In this sense the “trans-local” (see for example the work of Smith and Eade, 2008) becomes a perspective that enables to collect more detailed data on where transnationalism arises, what it reproduces and how it develops.

On the other side scholars have underlined how it becomes more and more important to elaborate the “significance” of such transnational ties (Boccagni, 2012), primarily by identifying the *kinds* of circuits that migrants have created. Indeed migrants are able to generate several fields of relations that cross national borders. Such focus wants to provide more detailed data also in reference to the

types of resources that are exchanged as well as their *implications* both “here” and “there”. In this direction scholars have recognised the existence of several transnational fields, as in economic, political, emotional and religious arenas where in turn various types of resources can circulate, such as ideas, meanings, objects and also people. In this regard I would like to emphasize that these two directions are not mutually exclusive and how if anything they complement each other. Moreover I argue that such an approach can provide an even more dynamic idea of transnationalism, given that in this way it’s possible to elucidate also the role of migrant *agency* in creating and renovating these global circuits.

Therefore in this chapter my approach will follow the two directions, and, given the peculiarities of my case studies, I shall provide additional reflections. As a preliminary consideration it should be noted how ethnic churches established by migrants are positioned into a local parish conventionally defined by a territorial model. Within this specific perimeter migrant-activism poses a “challenge”, given that migrants generate transnational identities and practises able to transcend those same parochial boundaries. In a certain sense we find an interesting tension between two movements: a first directed to “fixing” the religious involvement, a second directed to opening it. A second consideration that I wish to discuss with more dynamism is the specific case of Catholic transnationalism, defined by Levitt -in her triple formalization- as “extended”. In this regard, I shall analyse the creation of circuits activated by immigrants inside an institution that is in itself transnational. As is well-known, Catholicism represents one of the main global circuit: religions are historically transnational and in a certain sense represent “prototypes” of such theoretical perspectives, but too often are conceived as static. For example, the increasing relevance of new technological possibilities may impact on Catholic transnationalism, giving more dynamism to its texture. Thus I will explain how at a local level ethnic churches may actively renovating this transnationalism, generating new circuits. To sum up: “new forms of transnationalism within an already established (and structured) transnationalism”.

Moreover, at the local level the conformation of such international circuits is variable and depends on how migrants have generated and stabilized their churches, and what kind of connections and activities they have promoted. These processes in turn generate various “religious remittances”, like the movement of leaders (lay or clergy) or the possibility to share meanings and ideas. Consequently, I intend to explain the existence of various *nested circuits* within the same ethnic churches that are animated by various players that exchange different kinds of resources. Empirically, the idea is to detail how case studies fit into transnational perspectives and then proceed to analyze the features they present. I therefore divide the empirical discussion into the circuits (networks), the practices that characterise circuits (practices) and the resources produced in such circuits (the type, quantity and frequency).

8.1 Building a transnational welfare: charity has no borders

Usually economic ties with the motherland are recognised as the most significant transnational circuits that migrants have generated; consequently financial remittances are framed as the main entities that circulate within them. Their role is indeed widespread debated in relation to issues like local development and global inequalities. In this sense, remittances have been studied prevalently through an economic perspective that tends to collect less data on their social, symbolic and emotional implications. Nevertheless this kind of conceptualization over time has been enriched; firstly widening significantly the study of the types of resources: aside from money it’s possible to observe how goods, symbols and ideas are increasingly travelling through transnational ties. In this direction Levitt (1998) coined the concept of “social-remittances” as a new frame able to stimulate the collection of more data. Secondly, beyond material implications, such as economic income,

remittances in turn may involve several “immaterial” effects, like cultural and ethical repercussions and a part from small qualitative researches, we have no consistent evidence on their medium-long term impact (De Haas, 2005; 2009; 2010); nevertheless remittances may actually influence the models of family organization, ethical and religious positions as well as educational trajectories. Finally these processes can in turn create other processes, as well as new forms of inequality, still unknown or under-researched (Carling, 2014, 2017). To sum up, the debate is widening and beginning to grasp the texture of such transnational ties, including their feedback effects.

Following these new theoretical and empirical directions, in this section I start to explore how ethnic churches can generate transnational donations. Moreover I want to discuss not only the existence of such remittances, but how members collect them and more importantly how they “experience” them. This perspective wants to elaborate the meanings behind this kind of transnational tie. In this sense remittances de facto become a sort of “religious economy” that expresses a “way of belonging”.

Indeed in all my case studies I found that migrants collect money to send to their mother country. As I showed in the seventh chapter, believers regularly sponsor charitable fundraisings, and such results can be sent in motherland, but not only. This practise indeed may follow different paths. In Milan within the two Filipino churches believers sponsor various activities to collect resources:

Here we organize various activities, such as concerts, aimed at raising money for the Philippines. For example, when there was a typhoon we all mobilized, it was very beautiful and significant... in case of need we can also send money for schools, or for sports centres and educational activities ... This is strongly felt by the community ... Moreover, if someone dies, even if we don't know him personally, we mobilize and organize a collection during the Sunday mass for funeral expenses in his hometown, we see him as one of us ... (Michelle, secretary and member of the Pilipino Church, S.M. Carmine)

Yes, often we collect money for some activities, if there is an international project we start a fundraising and then we send money, often someone is linked to parishes or similar associations, he explains the project and proposes a fundraising... then we collect something and the money go to a parish that needs new structures, like sports grounds or other things, it's very felt by our community (Rosalie, member of the Pilipino Church, S.M Carmine, Milan)

Generally it's possible to observe two recurrent cases: contingences, like a natural disaster, or the opportunity of supporting an international project. Indeed through fundraisings members participate to several social initiatives, a practise which is particularly felt within Filipino church.

In a similar way the Salvadoran community activates several fundraisings for the motherland:

Here in the Church there are groups and in one of these members organise activities to help Salvador. They participate to small but important projects, for example projects for young people, such as schools or sports grounds, or also to help people buy expensive medicines, or they buy things like crutches, wheel-chairs and prams, or diapers, all things really important and often not easy to buy because they are expensive, or difficult to find in some towns in Salvador (Diana, member of Salvadoran community, Milan)

We organize games like tombola to raise funds. We have these games to help both our country and the people here, like when the earthquake happened. Or again, the prize might be a plane ticket to go back during the holiday, which is usually very expensive and therefore very much needed (Melanie, member Salvadoran Community) .

Addressing some projects or needs expressed by relatives or acquaintances in Salvador, church members collect recourses to send. As in the previous case of Filipinos, normally money may help schools or parishes. But migrants can also support compatriots in facing everyday needs, like medicines or basic necessities for mothers helping them deal with critical issues. Also in the larger Latin-American Church in Milan, members sponsor fundraisings and participate to various international projects. As we can see, Milanese ethnic churches act in different transnational charitable circuits, depending on the players involved, that could be lay leaders -and their personal transnational links- or Catholic international circuits already sponsored locally.

In London, the Brazilian church is active in promoting fundraises for parishes in the mother country:

We collect money, and sometimes people organise lunches, but we don't have relations with a specific Brazilin parish. Instead a congregation -which works in close collaboration with the Brazilians Church- organises collects and they participate to several projects. We work with them, nuns are really active in this Church, they explain us what they want to do and then we collect something, so ... they support Brazilians and Brazilians support them ... (Rafaela, volunteer of Brazilian Church, London)

Officially migrants don't have contacts with specific parishes, but the transnational charitable circuit is managed by a congregation of nuns who operate in various parishes both in Brazil and London.

Always in London, the Latin-American Church is the mostly active in charitable circuits. Firstly, it actively participates to the international network managed by the local congregation (OAR Augustinian) that is strongly engaged in such activities. The journal of church regularly sponsors projects and shows results achieved thanks to fundraisings:



(London, Latin-American church, St. Anne)

As one can see, church members regularly (and proudly) show the results they have achieved. Moreover other circuits take shape internally given how some lay leaders are in contact with Colombian or Bolivian parishes, and regularly collect money to send them:

Yes ... I'm in touch with a parish where my sister lives and ... if she needs something for the Church she calls me ... we organise collects and then we send money to help that parish (...) last time my sister told me ... "a woman here needs money for her kids" ... and we collected something and I sent the money to my sister, so we know very well what happens ... poverty is not good and we try to help people (Eugenia, Bolivian woman, member of Latin-American Church, S. Anne, London Vauxhall)

Lay leaders have indeed regular contacts with their motherland and sponsor activities to help their acquaintances directly in case of need. In this case, donations become a sort of transnational welfare: they receive directly information and then they can try to sponsor fundraisings through lunches or other communitarian activities.

Reflecting on these findings, a first consideration is that ethnic churches have become de facto transnational actors of local development; through charitable practices they collect resources for various social-projects (migrants that help other migrants in the name of solidarity). It should be remembered that members generally are not a wealthy population, but their *solidarity* can extend beyond borders and beyond their financial situation. Additionally within case studies it emerges how various circuits are active. Ethnic churches have become actors of solidarity that in turn can intersect different transnational charitable networks. From one side, there are conventional ties that intersect ethnic churches "from above". Indeed the clergy who takes care of them spiritually often belongs to Catholic congregations that traditionally are dislocated in several countries where they promote local projects. On the other side and "from below", believers promote fundraisings: in this case collections are made in case of contingences, like a natural disaster or lay-leaders may promote collects around of their personal links. Thus the texture of circuits is plural, some of them are fixed others are not continuous but activated in a variable ways on the basis of needs.

Finally it should be noted how this kind of activity has also immaterial implications. Such solidarity that crosses the national borders should be outlined not only economically but also in a symbolic frame. –Participating to a social project represents a way to stay connected with their mother country. Moreover transnational supports consolidate the value and prestige of religious communities established abroad, contributing to generate specific forms of recognition that travel on a *trans-local scale*. In this sense ethnic churches acquire a transnational status that is locally invisible. Therefore church members, by sending money to support projects, participate to a channel where to develop respectability.

8.2 Global cities as hubs of transnational religious circuits

In the previous section I discussed how ethnic churches participate actively to transnational circuits through economic help, becoming in this way providers of solidarity. In this section I go instead into the details of a topic that is more strictly religious. I analyse a particular transnational network: the movement of clergy (most of which are canonically defined as chaplains) between sending and receiving countries.

The international movement of clergy represents a historical transnational pattern of Catholicism. Priests have indeed always travelled around the world. In this case one can observe a "formal"

circuit, sponsored and managed by Catholic Church as institution by which priests de facto are representative actors of catholic transnational circuits. In the sixth chapter I described the role of priests, analysing their position within ethnic churches. I presented them as ecclesial-junctures, who embodying a specific role create continuity between local dioceses and migrant communities. I now want to analyse these figures detailing their transnational implications.

Firstly priests are “called” in order to support migrants’ spiritual needs. Dioceses, both Italian and English, select priests among various transnational circuits at their disposal. Principally this process may in turn involve two kinds of recruitment, from the motherland as well as among international catholic congregations that may have a “satellite” in the country where ethnic churches are based. In this sense chaplains can be “migrants” (called directly from the mother country) or alternatively can be priests who have at least experienced a period abroad that provided them peculiar “religious skills”, as a foreign language or a “knowledge” of migrants’ cultural background, all necessary to support them in their spiritual needs.

In this section I analyse how this international circuit intersects the life of ethnic churches both in London and Milan. In Italy the Milanese diocese puts into action a specific process of recruitment. Initially it prefers to look for priests among local “workforce” (as congregations), providing ethnic churches with Italian priests who in the past have travelled abroad, learning a foreign language and becoming “skilled” also in the cultural-meanings associated to migrants’ religion. In other cases the Milanese diocese provides a clergy that comes from the motherland of foreigner believers. In this case the international movement is then regulated by an official agreement between sending and receiving dioceses:

(...) Our task is the reception of the chaplains who follow migrant catholic communities, as well as “taking care” of them in terms of training and connection with us in coordination with our office. We organize the movement of priests, making arrangements with other dioceses.

(...) normally we start to look for a local priest, then we look for another profile, but if there is an Italian priest able to support them we choose him ... generally this is the process, but it’s not easy, there is a long negotiation, we study the case to understand how to proceed (...) (S. Beretta secretary and responsible of pastoral care of Migrants in Milan.)

From below migrants’ religious activism requires a response from diocese that starts with a selection. For Latin-Americans and Salvadorans there are Italian priests. In one Filipino case (S.M. Carmine) there are both Italian and foreign priests given that an international congregation (Scalabrinians) is in charge of the Church (which is also a personal parish). In the other Filipino case (S. Stefano) there are priests that come from mother country, as in the case of the other chaplaincies dislocated in the city (for example Ukrainians).

In London there is a similar process of recruitment. In the case of Latin-Americans the main priest is Spanish and he has been selected within an international congregation which is located in London (OAR, Order of Augustinian Recollects). English diocese gave to such congregation two main tasks. The first one is to take care of the parish where it’s located, given that the previous priest was too old, and the congregation was the only one able to manage the parochial life. The second one is to take care of Latin-Americans; the diocese has indeed officially established a Chaplaincy within the same parish. Today, the Latin-American Church, encapsulated within an English parish, has officially two priests -sometimes more than two- given the high number of foreign believers, one Spanish and the other Mexican:

(I interviewed the head of such congregation) Yes ... our congregation officially today is based in this Church ... I mean ... it’s a long ... long story ... (he explains part of this story) now the Bishop officially gave us this role, and we manage the local parish and we take care of Latinos (...) there are two priests, one Spanish and the other Mexican, and sometimes

other priests come and help us, I mean ... we have many many Latinos, we have to organise everything, and we have to manage a lot of tasks, like confirmations, baptism, marriages ... (Father Andrew, Head of OAR congregation based in S. Anne church, London)

The bishop officially gave them such role given the increasing presence of Latin-Americans in the city. Within this international congregation there are indeed several priests able to support the spiritual needs of Latin Americans.

In the case of Brazilians, during the last years several priests have travelled from Brazil to take care of the community, and also to take care of other (six) Brazilian religious communities dislocated in the city that formally (for what concerns administrative tasks) are associated to this Church (which is the main Brazilian Chaplaincy in the city of London). In addition, a congregation of nuns supports the priests in managing religious life. In this regard, in the last decades a significant process developed in London: the growing number of Brazilians in the city has generated several religious communities that over time have created a flourishing transnational network of clergy. In other words: “transnationalism generates additional practices of transnationalism”. Today the priest of this ethnic church has become also the main responsible of Brazilian religious communities in London (moreover he has become the priest of the English parish where the chaplaincy is based). Besides him, given that the community has become very wide and animated, there are also other Brazilian priests who canonically belong to this chaplaincy. Thus global cities as Milan and London have become hubs (a sort of junction) of Catholic transnationalism. “From below” migrants’ religious activism requires and animates a great international movement of religious personnel.

These networks have rarely been explored in depth, as for example with regards to priests’ agency, including representations (see sixth chapter), tasks, strategies, tactics and emotions involved in their role (for the case of Polish Priests see Trzebiatowska, 2010). In this section I debate some of these subjects (I will explore the others in next sections). Firstly I want to underline how such movement can produce specific emotions. In Italy in most cases foreigner priests can stay only for a limited amount of time, as required by the sealed contract among dioceses, and this has implications for their life:

Honestly ... it’s not easy because you’ve got used to living here, in Milan, you have relations, you created new friendships and also customs... lifestyles ... and then ...you have to come back, or go to another country ... sometimes it’s a challenge, also for other priests like me, but ... it’s the way it is, this is our task ... (Father Osial, Filipino chaplain Milan, priest of various Pilipino communities in the city)

Being a chaplain becomes a peculiar experience. As I explored in the sixth chapter, priests have to face various challenges. “Theoretically” they become accustomed to travelling, but every time they face a new “spiritual journey”. When a “job” finishes and they return to the mother country (or go to another country), the process may generate emotional implications. De facto they are “migrants”, and moreover they can experience a migration more than one time during their life, as in the case of a priest who follows Latin-American in London:

(...) London is another world, a big city ... completely different ... millions of people, and millions ways of life, religions, cultures ... with their own way of praying, so ... I’m used to travelling ... it’s not the first time, but you have to learn everything ... it’s not easy. Then again this is my mission, I decided to follow it ... I decided to give my life to God and God follows me in everything (Father Juan, Mexican priest, S. Anne, Vauxhall London, Latin-American Church).

The kind of relations among priests and local dioceses are another significant issue to debate. In this regard a crucial topic concerns who effectively manages priests’ tasks “from above”, and mostly

how they do this. In this sense, sending dioceses requires that priests take care of migrants' spiritual needs that is officially their main task. But in Italy the Milanese diocese has recently started to push in another direction:

Yes ... today the idea is to involve them more and more ... we try to be in touch with them because they are points of reference, some work with us but others work in parallel ... they follow the community and stop ... and today we want to find new directions to these relation ... (S. Beretta secretary and responsible of pastoral care of Migrants in Milan.)

The Italian diocese would require priests to try to bring migrants believers also within the local parishes as a strategy to create inclusion and avoid parallelism. But beyond this “rhetoric” the “practise” is another (I will explore in detail such topic in the last chapter). The practice mostly meets the migrants' religious activism that goes (clearly) in another direction. Moreover the role of chaplain can in turn be ambiguous, given that in some cases it is ancillary with respects to the life of community that is already well organised and autonomous (see the sixth chapter where I discussed such topic).

In the past in London there was a similar ambiguity in the case of Polish migrants. In the last decades, following significant migration flows, Poles have established several ethnic churches in the UK, supported by Polish Catholic Mission. Their presence has become a controversial issue generating a debate on the integration of the Polish within English Catholicism. The Archbishop of Westminster (Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor) underlined publically such issue in a homily (30, December 2007), saying:

“I'm quite concerned that the Poles are creating a separate church in Britain. I would want them to be part of the Catholic life of this country. I would hope those responsible for the Polish church here, and the Poles themselves, will be aware that they should become a part of local parishes as soon as possible when they learn enough of the language”

This statement reveals the “conflicting agendas” on the role (and control) of these churches. In this regard I want to underline that these kinds of transnational religious networks animated by the movement of priests are complex processes that require also some forms of negotiation among the actors involved.

Beyond this official-clergy, *i.e.* those who are formally selected to take care of migrants, there are other priests that travel within transnational catholic networks. For example in Milan during the most important devotions or festivities (both religious and national) sponsored by ethnic churches numerous priests travel to Italy to participate and support such events. For example during the procession of “*El señor de los Milagros*” -see chapter 4- several priests arrived in Milan from the mother land (Peru) or from other countries where they are dislocated, as also from various Italian cities where they live and serve as chaplains. Furthermore “from below” migrants may periodically request the visit of Bishops or Cardinals, or similar pivotal figures. In London, in the Brazilian case, during the fieldwork a Bishop visited the Church for confirmations, also attracting many Brazilians who live in the city. However Cardinals or Bishops from Brazil periodically travel in London to see and meet the Church in case of special ceremonies .

To conclude, Milan and London have become important hubs for catholic transnational circuits, such as the travels of the clergy. Ethnic churches established by migrants represent pivotal actors in renovating and redirecting this historical network of Catholicism *that in recent time is more and more embodied within European continent*. Moreover, spiritual journeys go far beyond, and ethnic churches bring new directions and stimuli to such forms of religious transnationalism. In the next section I explore these movements.

8.3 Varieties of transnationalism: ethnic churches as hubs of alternative circuits

The religious transnationalism activated of ethnic churches may follow various paths given that “from below” migrants are able to sponsor alternative circuits to the official ones. Aside from the clergy, another pivotal network regards the movement of lay-leaders or preachers. In this sense the role of Charismatic groups is central. Today such religious movements have become protagonists of a new catholic transnationalism. As I discussed in various sections, they are present in all case studies, promoting several meetings where both priests and lay preachers come from all parts of world. It’s important to underline how internal groups manage from below these transnational networks differently from official ones.

Starting from Italy, in the case of Filipinos the Charismatic movement is very active and it attracts numerous believers:

This Charismatic group (El Shaddai, a famous Charismatic group in Philippines) normally calls various priests and they (Filipinos) go to collect them, they have numerous programs, and they are in contact with other groups around the world, they can bring priests from Italy but also from Europe and also from other countries in the world, they organize themselves very well, for all the expenses, they collect money and they pay the trips for these priests ... there are fixed rates, or they can call famous preachers, very famous, who belong to the same group, and these preachers organize long prayer meetings that often last more than a day, and they sponsor several international projects, many of these projects are for young people, and they organise collects to pay their travels. Some time ago one of these groups paid trips for some kids to go to France, and they did everything ... the group paid visas and flights .. (Michelle, secretary of S. M. Carmine, Milan, Filipino church).

From the interview it’s possible to understand clearly how such movement acts at a transnational level. They can call both priests and preachers -who often do this as their official profession- from various Italian cities as well as from Europe and other countries.

Also within the Milanese Latin-American church, similar transnational processes are promoted internally. In this case a Charismatic group they are very active:

During the week my group gathers and ... we start to pray together, it’s like a training, we learn how to pray and how to read the bible, then during the weekend we organise another meeting, there are more people given that normally most can’t come during the week, and every two weeks or once a month there are spiritual retreats or meetings in other places because many people arrive, there are people who guide prayers. Sometimes it’s not the same people (I ask to elaborate on the subject) sometimes there are priests or people like preachers, from other cities or also from south-America, some time ago a preacher with his wife came here (I ask to elaborate on the subject) ... yes ... so (hesitancy) we collected money and we paid the flight, often we organise expenses with other communities because once the preachers have arrived they also go in other cities to follow other groups ... (Jorge, member of a Charismatic group, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin American Church)

As I explained in the sixth chapter, these groups often organise several meetings and spiritual retreats. People can also collect money and bring preachers from outside. But, if in the Filipino case Charismatic (in most cases) can organise their events within the church (S.M. Carmine) where they are based, Latin-American members have instead to find another accommodation in case of massive events that see the presence of external clergy or preachers. Usually they find accommodation at catholic facilities in Milan where international congregations are willing to host them. (for ordinary meetings they can use their Church).

In London within the Brazilian Church such kind of transnationalism is well established and practised: the international movement of clergy and lay-leaders is indeed very common. As we can see in the next photo, the Charismatic group based in this Church regularly organises huge events:



(Typical leaflet of a Charismatic event, Brazilian church, St. Anne London)

The local Charismatic group is in close contact with other groups dislocated in several countries, and the Brazilian church represents an important meeting point for organising hugely popular events. Moreover it is an important catchment area for this transnational network. In the period before this event many members sponsored it and numerous brochures were distributed and there was the possibility to register online:

I can't participate to this event, in theory I should have signed up and paid a fee, plus I have to meet a member of the Latin-American church, fortunately the times are different and I can go to see what's happen before, I'm really curious ... I arrived early and I see how believers are arranging the Church, they brought several music instruments, plasterboard walls to isolate the Church and create a certain atmosphere with different colours and they have also brought a stage ... I think for preachers ... at the entrance there are people for the registration, it's incredible, I asked a Brazilian acquaintance something about the preachers and she told me that one has come from France and the second from Brazil, I asked her something more, and she told me that they are really famous ... "they're like global celebrities and today there will be loads of Brazilians, hundreds! and most of them come from cities outside London only to see the preachers!" (Field diary, July, London)

Such preachers are indeed “world stars”, pivotal “actors” of this transnational circuit (they have also famous social media accounts).

In the case of the Latin-American church there is another kind of religious network; a very active evangelisation group, that has attracted many followers within the community. Like the Charismatic or other similar movements, this group organises retreats and prayer meetings. Indeed a member of Latin American church over time has become the national leader of this international network and often she sponsors several events.

To sum up, ethnic churches have become hubs for various kinds of circuits: one on side, official networks managed by dioceses (like chaplains), on the other side there are networks managed independently by members. Therefore the movements of various priests, preachers and lay leaders regularly intersect the migrants' religious experiences. Thus it's possible to note "*varieties of religious transnationalism*" and ethnic churches have de facto become sites of *nested circuits*.

Finally also the presence of an *European-circuit* should be considered. (As in the case of Brazilian Charismatic group, connected both with France and Italy). The structuring of the European Union as supranational political entity has generated the possibility to travel freely within it (i.e. European intra-mobility). In a certain sense this process has also important religious implications. Usually scholars study only economic, financial and political implications and only rarely elaborate the case of religions. Today several migrants have indeed a long-stay residence permit and some of them have acquired the citizenship of country in which they live. These juridical advancements provide more possibilities in terms of mobility. In turn this process allows them to visit Churches, participate to events or retreats. Migrants may also sponsor activities that can animate "a European variant" of religious transnationalism.

8.4 Virtual transnationalism: experienced God in streaming

In this section I want to address a debate on how religion can be also experienced virtually in a world where new technologies, social media and smart phones have become central to everyday life. As a preliminary consideration, it should be noted how the sacred, often conceived as something "ancient and antique" and in some respects as pre-modern, can instead resist, stay and develop within a super-modern world. Secondly, new technological means have had a significant impact on the genesis of international networks, promoting them. In the case of migrants, such instruments are clearly pivotal, supporting migrants in creating and feeding various kinds of networks with mother country. As a consequence, technologies have also contributed to the growth, consolidation and renovation of transnational religious networks (see Vertovec, 2009: 145).

Virtual channels and media-platforms cross the "physicality" of national boundaries, connecting people dislocated in several parts of the world and creating a new form of simultaneity of events and actions. Thanks to new technological possibilities it's possible today to stay in touch, communicate, share contexts and emotions as well as generating particular forms of collective action. This new frontier is increasingly intersecting all aspects human life, from economy to politics, including religion (see Levitt, 2001; 2007). In this regard I want to analyse what kind of implications these technologies may have on transnational religious networks, in particular on how they intersect migrant spirituality, both in sending and receiving countries. This interest is growing within the academic debate on the intersections between religion and migration, and studies in general have investigated mostly Pentecostalism or similar "dynamic" congregations (see for example: Vásquez and Marquardt, 2003, pp. 92-119; Garbin and Vasquez; 2013), that have in turn benefited from these new technologies. In this direction I want to explore how such subject can interest also ethnic churches founded by catholic migrants.

In Milan I found that the Charismatic, within the Pilipino Church, are active in the use of new media:

Generally when we have meetings we often stay connected with other communities, in Italy and in other countries, normally it's possible thanks to Skype, we have a projector and a sort of screen, from outside (from other cities or countries) people may participate and also guide our celebrations, there are famous preachers who come into contact with us, and when there are the most important events we stay in contact with other groups at the same time ... (Justin, member of Pilipino Church, S. M. Carmine, Milan)
(...) it's amazing ... they may stay here (in the Church) all night given the time zone ... it's amazing, because they do the same physical movement and things contemporary ... (Michelle, secretary of S. M. Carmine, Milan, Pilipino Church)

The Charismatic, thanks to Skype, can stay in touch with other groups, both in Italy and abroad, and they can share contexts and activate collective prayers or celebrations. In this case Skype allows a simultaneous experience of the sacred. People dislocated in different spaces can indeed replicate at the same time “the same body movements” as well as prayers. Thanks to this technological possibility these groups continuously merge a local experience of sacred with its virtual transposition, creating a transnational religious meeting which is “unique and sui generis”.

Always in Milan, beyond the pivotal role of Charismatic, other groups have also adopted streaming technology. Streaming has been used by Salvadorans for example. In particular, during the fieldwork in the autumn of 2018, knowing that Oscar Romero -Archbishop of San Salvador- would be sanctified, I attended the community in order to understand what kind of transnationalism had been implemented. Indeed Salvadorans organised a streaming session with the Vatican -where Pope Francis named Romero Saint- and other Salvadoran parishes. This transnational connection has been the most important event in the history of this Milanese community (given that, when the community was founded, it was dedicated to Romero). Around such transnational connection - before and after- Salvadorans sponsored several activities; they organized a great celebration meal that attracted Salvadorans from within and outside the city, moreover they printed leaflets and t-shirts to celebrate this event. Therefore it's possible to observe how technology can be used in various ways, as in the first case, where it has become central for the development of Charismatic groups and is regularly adopted, or as in the second case, when a community organises a virtual connection for a special event, such as a religious celebration or a national festivity.

In London the Brazilian Church represents the most active context that develops such kinds of transnationalism. First of all, it has a website accessed by many believers, with a stylish design where events and activities are regularly updated. The logo is the picture of “*Our Lady of Aparecida*” to which the Brazilian Church is officially dedicated. On the website, photos and videos that come from other communities dislocated in the city are uploaded (there are six different Brazilian churches in the city), and users can find notices on timetables of mass, or news about other activities, like prayer groups. The site serves as an information point, and migrants can also be informed on where -among the six Churches- special events (like spiritual trainings) are planned. Indeed, as priests and secretaries told me, they normally receive several emails and whataspps messages about the Church life.

But the most important activity they promote are the live-broadcasts that are used by members and non-members as well as by those who live outside London and by their relatives in Brazil:

Yes we do that (live broadcasts) because most Brazilians don't have all their family in London, and so ... it's an opportunity for them, when they get married, when their children are christened, families in Brazil can watch them, they can imagine to be here, they can pretend to be with them during mass ... people ask for this and it's amazing (...) (Maria, secretary of Brazilian Church)

People love it, they want it because it's like being with their relatives, sisters, brothers ... most of them can't take a flight and they can't come for a wedding or a baptism, but they

can watch it, they want the broadcast because they can imagine to be here with us, and yes ... it's incredible, for us it's really important. A family from Brazil can see ... together they can see an event and pray with us ... (Ana, Brazilian Believer, member of a Charismatic group, Brazilian Church London)

Emotions and spirituality are intrinsically embedded within this virtual transnationalism. For those who are physically divided by borders it provides the opportunity to imagine (and experience) a proximity. The live broadcasts are also used by those who can't attend mass, such as elderly people or those who work during the weekends:

They have jobs like ... cleaners (...) and often ... they can't come to the mass on Sunday, but... they can watch mass with their phones (he smiles), while you are working you can hear the mass, so ... they feel happy, they aren't here but they can see the mass on their phones (...) Or also old people and people who are sick ... in this way they can watch the mass ... (Father Paulo, priest of Brazilian church)

The photo below clearly shows how the Church arranges this virtual transnationalism:



(Brazilian Church, London, S. Anne)

Beside the statue of Our Lady, a woman is filming, standing on a stage that was prepared for the live streaming. The Church has a staff dedicated to organising these activities. Moreover the priest has learned the sign languages (or signed-language) for deaf people, in this way they can attend celebrations or -thanks to the streaming- they can follow the mass from their home. One can see how within the Brazilian church the central idea is that “God should reach all people”, wherever they are and in every possible way.

Finally I want to highlight a peculiar process that is becoming increasingly popular in all communities. The use of smartphones nowadays is extremely widespread in everyday life with mobile phones having de facto become an extension of the human body. People are continuously in contact with this object, taking photos or videos of everything and everywhere. In this regard, during the fieldwork I saw several attendants use smartphones during celebrations. In particular most of them activate whatsapp-calls with relatives and friends, showing themselves during mass. Intrigued by this custom -that I noted many times in my diary- I asked believer about it :

I saw a woman with the phone, and then I saw she was flipping the phone's screen toward the altar for a little time (...) When the mass finished, I decided to ask her why, and mostly ... who was connected with her (I allowed myself to ask such question given that I met her once thanks to person that I interviewed) before she laughed and then she told me: yes ... she was my sister ... She called me and I wanted to show her where I pray ... and then she asked me to film the mass for her(...) I asked another person the same thing, because I noticed he was also using his phone and he replied that today was his birthday! And the family called him ... and he wanted to show them the Church and the celebration (Field diary, London, may 2019)

Today members use smartphones more and more during church events; they take photos (most of these also become Whatsapp or Facebook profiles photos, as I have seen having their contacts) or videos to send to their families who are dislocated both in the city and in mother country.

To conclude this section, a first consideration concerns the role of media. Indeed modern media are able to challenge traditional categories of thought, like time and space, but not only. Technologies intersect both the spatial-scales, *merging* local and global, and the ontology of action, *merging* physic and non-physic presence. In Milan and London social media and similar platforms have a pivotal role for sharing events and activities, connecting people wherever they are.

In this regard migrant believers show a significant creativity, a particular form of agency. They are able to adapt technologies to their settings and aims. Thus, the “medium” per se is neutral but in the hands of believers it becomes crucial for their “transnational needs”, like sharing spirituality and emotions. As one can see, religion tries to resist, adapt and also find fresh energies through these instruments, and migrants are important actors of this trend.

Moreover I want to underline how these technological means implemented by ethnic churches de facto represent another transnational “dominion” where migrant believers may actively participate, and such “sphere” may in turn expand and reinforce the other transnational circuits. This virtual network involves members and non-members, as relatives or friends who are simultaneously embodied with churchgoers sharing various contents and emotions. We can hypothesize new developments on how migrants will experience God through this specific kind of virtual transnationalism.

8.5 Concluding remarks

Thanks to the possibility to transcend geographical boundaries, religion today denotes a significant empirical field in terms of transnational ties and practices. In this chapter I have analysed how

ethnic churches established by immigrants in Milan and London may actively take part in this religious network.

Firstly members raise funds for several international projects addressing the socio-economic needs of their motherland. Moreover some Churchgoers can collect resources on the basis of their personal networks; internal solidarity can take indeed a transnational profile. This charitable process produces a sort of moral economy that adds also an international status to ethnic churches. Secondly I explored formal transnational circuits managed by the Catholic Church as an institution, these being for example the movement and reallocation of chaplains. Several priests, both from their mother country and belonging to different international congregations, join such migrant communities. I analysed how dioceses manage these movements, exploring also the emotions and tensions involved by their experience. Thirdly I have extended the analysis to the transnational circuits activated by migrants “from below” (e.g. Charismatic groups), that are going through a growing movement of preachers (both clergy and lay). In this sense migrants create also “alterative” networks compared to official ones usually managed by the Catholic Church. Fourthly I have explored a new frontier: the “virtual transnationalism”, through which churchgoers may creatively exchange and communicate meanings between sending and receiving countries. Thanks to new technological possibilities migrants may participate to various religious events from where they are dislocated around the world and can also share emotions with their acquaintances beyond the national borders. They have indeed moulded a new transnational channel that challenges a priori categories like space and time. They have also shaped the “ontology of action” into a new virtual level.

Thus, a first consideration concerns the existence of *various transnational circuits* nested within the same contexts. Ethnic churches de facto represent hubs, both junctures of structured-networks and generators of new transnational ties. This idea gives more vitality to religious spaces (and to their members) and it gives more dynamism to Catholicism as global religion that sees migrants becoming actors of renewal. Indeed the same activism that I investigated in previous chapters can be found also at a transnational level.

Moreover I want to develop a second consideration. Ethnic churches represent a peculiar form of transnationalism, assuming a “sui generis” conformation. In this sense Levitt and Jaworsky, recalling S. Sassen, pointed out that in order to avoid methodological nationalism it’s important to conceptualise “such spaces as analytical borderlands, where the overlap and interaction of the local and global creates a frontier-zone” (2007:142). In this direction ethnic churches are in the “middle” between local and global experiences (i.e. “in-between” spaces). They address migrants’ needs and wishes acting between the local and transnational level. As corollary it should be noted how ethnic churches may also pose new challenges to the Catholic Church. By establishing new spaces, migrants renew a historical pattern, but at the same time animate in new ways the same model. In this sense, the “middle position” presented above, expresses also how “from below” and “from above” ethnic churches become sites where to negotiate this transnational process. Finally, I want to recall the opportunity to start thinking also of a European variant of transnationalism because the growth of intra-European mobility can also produce religious implications. (Congregations can be indeed more connected thanks to the freedom of movement and to how easy it has become to share information). In this sense it could be interesting to analyse both the consistency and regularity of such processes.

Chapter 9. The Catholic Church and immigrants: making room for diversity

Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am the pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all. For this reason, I exhort all countries to a generous openness which, rather than fearing the loss of local identity, will prove capable of creating new forms of cultural synthesis. How beautiful are those cities which overcome paralysing mistrust, integrate those who are different and make this very integration a new factor of development! How attractive are those cities which, even in their architectural design, are full of spaces which connect, relate and favour the recognition of others! (Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium -Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel- paragraph 210)

This passage allows to introduce the empirical focus of this final section. I will discuss the presence of migrants -including their religious communities- in the context of native Catholicism. Migrants in the receiving society meet a religion already established and socially rooted, and such encounter may assume various profiles, including tensions and ambiguities. The ways in which local Churches come into relation with migrants represent the core of these final paragraphs.

Catholicism, as well as other European Christian denominations, is facing new challenges and transitions, including a significant growth of an internal cultural diversity; a particularly visible process within urban contexts, which historically represent spaces in continuous evolution, where the exchange of material and immaterial resources has always created “something new”:

“In cities, as opposed to the countryside, the religious dimension of life is expressed by different lifestyles, daily rhythms linked to places and people (...) New cultures are constantly being born in these vast new human geographies (...) A completely new culture has come to life and continues to grow in the cities (72-73, Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium)

Both in the city of Milan and London Catholicism sees interesting transitions, for example believers are becoming more and more “mobile” compared to the “fixed” model of parish. New lifestyles and needs are impacting on the ways of religious participation. The presence of migrants can be initially framed as part of a more general process of rewriting, that is challenging the centenary role of parish as a religious community territorially bounded with an “homogenous” body of members. A “mobile” population de facto encounters an “immobile” structure. The religious transnationalism imported by immigrants requires a reply both in terms of organisation and inclusion. Church starts to reconsider itself, as a context no more ethnically uniform where new members express in turn new needs and aims.

Nevertheless, as critically pointed out by Pope Francis:

“But there are also many “non-citizens”, “half citizens” and “urban remnants” (...) Cities create a sort of permanent ambivalence” (74, Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium)

Thus, I want to explore how Church faces this “permanent ambivalence”. Such consideration opens to wider reflections on how it comes into relation with migration issue.

As I previously debated in the theoretical section (see chapter two), introducing concepts as “mediating and multilevel”, Catholic Church operates in favour of immigrants. An activism that is becoming increasingly significant. If the “fear of the stranger” has always been a central topic within public debates of last decades, today it has definitively become one of the most controversial issue. Populist parties have achieved a relevant visibility and centrality portraying immigrants through a specific rhetoric. Terms like invasion, wave, out of control and welfare-shopping have become the main (and dominant) vocabulary through which frame the migration issue, generating in turn a growing demand of security and exclusion. In this sense, while the state tries to defend itself

from migrants, Church instead tries to defend migrants. It also operates in promoting narratives, sharing ideas and values on diversity as well as it operates in defending political and social rights. De facto, the Church has achieved a significant position within the governance of migration processes.

Nevertheless, such prominent role achieved “institutionally” not necessarily is shared “collectively” by all churchgoers. Among believers are often widespread negative sentiments toward immigration, an issue that cuts transversely ecclesial communities, generating various kinds of attitudes (see: Pew Research Centre, 2018). On one side, members are increasingly engaged in promoting activities aimed to address to migrants’ needs, from the most simple and direct, like donate clothes and food, to more structured ones, as language courses, supports for children education, legal advises and many other forms of volunteering. On the other side, believers -often those who are simple churchgoers- develop negative attitudes, sharing the mainstream xenophobia, and supporting anti-immigrants parties. Generally, in the last decade, populist movements -in almost all European countries- have found an important “catchment area” within Christian communities. Moreover, such parties have “exploited” politically the Christianity, promoting themselves as those who defend the national identity by defending the religious one (presented as embedded). As pointed by Olivier Roy:

“If the Christian identity of Europe has become an issue, it is precisely because Christianity as faith and practices faded away in favour of a cultural marker which is more and more turning into a neo-ethnic marker” (2016:3).

Religion has become a pivot around it people can still recognise themselves while other forms of belonging are gradually eroding in time of globalisation. Such movements when promote publically religion they employ mainly its “folkloric” side, showing for example the cross as a symbol in which people can easily recognise themselves (ignoring the gospel). Moreover, a critic (for example in Italy) is also addressed to the forms of helps promoted by the Church to support immigrants: “Church provides more help to immigrants than to the local poor”. Thus the issue of migration has de facto joined Catholic Church’s agenda, ranging between acceptance and exclusion.

In this direction, thanks to the fieldwork in Milan and London, including interviews with some exponents of the local catholic panorama, I was able to collect data on such issues; in this final section I want to explore how migrants are framed and included locally, how native Catholics see and interact with believers coming from different countries. In this case, from a theological point of view, the “stranger” officially is a “brother”; but, from a sociological point of view, the socio-economic status may influence the approach to newcomers, creating social distance. In other words, it’s interesting to elaborate until what point the passport is more important than the baptism. Thus, through various perspectives, I try to examine how Catholic Church is transforming in response to migration.

9.1 From pray to protest: Churches in defence of immigrants

As I have discussed in the theoretical section (see chapter n.2), the Catholic Church can operate both in producing welfare services and in the migrants’ political advocacy. In particular, starting from a fragmented literature, I have proposed two concepts for framing such activism: “mediating and multilevel”. In this direction, both in the city of Milan and London a significant series of activities are organised and promoted by the respective Churches; a set of services planned in collaboration with other religious actors that deal in various ways with the same issue.

In particular, going into the details of these activities at urban level, within a more recent literature interesting theoretical accounts are taking relevance, as for example the concept of *sanctuary city*

(see Mancina, 2012, McDonald, 2012; Bagelman, 2016; Bauder, 2017). Typically, this is a literature focused on the implementation of migration policies at *local level*, including contradictions and ambiguities that may occur, given that “implemented policies differ from declared policies and the behaviours of many actors, including public authorities and civil servants, diverge from formal rules and regulations” (Ambrosini, 2018: 14).

Some scholars have indeed stressed and developed an ancient religious concept, namely *sanctuary*. By recalling its historical genealogy -within various medieval and roman laws there are interesting accounts on how fugitives or exiles could escape from imminent dangers by claiming protection in a sanctuary (Bauder, 2017)- they explain how migrants in irregular condition, asylum seekers and refugees have today found within some cities a space of survival (for a cartography of sanctuaries cities see the map provided by CIS, Centre for Immigration Studies, 2019; for the English case see also: Darling 2010, and the annual report published online by the movement “City of Sanctuary”, 2018). The history shows indeed interesting examples about sui generis spaces where the “constituted power” knows borders and limits, for example, into to the novel “I Promessi Sposi” written by Alessandro Manzoni, there are interesting examples; centuries later, recurrences can be detected in front of new challenges (the power is never completely absolutus). In particular, this concept refers to various municipal jurisdictions, typically located in North America, that, limiting their cooperation with national polices, create “urban sanctuaries” where migrants may find various means of survival, including the possibility to see fundamental human rights recognised. Within these sanctuary cities, the action of various civil-society actors, including churches, contribute to reinforce safe areas.

Taking inspiration from this international literature, in the city of Milan, there are several catholic networks that provide various forms of help; in first instance, one of the most relevant and capillary support is the one provided by Caritas -a direct expression of the Italian Episcopal Conference- which in the course of time has also created an *ad hoc* service called SAI (Immigrant Reception Service). Within the Milanese diocese there are about 400 centres of listening (spread across 1,104 parishes, while the city is officially subdivided into 172 parishes); as the head of this service claims:

Caritas Ambrosiana, which has several central units and this is the central unit for immigration, its mission, its mandate is to pay attention and give guidance on migration issues, so we offer a quality guidance service by spreading information. But that’s not all, we also try to support people, we offer legal counselling and provide direct support to the individual, to everyone who’s migrated under difficult circumstances. At the same time, another mandate is to support all scenarios of the Caritas system. I should now point out that the Caritas system is composed by some desks, which are the counselling desks we established in the parish churches. In Milan alone we count several dozens, hundreds in the diocese. This is where you can immediately detect the suffering experienced by the migrant population residing and living on that territory (Pedro D.I, head of Caritas reception service to migrants in Milan)

As can be seen from the words of the head of Caritas reception service, Church operates locally in order to address needs linked to migration experience. In most of the local parishes migrants can find “desks” that together create a “religious network of help”. Similarly, in the city of Milan there are several catholic associations involved in various ways in providing forms of support.

Among the most relevant, there is the “Community of Saint Egidio”, born in 1968 right after the second Vatican Council. This association over time has become a worldwide movement of lay people based on solidarity and ecumenical dialogue, and it is really active in favour of migrants:

Among all the services we offer, our Italian language course stands out. Here in Milan we only have two premises, but it’s still one of the most important scenarios of this kind in the city. As for the numbers, we have about 500 students a year. From this activity we have

developed a movement of foreigners (men and women) called 'Peace People'. It's a movement of socially committed immigrants who fully embrace the spirit of The Community of Sant'Egidio and bring it to their everyday lives. As I said, I coordinate all these activities, but another chapter has recently started, including activities of support and assistance to the refugees. Here in Milan in particular, we are working in the camp of Bresso, which is a refugee-resettlement center managed by the Italian Red Cross. Here we organize Italian courses, offer several advisory services and take the refugees in activities outside the camp (...) (G.d.Z, head of Saint Egidio community Milan)

The Caritas Ambrosiana and Saint Egidio community have become important points of reference within the city. Such "urban religious welfare" sees also the participation of "*Casa della carità*" (House of Charity) set up in 2002 on the initiative of the Archbishop of Milan Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini; the house welcomes everyday about 150 people, providing legal assistance, clean clothes and other chances of self-care, fundamental for irregulars and refugees that live in informal camps or irregular slums. It provides also a psychiatric ambulatory and an centre for occupational guidance service. Among the other players, there is also the "*Opera San Francesco*", officially inaugurated in 1959; it represents an evolution of the historical social activism of Capuchin friars within the city (established in 1878); for example this charity offers a pioneering health centre which has become an important provider of care for indigent people. As one can see, in the city of Milan the Catholic Church and other religious associations have planned a series of welfare activities in favour of immigrants; from material ones, like legal counselling, food and clothes, to cultural ones, like language course and after-school projects.

In the city of London, although Catholicism is a minority compared to Italy and Milan, the Church is active in promoting various forms of helps accessible to migrants. The city is formally (in terms of canonical law) divided in three different dioceses: *Westminster* (the mother church for Catholics in UK, it has 214 parishes covering West, Central and North London, the Borough of Spelthorne and Hertfordshire), *Southwark* (London boroughs south of the Thames) and *Brentwood* (London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest). Each promotes helps directly or in network with the other dioceses of London, as well as various alliances have been created in collaboration with numerous charities present in the city. It's possible to provide a introductory picture; in first instance, at national level there is the "*Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN)*" which is an agency established directly by the "Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales". As recalls its name (Network), it can be framed as an organisational platform that coordinates and facilitates relationships among dioceses and it helps in plan new partnerships with other players. Then, at local level, recalling the ecclesial subdivision of London, there is the "Caritas Westminster", which in turn is an umbrella organisation for others numerous catholic associations that work in the city. Within this ecology there are about 80-90 associations where migrants can freely access and find services in case of need. The major part of these helps are aimed to critical issues, like social exclusion, marginality, exploitation and the case of homelessness (which has become a critical issue in the city), including groups specialised to support asylum seekers and refugees denied. Among these various organisations, there are groups well structured, as the *Jesuit Refugee Service* or less structured, like "Justice and peace groups" that promote issues of social justice at parish level. Then there is the "Caritas Diocese of Brentwood" recently established in November 18', and, in the diocese of Southwark, there is instead the commission of "Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation" that, among the tasks, promotes the defence of social rights at parish level:

Yes ... our office (Justice and Peace Commission, Archdiocese of Southwark) works at parish level, we try to provides assistance, we have programs for ... homeless, for those who cannot access to state support and housing, and we have programs for immigrants, we make our contribution so that migrants who come to England may at least have basic supports,

hoping that this can help integration (...) those who for example need legal advices, for example programs for refugees, there are groups really active for this issue (...) we sponsor events, groups built around parishes, afterschool activities (...)we want to present problems to public institutions, so events are organised, in this way the problems of migrants don't become forgotten and are instead voiced to institutions. (Marie, Justice and Peace Commission, Archdiocese of Southwark)

The commission tries to share the issue of migrants under the umbrella of social justice, involving local parishes in the same spirit.

There are different areas of work. The diocese sets programs aimed to face urban marginality that in turn become accessible for migrants, or it can become part of a specific project (that has won a local funding).

As pointed out by Cecilia, head of the Office for Migration Policy:

I work ... at different levels, between national and local level, I coordinate projects between the parish level and big issues, like exploitation, housing, migrants' rights, social justice for them, my task is to facilitate relations between national structures and local communities, projects where parishes can be involved, then I have a political role, the question is to transform the local ... so ... the local needs, where the people live, where there are problems, these must become policies, what we see, what we do for migrants have to become something of more and more structured (Cecilia, head of the Office for Migration Policy)

In addition to be a provider of social services, the Catholic Church is indeed involved in migrants' advocacy. Given that migration has become, in the course of time, a political issue, the Church operates also at this level, sponsoring the defence of rights and trying to give voice to activities planned locally.

Moreover, in both cities, the catholic organisations represent platforms where national and international projects are developed, in particular for what concerns the issue of refugees that today has become the main focus of the debate.

At this regard, Caritas in Milan has sponsored activities aimed to transform an international issue into a local practise:

Then again, Caritas has been the author and co-star of a different model of reception (a project about hosting international asylum seekers by local families or in local structures). This project showed that it is possible to provide a quality intervention in support to the much discussed forced migration. This is important, because one thing is the possibility to host 400 people or so, another thing is to host 8/10 people, allocating resources and developing specific programmes of social inclusion and assistance. It's not a new model, but it provides specific assistance to a selected group of people and all the benefits deriving from it. (Pedro D.I, head of Caritas reception service to migrants in Milan)

Moreover, a significant initiative sees the participation of different religious actors; for example, an inter-faith coalition composed by FCEI, Federation of Italian Evangelical Churches, the Waldensian church, and the Catholic community of St. Egidio, has sponsored the "humanitarian corridors", which over the last three years have made possible the arrival of refugees through innovative legal channels:

Among all the services we offer, another chapter has recently started related to activities of support and assistance to the refugees, it includes the Humanitarian corridors project, in cooperation with the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy and the Waldensian Church. Our refugee-related involvement includes the Humanitarian corridors project, in

cooperation with the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy and the Waldensian Church (...) (G.D.Z, head of Saint Egidio community Milan)

Calling into question the Waldensian Church:

I think the project of humanitarian corridors has become very relevant, an innovative answer that came during a dark moment, maybe one of the most important project during a dark moment, a project that comes from below ... from the ideas of people who don't want to be silent during this period ... (interview Paolo Naso, responsible Italian Waldensian Church)

It's really interesting to note that the issue of refugees and asylum seekers has de facto created and promoted new forms of ecumenical dialogue.

Also the Catholic Church in England is active in several international projects aimed to refugees and related issues like human trafficking:

We collaborate with other national and international institutions, often these are small projects, but, in my opinion, must be replicated, or we are involved in international projects for the victims of human trafficking and also for the case of job exploitation, the labour market is full of areas where we have seen immense abuse in this country (...) it's a way to share our experiences, to highlight some the needs and to share solutions (...) we have had invitations from other bishops, here and abroad, we have organised national and international conferences so that information can be shared. We wish to work with ... more people, we want to make them aware (...) we participated to parliament debates, we were received several times, and we try to participate to public debates, to improve debates (Cecilia, head of the Office for Migration Policy)

Thus, both in Milan and London, Churches try to promote services and advocacy. In particular, as pointed out by Beaumont “we need to conceptualise the changing dynamics between religion, politics and post-secular society in the conviction that cities are the pre-eminent *loci* where these new relations are forming with intensity” (2008: 2019). In this direction the Church acts in replacing the state defending fundamental rights; it can operate in collaboration with other religious or secular charities, building also inter-faith coalitions. But, Churches try to do something more, promoting the respect of rights that for most time were the core of liberal traditions (principles that are clearly declared within the national constitutions) as well as Churches can cross national policies generating transnational networks (projects for refugees). Within this picture more specific data are required to better explore the different configurations of this activism, but, from the fieldwork, some features are really clear.

9.2 Exploring migrants' ecclesial citizenship: Catholic parishes and the anti-immigrants agenda

Both in the city of Milan and London, a religious ecology provides significant services for the immigrant population. But, beyond this “protective shield”, it's important to understand how the local panorama incorporates the same issue. While a large number of faithful is engaged at various levels with migrants, the problems concern instead attitudes of apprehension and fear inside the same catholic communities.

De facto, the issue of migration has today become part of ecclesial life, and it is framed in various ways; as the head of the office for migration policy in UK tells:

Clearly ... today ... we have a problem of racial justice, both in general and in relation to our communities ... we see an hostile environment, you can feel this atmosphere ... you can feel it, it's a problem of Church itself, we try to encourage the parish life, we try to encourage our brothers to welcome newcomers of different backgrounds, I'm strongly committed to encourage our churches to include -she quotes her role at CARJ, catholic association for racial justice- but the atmosphere is ... confused and fragmented ... both at national and local level (Cecilia, head of the Office for Migration Policy)

As one can see, the atmosphere is “confused and fragmented”, different prejudices mark the perceptions of common believers. As Marie suggested me:

So ... we're used to having different ethnic groups in London, different kinds of people and so on... The fact that we live in a multi-ethnic society isn't really a novelty for us ... I would say ... the problem ... becomes the same problem of any other English citizen, so there can be a relational problem with new and different people, I think this is the challenge, it's not easy, today ... the first problem is fear! Fear is irrational by definition, there is fear ... it can be sensed, and it's obviously a kind of fear that tends towards exaggeration, which tends to make problems bigger than what they are, this is an obstacle and ...this is my claim, my claim is that the other obstacle is a cultural one and it has to do with the relationship you have with those different from you and this is something that has always existed, and the third obstacle I believe is a social problem, and here in England you can see the social problem, it's clearly visible the social distance (Marie, Justice and Peace Commission, Archdiocese of Southwark)

As one can see from the words of those who are in regular contact with local communities and involved in parish life, the presence of immigrants represents a challenge, both in terms of cultural background and of social distance.

More specifically, calling into question a priest of the parish where the Latin-American church is located:

Sure, ... there are fringes that are really very closed and there are those who try to build a relation. They try and activate the tool of knowledge and therefore of encounter, of study, of friendship built around freetime, of making yourself available to others, but ... there are ... are people who think that others should be the same, they believe difference is a limit...they see differences on all fronts, on all the aspects they are unable to understand...daily customs, so they judge others and think everybody should be the same as them... I can say that here at the parish I see obstacles in those kind of people who are afraid... they are afraid first of all because they ignore the situation, the other community ... (Father Andrew, Head of OAR congregation based in S. Anne Church, London)

And, as Mariutzky -a leader and responsible of catechism- told me starting from her perspective:

I mean, they see you as ... still like a migrant ... not a brother ... this is the problem, you can feel this situation ... the distance among us ... I can feel "rumours"... sometimes I understand ... but ... we are Catholic, we live the same faith, but people tend to live the communities on the basis of their needs, on the basis of their lifestyles ... we and them ... (Mariutzky, Colombian leader and catechist, Latin-American Church, London)

Despite a shared religious affiliation, English members continue to use a different framework -"still like a migrant"- also within the same community. A social stigma hard to change.

In the case of the Brazilian church the situation is partially different; in practise, they don't share a place; they have reopened a local church, creating a lively context. Moreover, Brazilians in the course of time have established various communities within different English parishes, both in and outside London, contributing to keep alive Catholicism. But, despite this significant activism, locally, and also at the level of hierarchies, their role and value is not fully recognised:

"Do they see us? The future of the English church is here ... Catholicism is increasingly becoming a matter of immigrants!" (Father Paulo, priest of Brazilian Church. St. Anne, London)

This quotation is particularly significant of how the situation of Catholicism in England is an "ongoing process" that sees migrants as protagonists, but, at the same time, there are ambivalences in terms of organisation and acknowledgement.

In the case of Milan, similar considerations can be discussed. In particular, xenophobia generally affects the ecclesial communities and marks a distance with the official message of Catholic Church. "From the Pope to the parish" the process is long and complex. The efforts towards integration coming "from above" face the attitudes of believers who are diffident and suspicious towards migrants' support and advocacy:

Allow me to say that the first -problem- is ... a political problem, i.e. that the country does not accompany these processes, because if we work for the integration ...in view of overcome barriers and lower the prejudice and ostracism towards immigrants ... our country is going instead in the exact opposite direction ... so the first problem is political, and this means also political culture, of political and cultural attitude, and this tension is visible inside the ecclesial community ... (Father Alberto, head of the pastoral care of immigrants, Milan)

(...) the attitude is ... fear ... which is the result of non-knowledge, and which is also exploited, it is a point which we cannot ignore because now it is the most spontaneous emotion that emerges when you are dealing with something new and different, the bad thing is that it has been particularly exploited (S. B. pastoral care of Migrants, Milan)

The dynamics generated outside the communities have indeed relevant implications also inside:

In part I've anticipated some problems. The issue of migration is a very sensitive one, and does not involve everyone in the same ways; on the contrary, it also creates problems. It's a theme that if you "touch" as a priest in a community in order to create activities and ideas ... you finish to create problems ... Often priests told me ... they saw a community too closed, and the elections of March 4 has showed this thing ... even in the front page of the local papers some frictions came out ... you can see the distance ... then in the parishes people are generating questions like: but the Italians? those who have families and children, those who

have been affected by the crisis, for them? Why do you talk about immigrants and not about them? Why do you talk and help them and not me? (L. Bressan, Episcopal Vicar for Culture, Charity, Mission and Social Action)

The famous populist motto: “Italians first” has become a dominant perspective also within the parish life. Moreover, interviewees often report a sense of “difference between representation and reality of migration”; common people, in their everyday and ordinary life, face and deal with diversity, but they continue to follow the dominant representation when considering migration:

Surely it becomes a difficulty ... on the part of Italians ... especially in reading complexity, which basically means abandoning themselves to fears ... and the aspect that always strikes me is that foreigners are always all ugly and bad but my neighbor foreigner he isn't! Then ... in fact... there is my caregiver (family assistant), my aunt's family assistant ... I think that the biggest problem is in the effort to read the complexity ... (S. B. pastoral care of Migrants, Milan)

The Italian Catholic Church tries to explain the bright side of migration, as a relevant phenomena that is already involved in the ordinary life and relations. In particular, following the catholic theological approach, namely the role of human dignity and the ethic principles of respect and openness, leaders try to develop a new framework, in order to improve the quality of relations with migrants, but their efforts face what happens outside the community. Moreover, it also emerges that there is a need to train the Clergy and the pastoral agents in this sector:

What I would like to say ... reality changes rapidly today, it changes so rapidly, and you can see it in our religious community, today you can see that something is changing and we need a clergy that tries to update ... and also there is the whole problem of digital advancement, it is a new dimension ... we need to make progress and understand such new issues (L. Bressan, Episcopal Vicar for Culture, Charity, Mission and Social Action)

In this sense, a significant consideration concerns the role of new catholic believers:

Specifically, I can tell you about our case of Catholic communities that meet other Catholic immigrants who, however, bring with them differences. Here the theme is a comparison of two different styles of devotion, and Italians see obstacles in this religious attitude that they don't understand.

Even some priests say it, they say that they are not prepared for ... they are used to different styles, migrants' relationship with God is different, it is a very affective and emotional relationship, it is a religious culture very different from the one that we have developed, and this generates misunderstandings and obstacles (L. Bressan, Episcopal Vicar for Culture, Charity, Mission and Social Action)

De facto, ethnic-churches are not fully integrated into the normal life of local parishes. The situation is complex and multifaceted. On the one hand, there are the expectations of migrants, in terms to create a lively experience, on the other, there are expectations of local believers. These differences coexist in parallel, not without difficulties. In this sense, as clear, religion occupies a different position in everyday life. It is also a sociological question, in terms of needs, aims and meanings that people associate to their lives and experiences:

By definition we have a common matrix, a convergence, on some macro issues we understand each other, but if we have to go down into the details, perhaps ... we don't understand (...) Our catholic moral ... has probably faced a series of themes ... perhaps ... it

is a moral different from the Philippines or Latin America. Values such as family, or rather marriage, are experienced differently, in the Philippines, in Latin America ... not in all countries exist the same visions, the theme of divorce ... or there is the theme of children born out of the marriage ... things that are clear in our common customs ... (S. B. pastoral care of Migrants in Milan)

Moreover, new faithful are again considered only as people in search of assistance. Immigrants are viewed as beneficiaries of various forms of support, and they are not considered as active members of the local community. A problem is to recognise migrants' presence, their activism, abilities and skills (a topic that I have also developed in various sections):

(...) There are people who are interested in the activities of their local areas, people that do voluntary activities. I remember a couple of Peruvians who told me: "Yes we are Peruvians ... but we aren't foreigners" and they were reflecting about loving the country from which they came from but also the love for Italy ... and love Italy meant for them to know what is happening in the local area, and this could work as an index of successful integration, so there are people who try to live more the local community, to participate, to volunteer, to acquire better skills in the labor market, and ... following the activities of their children they try to engage with the Italian realities in which the children are already related ... but the question is the response from the other part, from Italians ... this is the challenge ... (S. B. pastoral care of Migrants in Milan)

Thus, the religious leaders are engaged in new and relevant challenges; aside from the typical commitment to the delivery of socio-economic resources, they are elaborating the role and the value of diversity in local ecclesial communities. Indeed, a new challenge for the Church is the “*ecclesial citizenship*” of new believers, a relevant matter also for of the recent synod organized by the Milanese diocese, that bears witness to this significant issue.

Thus, some considerations can be formulated. I have discussed the role of Catholic Church as provider of significant social supports as well as it has a crucial role in migrants' political advocacy. This activism, although it is nothing new, however is taking on a specific relevance today.

In particular, the mobilization of civil society, including religious movements, plays an important role in contrasting immigrants' and asylum seekers' rejection coming from local and national governments as well as by xenophobic movements. Also common citizens have actively taken part in various activities in favour of newcomers. In this sense, this reflection joins a recent literature on the mobilization of European civil societies for the reception of immigrants and asylum seekers: what it has been also called as “the Summer of solidarity”. Therefore, the role of non-State actors in contrasting what Alejandro Portes (2020) has recently called “the end of compassion” is increasingly fundamental.

At this regard, it should be deepened the political meaning of these activities: even if many actors involved in these supports do not exhibit political motivations, in the present political climate also simple acts of help, such as donating clothes and food, are increasingly perceived as political acts. While some political actors are criminalizing the solidarity, the same process takes another and opposite direction.

Another consideration concerns the other side of the coin. While it's possible to see catholic groups strongly involved in migrants' welcoming, most people follow the general political climate. Even in the case of brothers coming from different countries, the role of passport is stronger than the faith itself. For the moment, it is difficult to map the situation. It is an ongoing process. This is a reason of why we need more data on how the migration issue is viewed at various levels, from the Catholic hierarchies to the common parishes.

9.3 Conclusions. Findings, challenges and future directions of migrants' religious involvement

This thesis has focused on ethnic churches established by catholic migrants both in the city of Milan and London. It wishes to respond to a vacuum into European migration studies on the role of religion; I have indeed argued that religious involvement represents a significant element for migrants' lives. In particular, I have investigated in which ways religious communities support migrants' experiences and needs, contributing to their integration.

This work adopts a qualitative framework and empirical findings are not representative; thus, results cannot be generalized. My research is based on a limited and specific case study, nevertheless what I have collected can be useful to advance the theory on the role of religion in migration. For those who are involved in such realities religion represents a significant resource, a way to create a new space of aggregation, a support to develop a new identity, a strategy to survive in a different and alienating context.

Within different European countries, various churches or religious institutions have been established by migrants on the basis of a common cultural background, and the profile of local religious panorama has partially changed. Clearly, each national context has historical and political specificities, but a common and transversal process can be however discussed, analysed and compared. It is a process that in different ways is interesting the European continent.

In these terms, religion represents a significant field of analysis to understand migration and social inclusion processes.

In the following concluding sections, I will discuss the theoretical issues I have presented in relation to empirical results I have collected. I will also consider some critical points and finally present some pathways for future research.

9.4. Themes and findings

- Cities and the challenge of religious transnationalism

This study has initially explored the transformation of the urban landscape in relation to the emergence of ethnic churches. As the literature on this issue shows, migrants' activism is changing the local religious landscape (Knott, 2010; 2015). Within European cities, where globalization processes take diverse and overlapping forms, religion has regained a new visibility. At this regard, global cities have become arenas in which post-secular trends are developing and where borders between sacred and secular are more porous. Starting from these theoretical considerations, I have advanced a *methodological approach* tailored on my case studies. In particular, I have progressively presented and discussed different perspectives able to grasp the various spatial dynamics that characterise ethnic churches, both in London and Milan.

In this sense, the central idea is that space needs a dynamic approach above all in the case of migrants' religious activism. I have explored the importance of shifting the perspective around and within the space, including entry/exit practises, as well as the gradual transformation of a single place. In particular, I discussed the following perspectives:

- I explained how foreign believers “take a place”, exploring the *internal rewriting* of native religious spaces activated by migrants.
- I introduced the concept of *urban pilgrimage*, exploring how religious communities produce a new form of urban mobility.
- I debated the issue of *urban processions*, exploring how migrants move out of invisibility expressing a specific form visibility.
- I presented some “*place-making practises*”: how migrants shape their ethnic churches.

- I explored the *cartography* of churches: where they are located in cities.
- I finally debated the *negotiation* of a space: how native-Catholicism has managed the presence of a new migrant-Catholicism.

I concluded with a theoretical summary scheme that I have inductively elaborated from the fieldwork in London and Milan.

In particular, I can affirm that in the case of Catholic migrants it's possible to observe a specific spatial process; indeed, they don't import a new faith, but they "*re-sacralise already sacred spaces*". It's a different pattern from other religious processes that today can be observed within cities, as when migrants import a "new" faith (compared to mainstream panorama) sacralising and transforming secular buildings in holy spaces -"*sacralise secular spaces*"- like the case of new prayer-halls or Temples. Catholic migrants are rebuilding a different Catholicism within established parishes, rewriting the local holy architecture as well as transforming marginal churches in animated places. This process, in comparative terms, takes such specificities:

- *In Milan* it is particularly salient given that Catholicism is intrinsically linked to the national history and identity; thus newcomers indicate how Italy is de facto becoming more and more multicultural also in religious terms. The mainstream religion has partially changed its racial profile, and an internal super-diversity has emerged.
- *In London* this process of diversification has a long and consolidated history. Nevertheless, in first instance, this shows how religion takes a relevance during migratory experience; around a religious belonging, migrants create a space where regularly meet and shape new relations in a different society. The history of the city, and the history of English Catholicism, is profoundly marked by various migration flows, and newcomers regularly create ethnic churches, which represent a "little Zion" where to regain a common memory and develop relations. For example, as I have showed, Latin-Americans -the more recent immigrant group in the city (McIlwaine, 2016)- have created their churches, which represent relevant spaces of aggregation within London. Moreover, such process regularly gives to the local Catholicism a new "ecclesial" lymph.

Finally, according to these considerations, both in Milan and London, migrants have transformed local parishes in *transnational* sites. Their religious practises give new meanings and directions to the local panorama, "transcending" national borders. According to the work of Tweed (1997) and Orsi (1985), around a religious space migrants develop a *diasporic identity*, able to make sense of their new experiences. Religious symbols and practises may merge past and present, an "imaginary bridge" between the mother country and receiving nation. Within the interstices of global cities it is possible to find such transnational spaces and processes. (Transnationalism represents an issue that I have also developed and debated in the eighth chapter).

Starting from these findings, I underlined the need to elaborate the "subjectivities" involved in these spaces in order to grasp more precisely meanings and functions of ethnic churches.

- **The functions of ethnic churches**

Moving from spatial dynamics, in the fifth chapter I have progressively advanced and developed a series of perspectives emerging from migrants' subjectivities: basically what meanings members associate the their involvement. In light of this, I was able to provide an inductive-taxonomy of ethnic churches and their functions.

- Churches become an *intermediary* place, softening the impact with the host society. Religious membership addresses to significant issues embedded in migratory experience, as

- the lack of relations, the loneliness and a sense of anonymity, providing significant psychological benefits.
- The fieldwork shows how religious spaces are diachronically intertwined with migrants' everyday experiences. Churches are spaces of *resilience*, where people can continuously mediate and cushion tensions associated to an unfamiliar place, stressful family dynamics as well as demanding jobs. This concept, namely a space of resilience, denotes how religious spaces are forum where migrants may regularly recover from adversities.
 - Beyond the concept of resilience, I have also adopted the concept of *resistance* in order to show how ethnic churches represent a way to negotiate structural dynamics. It offers the idea that migrants within Churches can also try to address more actively to the various pressures and limitations they face in ordinary life, generating a series of micro-acts of surviving.
 - I have explored a kind of “benefit” often underestimated: migrants within churches can find another significant resource, often hard to find outside sacred walls, i.e. *a particular and alternative form of social mobility*. Membership can provide interesting cognitive resources, such as a sense of self-esteem, a different social status and the chance of practising abilities typically underused in ordinary lives. In both cities, migrants try to enact an alternative construction of self within churches.
 - Religious communities try to address the *moral liminality* implied in the migratory experience that can generate various tensions, a space where migrants try to create an image of respectability and order, where try to resist external pressures, and where to also create a strong behavioural attitude.

In comparative terms, in all my case studies I found these functions. Clearly, they were intertwined in different ways, and I tried to disentangle them in order to show how members may experience the churches they attend. In a certain sense, these functions represent “ideal types” of why migrants decide to participate. I can affirm that churches established in foreign land are de facto shaped and modelled on the basis of the various needs and aims emerging from migrants' experiences. Religion is indeed intrinsically associated and interrelated to emotional, psychological, moral and political necessities. Such functions can be thus activated and performed according to contingences, and members use them to reinforce and sustain their secular experiences in a diverse society.

- **Migration as theologizing experience and the challenge of congregationalism**

In the sixth chapter I have provided a synopsis of the internal life, focusing on the dynamics that characterise the manifold ways in which migrants may experience faith within their ethnic churches. I have initially analysed the kinds of religious involvement given that church membership can follow different paths. Then, I moved to examine the internal organisational models, explaining why it is so important to adopt a “meso-level” approach. I have indeed showed that churches are animated by a vigorous dynamism that in turn has created several groups based on different criteria. De facto, these relational processes create a specific kind of religious organisation, similar to a congregational-Church. At this regard, I have provided examples of how migrants are able to sponsor several religious and social activities, showing a great vitality, not without tensions and ambivalences.

The main idea of this empirical chapter is that religious involvement is more complex than common perceptions: migration experience impacts faith in many ways, leading to various types of participation and aggregation models. Churches are sites of interesting religious processes that cohabit under the same “parish roof”. In particular, the chapter has followed this argumentative logic:

- The perceptions of ministers, i.e. voices and perceptions “from above”.
- The kinds of religious participation: migration becomes a theologizing experience.
- A significant type of engagement: the process of “Born-again” in Milan and London .
- The emergence of a congregational-Church .

To introduce the internal life, I started “from above”. By drawing on interviews made with priests both in London and Milan I could initially present the challenges they face and see within churches. Indeed priests represent the “ecclesial-junctures”, i.e. those who try to coordinate migrant religious activism. Starting from their stories, it emerges the presence of a multifaceted profile of members, and this represents a challenge. Migrants show different religious backgrounds, cultural traditions, styles and different approaches to religion: there are people who want to transplant the same model, who rediscover religion in migration, who intensify their degree of involvement or those who look for new spiritual meanings. Another significant tale and challenge is that ethnic churches are lively and dynamic: a space for migrants’ agency (see chapter n. 5). Churches could appear only as ethnic-spaces, where people share the same cultural background, but from inside they reveal a widespread and unexpected activism. Migrants create indeed several internal groups and sub-groups. Then, thanks to priests’ voices (i.e. the perceptive “from above”), I elaborated these topics as they de facto emerge “from below”.

I have explored a significant process: migration as a theologizing experience. Interviews suggest how religious participation may follow various configurations. On one side, the *ethnic-model* is clearly present. The possibility of finding a cultural atmosphere where to practise a specific kind of Catholicism, able to evoke the mother-country, represents a strong pull-factor. On the other side, the model of “*questioning faith*” emerges (a similar process has been explained by Levitt, 2007). Migration impacts the approach to religious involvement, and members often start an intimate spiritual journey. In some cases, migrants have re-discovered Catholicism in a new context. In the receiving country “the need for God” progressively grows. If initially the approach was superficial and religion was taken for granted, in foreign land it becomes an essential part of their new identity. These various patterns *cohabit* within ethnic churches. Moreover, also within the same narratives, these elements are often balanced in various ways. In this sense, religion is a question of “roots and routes”, whereas a simple ethnic perspective is a static view of understanding ethnic churches. The individual focus has indeed showed how migrants may undertake also new spiritual routes.

Elaborating previous findings, I decided to examine another significant process. I found how a renewed participation can also lead believers towards a more intense spirituality, in particular the adhesion to a Charismatic Movement. These groups sponsor an immersive religious experience, creating an emotional and touching setting where to soften and “console” members’ pains and sufferings. The participation to these units often reveals a radical change in the religious experience. Expressions like “before” and “after” as well as “old and new path” or “bad and good” have been recurrent. These verbal dichotomies state a transition towards new lifestyles. Here we can find the category of “born-again believers”. At this regard, charismatic groups are present in all ethnic churches, both in Milan and London.

Moreover, the analysis of some interviews provides another perspective to debate the role of ethnicity shared within churches. It often becomes an ambivalent-issue. Interviews have provided representations on how it is more than a neutral subject; participation often tries to mark a border to prevent clichés and dangerous behaviours typically associated to ethnicity.

Another perspective to understand the migrants’ religious activism is to explore the emerging organisational configurations. Migrants tend indeed to create clusters on the basis of various criteria. These are units that in turn promote both secular and religious activities.

In light of this, sacred spaces aren't an undifferentiated mass of believers, but arenas of ideas and initiatives that become pivots around which several migrants' groups take shape. This tendency is boosted by various motivations; as I debated, churches are alternative spaces, where people can act without external pressures, where believers can carry out their abilities, where to create new social ties. Elements that strengthen the relational tendency towards congregationalism.

This process based on voluntary participation characterises all ethnic churches and poses a peculiar and unusual type of challenge for the specific case of Catholicism. Within churches all groups have to cohabit under the same "parish-roof". This adds another perspective for discussing ethnic churches. In particular, it's important to avoid the tendency to romanticize the meaning "community".

To conclude, I showed the multiple ways in which catholic migrants both in Milan and London may experience religion. It emerges how migration intrinsically impacts and stresses the relation with spirituality. At this regard, while in the fifth chapter I have explained the social functions of ethnic churches, in this chapter most of their religious counterparts are instead explained. Ethnic churches become multifunctional also for migrants' religious needs.

Moreover, we can see how the internal dynamism may follow various and parallel paths, also "de-bordering" from conventional outlines; congregationalism is a typical tendency, and it addresses to the needs of migrants in terms of activism.

- **The emergence of an informal welfare: a way to investigate integration processes**

In the seventh chapter I have analysed how ethnic churches provides what I have labelled an *informal welfare*. Into the literature this subject is rarely taken into consideration. While "welfare" is mainly associated to the study of public policies, to the market and to the role of third-sector, I argue instead how this concept may be applied to the case of churches established by immigrants within host societies. This "theoretical extension" represents the core of this chapter.

In particular, I have progressively advanced a schematization able to frame the welfare activities that religious communities provide to their members. It is a classic inductive procedure: I have identified the various resources allocated, then I have analyzed the mechanisms that generate them. In this way it was also possible to capture the range of action of such practises and resources.

In addition, in this chapter I have also debated relations between ethnic churches and migrants in irregular conditions. Given their specific situation, I have investigated the ways in which they turn to religious arenas as a strategy for surviving.

In light of the data collected, I may elucidate the role of this informal welfare.

- Firstly, both in Milan and London, ethnic churches work de facto as listening centres as well as provide groups of believers prepared to listen, which includes the role of the clergy who reinvents itself taking on a new role. Together these various activities represent a sort of "emotional welfare". Religion intrinsically becomes a way to face problems, where people can turn to alleviate pains.

This support can be also considered under the spectrum an emergent body of research on "migration and emotions studies" (see Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015), a subject that has achieved a greater theoretical and empirical formalisation. At this regard, religion and emotions are intrinsically intertwined and such findings can help to open a window on how migrants can face their problems thanks to religious institutions.

- I have analysed how ethnic churches play a significant role in providing a multidimensional set of resources. Communities represent arenas where to share pivotal information, such as legal advice, job vacancies and available housing, addressing the essential needs for the

experience of migration. In this sense, beyond religious matters, churches take a profile as “platforms services”. The interpersonal trust that feeds bonding social capital is the basis of this informal welfare. Churches -clearly- don’t have specific economic aims, nevertheless the possibility to freely share a place also entails the chance to share pivotal information and resources tailored to migrants’ secular needs.

- It’s possible to observe how within churches other forms of help take shape, such as the organization of meals or events to raise funds. During the fieldwork, I have observed how collecting money for different purposes was a recurrent practise in all sites. In this sense, fundraising is a typical religious activity, and within ethnic churches this practise is even more important given members’ needs. Furthermore it’s rather surprising, given that members -in most cases- aren’t a wealthy population. But the general atmosphere of solidarity -both in Milan and London- is able to promote numerous forms of collections for who is in time of need, as in the case of money for medicines or expensive therapies. If these forms of helps may attract too many people being very precious, access to them is intrinsically linked to the trust established through the continuity of church attendance. Membership becomes a selective filter both for avoiding ambiguities that an indiscriminate use could imply and for preventing that religious identity is overshadowed only by material needs.
- Another relevant form of support promoted within communities is childcare, an important issue given the lack of extended familiar networks that can assist migrants in parenthood. In particular, immigrant families, given they are exposed to difficult relational dynamics made of repeated re-joining and breakups, look for a specific kind of environment that may accompany them through these critical transitions. Children can indeed face the passage between the family from which they start and the family in which they arrive, and a recreational space sponsored within churches represent a way for alleviating the difficulties of this phase. Each church sponsors several activities for children and adolescents, a sort of oratory that promotes both leisure and religious activities, such as organised games or catechism. Immigrant parents appreciate this space given that it represents a way to reproduce both ethnic and religious belonging. It also emerges how ethnic churches represent “safe-spaces” given that these are socially selected. As pointed out by Cao (2005), immigrant religious institutions become something like a “*surrogate family*”, supporting several educational fragilities. It represents a space where to compensate the weaknesses of immigrant -working class- families. In a certain sense, these provide the “cultural capital” the families don’t have.
- If ethnic churches provide various supports to members, this informal welfare becomes even more significant for those who are in irregular condition. Communities represent crucial pivots to sustain their precariousness. To frame this support, I have proposed the concept of embassy; as the same juridical notion evokes, generally an embassy is extra-ordinary space that enjoys a full extra-territorial status. Irregulars, although formally excluded from the state, are instead formally included within the borders of ethnic churches. Firstly, communities give them *dignity* as a human beings; irregulars are typically employed in low-paid jobs, often they live on the margins, with no formal access to welfare services (like basic health care or other subsidies). In this sense, churches represent an *alternative* an *safe* space where to breath, survive and find resources. Moreover, religious membership is a way to resist to external and structural pressures, and it also represents a *tactic* for “practising invisibility”. According to the studies of McIlwaine (2016) on Latinos in London, invisibility is a strategy of entry, but it’s also a survival strategy that gives to irregulars a “degree of agency” (2016: 183). It can represent a way to resist structural dimensions such

as a restrictive immigration regime. Recalling Broeders and Engbersen (2007) and their famous study on the (various) counterstrategies of irregular migrants, religion is another dowel to add to the “weapons of the weak” (2007:1958).

Thus, what I have labelled as an “*informal welfare*” characterises all ethnic churches analysed. The main methodological challenge was to “capture such informality”. I have “sociologically and inductively” explored the possibility of generating welfare resources and practises through internal relations and below I may summarise five features able to better frame this informality:

- (1) Compared to other formal institutions, religious communities are small and unstructured, but due to their organizational flexibility they are able to respond quickly and effectively to the various needs of believers. Churches indeed don't have to manage formal procedures and -paradoxically- this informality isn't a weakness, but a point of strength. It becomes more receptive than formal policies which typically have different “timing”.
- (2) As corollary, ethnic churches are able to allocate resources with flexibility and effectiveness according to the needs that may arise in the migration experience. Resources as the regularity in the legal position, the continuity in employment and the stability of residence are strenuous and difficult achievements, and moreover they often are not even definitive. Regressions and advances are recurrent characteristics experiences in the life of migrants, and attending a religious space can also support these dynamics. Networks are sensitive to adaptation and readjustment on the basis of political, economic and familiar contingences.
- (3) Resources as emotional and psychological support, recreational and educational help for mothers and children, references for a job or a new room, loans for medical care, are all difficult to obtain within public provision. In this sense, churches provide tailored helps for migrants' experiences, supports difficult to find into formal services tailored instead on native population.
- (4) The access to these precious resources is linked to the trust established internally. The social capital is the basis of this welfare, but an intrinsic charitable tension can however move the “horizon”, opening the borders of solidarity for those who are in need. The religious principle of solidarity questions group boundaries, and these can be negotiated and enlarged through a relational process.
- Finally (5) it's difficult, if not impossible, for this informal provision to assume a precise formalisation. The border between religious or social activities is thin, and exposed to tensions. Religious communities can't transform themselves in another kind of organisation given that this could generate a “misunderstanding” about the main religious identity. This is a difficult balance, regularly subjected to tensions.

These findings stimulate additional reflections. A significant aspect concerns the “value” of these helps produced by churches compared to other actors that normally support migrants. I have analysed the mutual help between people who share similar social conditions. This is a peculiar form of activism, often overlooked.

Secondly, the existence of such welfare can be analysed under different points of views. It becomes theoretically salient in relation to various contemporary debates, as the “recalibration of welfare state” and the controversial issue of migrants' social citizenship. In particular, it should be observed how today welfare policies are becoming more and more a battleground. This is particularly evident in reference to a widespread neoliberal agenda (especially after an economic crisis). Moreover, neo-populism is trying to reinforce a “nationalist” border for the access to formal welfare services.

In my personal opinion, collect more data -both at national and international level- on how religious institutions provide supports to migrants' needs could enlarge and develop the theoretical debate on migrants' religions.

- **Transnational religious circuits beyond the state-nation borders**

In the eighth chapter I have debated the transnational perspective, given that ethnic churches represent sites of various and overlapping ties that “transcend” national borders.

Transnationalism has indeed become a burgeoning theoretical perspective within migration studies. In this regard, I wanted to show how religion provides a privileged point of view to progress this area of study. Ethnic churches can be discussed as “dense” relational fields, where relationships, emotions, values, ideas, resources and identities are activated and exchanged combining and involving at the same time the sending and receiving countries.

In particular, the core idea of this chapter is the existence of a specific transnational pattern. Catholic migrants have created international circuits within an institution, i.e. Catholic Church, which per se is historically transnational.

(1) I started to analyse the international circuits of solidarity and their implications. Ethnic churches represent transnational actors of local development; through charitable practices they collect resources for various social-projects (migrants that help other migrants in the name of solidarity). Two main trends have been discussed. There are conventional ties that intersect ethnic churches “from above”. The clergy of these communities often belongs to Catholic congregations that traditionally are dislocated in several countries where they promote local projects. On the other side, “from below” believers promote fundraisings: in this case collections are made in case of contingences, like a natural disaster or lay-leaders may promote collects around of their personal links. Thus the texture of circuits is plural, some of them are fixed others are not continuous but activated in a variable ways on the basis of needs.

Finally it should be noted how this kind of activity has also immaterial implications. Such solidarity that crosses the national borders should be outlined not only economically but also in a symbolic frame. Participating to a social project represents a way to stay connected with mother country. Moreover transnational supports consolidate the value and prestige of religious communities established abroad, contributing to generate specific forms of recognition that travel on a *trans-local scale*.

(2) Beyond material resources, I have explored transnational circuits where people are involved. In particular, I divided this empirical focus in two main trends: the movements of the clergy as well as the movements of lay-leaders across national borders.

In the first case one can observe a “formal” process typically sponsored and managed by Catholic Church as institution. Here priests de facto are representative actors of an historical catholic transnationalism. These ministers are “called” in order to support migrants’ spiritual needs. I have investigated how recruitment works both in Milan and London. Thus I have analysed these networks in depth, as for example with regards to priests’ agency, including representations, tasks, strategies, tactics and emotions involved in their role.

In the second case, I have investigated the travels of preachers and lay-leaders, a process sponsored from members. Here “from below” migrants are able to create alternative circuits to the official ones. In this sense the role of Charismatic groups is central. Today such religious movements have become protagonists of a new catholic transnationalism. They are present in all case studies, promoting several meetings where both priests and lay preachers come from all parts of world.

(3) Finally I have investigated another frontier: the virtual transnationalism. It represents a new trend that allows migrants both to live experiences and exchange emotions simultaneously with families and friendships dislocated around the world. New technological means have had a

significant impact on the genesis of international networks, promoting them. As a consequence, technologies have also implications for transnational religious networks.

In the Italian case, Charismatic groups thanks to Skype can stay in touch with other groups (dislocated both in Italy and abroad) and they can share contents and activate collective prayers or celebrations. In London, Brazilian community promote live-broadcasts that are used by members and non-members in Brazil as well as by those who live outside London to imagine and experience a proximity. The central idea is that “God should reach all people”, wherever they are and in every possible way. Finally I have highlighted a peculiar process that is becoming increasingly popular in all communities. During the fieldwork I saw several attendants use smartphones during celebrations. In particular, most of them have activated whatsapp-calls with relatives and friends, showing themselves during mass.

Thus, virtual channels and media-platforms cross the “physicality” of national boundaries, connecting people dislocated in several parts of the world and creating a new form of simultaneity of events and actions. This new frontier is increasingly intersecting all aspects human life, including religion.

To conclude, Milan and London have become important hubs for catholic transnational circuits. Ethnic churches taken into consideration represent significant actors in renovating and redirecting such historical feature of Catholicism. Material and immaterial recourses are exchanged across borders, and events can be experienced simultaneously. In this way I suggest how today ethnic churches represent sites of *transnational nested circuits*.

Finally, I proposed to develop the transnational focus at a European level. The growth of intra-European mobility may produce implications also in religious terms. In this sense it could be interesting to analyse both the consistency and regularity of such processes.

- **Activism, advocacy and the role of diversity.**

In the final section of this thesis I have discussed the presence of migrants and their religious communities in the context of native Catholicism. Given the nature of my case studies, it is important to underline that migrants meet a religion already established and socially rooted, and such encounter may assume various profiles, including tensions and ambiguities. This is a process common to various European Christian denominations, which see the genesis of an internal pluralism. In this direction I have discussed in which ways local Churches come into relation with migrants.

- In particular, even if the Catholic Church has always been engaged with the migration issue, such activism has achieved a new significant position, a perspective that is typically neglected by the academic debate. I have examined the role of Church for migrants’ political advocacy as well as the various ways in which catholic organisations provide crucial social supports. I have explained how Churches have created a “protective shield” both in Milan and London in the face of to an unfavourable political and social contest: where the state tries to defend itself against migrants, the Church tries to support them. This shield works both at a national and local level, including several projects promoted and shared with other religious institutions at a transnational level. Taking inspiration from the literature on sanctuary cities, I thus proposed to develop this theoretical framework in order to examine more in detail how religions today have become significant actors in creating both new forms of political advocacy and welfare areas.
- Then, I moved to discuss the other face of the coin. I shifted the glance at what happens internally. Despite Church’s activism, social distance and exclusion cuts transversally the

attitudes of catholic communities. “From the Pope to the parish” the situation is complex and multifaceted. Moreover, the Catholicism, as well as the other European Christian denominations, is facing new challenges and transitions, including a significant growth of a cultural diversity sponsored by the presence of migrants belonging to the same denomination. In this sense, the general political climate has important implications for the ecclesial life. As I showed, this interrelation is still marked by distance and prejudice. What I framed as the “ecclesial citizenship” represents a challenge for the Catholic Church.

Concluding remarks

I investigated how and in which ways migrants may draw on religion to cope with their new experiences. Thus, my research reveals how religion represents a significant element of migratory process. Beyond the only spirituality, it has significant social implications and, de facto, supports integration processes.

To conclude, I would to summarise ideas provided by my work, which in turn represent contributes to the recent European theoretical field on the intersections between religion and migration.

If the role of space has been generally explored and investigated, I proposed some pathways to disentangle the spatial dynamics related to migrants’ religious institutions. In my case, ethnic churches are also changing the profile of a mainstream European religion. More generally, our cities see the born of many and different churches established on a ethnic background, which are rewriting the traditional borders of Christianity, a topic often overlooked.

The social functions of these churches are diverse, variable and abatable; from below, migrants, thanks to their activism, are able to mould the role of a religious community on the basis of needs emerging during migratory process.

The ways in which religion changes in migration is often overlooked. We don’t have quantitative data, but qualitative studies reveal interesting shifts that need to be better investigated. I showed some processes on how involvement may change given secular experiences.

The role of informal welfare, in my personal opinion, is crucial under different points of view. In particular, the last twenty years have seen the increase of neoliberal policies and the simultaneous decrease of public policies; in this context, scholars have recently started to analyse the role of non-state actors that are replacing the vacuum left by the recalibration of welfare-state. In this space, charities, voluntary and religious organisations as well as interfaith-coalitions are indeed working together against social exclusion. Thus, in mapping the *new geography of welfare*, researchers should also start to notice the dynamism of immigrant churches.

Transnationalism is the new frontier within migration studies, and churches established by migrants into receiving society are today interesting sites where transnational processes take shape. Religion par definition represents a significant field where to develop this recent debate. Par excellence, it transcend and cross borders.

In most countries, the role of national churches is increasingly central in the political debate; moreover, they provide various resources in terms of advocacy. De facto, Churches, as in the case of roman catholic church, are actors in the governance of migration, a topic taken for granted and rarely explored in-depth. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a new body of believers represents a significant multicultural challenge at communitarian level. We are seeing “brothers” with different cultural backgrounds, an a question is: to what extent will they be only “brothers of a lesser God”?

Finally, I’m conscious that while religious institutions contribute actively in supporting migrants they are not a panacea for every need. Nevertheless, the study of their role contributes to understand interesting processes activated “from below” by a significant part of our population, as in the case of catholic migrants in Milan and London.

9.5 Pathways for future research

In this section, I wish to underline some pathways for future research; elements that could help to develop such body of studies on migration and religion in Europe.

An important issue to explore is the progression of religious belonging in terms of civic and political participation. Some studies suggest that membership in the course of time can extend to include other forms of activism (Levitt, 2008). Communities may transform in “arenas” to develop civic skills; generally those who experience actively the “religious field” tend to promote activities also outside church, as in the case of volunteering (Handy, Greenspan 2009). In this sense, the informal welfare I have analysed may represent a training to encourage new ideas and activities.

Moreover, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2006, 2008) and Hagan (2006) have pointed out how religious communities have become increasingly important within a political context marked by an anti-immigrants agenda. They propose to elaborate how religion may transform itself, an advancement from a “cultural expression” to a “political tool”. In other words, religion could represent a form of “empowerment from below”. But, for the moment the empirical field is still fragmented; there are only single case studies, and not extended researches on the interrelations between religious involvement and political participation.

In this direction, on the basis of my study, it becomes important to analyse both endogenous and exogenous factors. Sociologically, an issue to investigate is how churches promote “bridging social capital”. As the literature shows, members’ social mobility may bring over time to the creation of new kinds of ties, and consequently a new set of resources (Foley and Hoge, 2007; Ryan et al., 2008). Moreover, as we have seen, within groups members develop new roles and skills. Acquiring such positions is a significant process; a diachronic study of this activism could be a perspective.

In terms of exogenous factors, the role of local level represents another perspective. See religion as an institutional actor to involve for sharing ideas or projects still represents a challenge. In Europe the role of immigrants’ religious communities is an ambivalent issue; generally, suspicions and fears marked their recognition. Being pivotal points of reference for many migrants in the city, civic collaboration at local level could be a first step. The forms of interrelation between local institutions and these “satellite communities” represent a first important argument to develop, also in comparative terms.

Another issue concerns the evolution of the moral dimension; within ethnic churches taken into consideration complex and multifaceted moral processes take shape. As we have seen, migrants look for new landmarks in a diverse socio-cultural setting. They search new “moral compasses” to soften the impact. This represents a reaction against the risk of anomie. Migrants try to create a good image of themselves; religion serves to them in terms of dignity and respectability, a way to resist to external prejudices. But this process leads also to develop a sort of neo-conservatism. In this sense, while moral preaching generally weakens within native religious settings, it becomes significant within religious institutions established by immigrants. Moreover, for some members the community represents a pivot compared to a decadent world, where religion is not central and where post-modernism fosters relativism.

For some scholars these moral processes lead to create a form of “spiritual citizenship”, in terms of deservedness. For example, Guzman Garcia (2016) has showed how immigrants -within two Pentecostal communities in the Us- have become “deserving neoliberal citizens”; they have used religious values for aligning to the dominant idea of citizenship, mostly in a context where the right to citizenship is more and more associated to elements as “self-sufficiency, merit and responsibility”. In this sense, such moral processes and their implications need to be better explored in comparative terms; there are different configurations. Also in this case -in my personal opinion- we need to examine endogenous and exogenous factors that may impact on these moral directions.

As corollary of these reflections, I crucial empirical field to advance concerns second generations. Here, once again, various processes need to be investigated (Ricucci, 2017).

It is important to grasp the models of religious involvement. During my experience, in each church I found a group of young believers internally engaged. They clearly represent a specific sample, not representative of how religion passes from first to second generation. Indeed, during the fieldwork, I could also see many young attend the church, but surely in different ways. Someone with their parents, as a familiar way to experience the Sunday, others only for specific devotions or processions that mark their cultural background.

In this sense, it should be initially noted that there is a significant number of youth with a Christian and Catholic background. In Italy, they are contributing in quantitative terms to the mainstream religion, and in UK they are enliven a religion which is a minority. This contribution needs to be elaborated in qualitative terms, understanding the forms of spirituality. Moreover, such involvement should be investigated at different levels, firstly in relation to their parents, analysing if and how the immigrant churches established by their parents will continue to be part of their identity. Secondly, another question is the role of this involvement for their inclusion in the host society. As pointed by Portes and Rumbaut, religious communities in America were pivotal contexts to elaborate a selective acculturation (2006: 316). Another perspective is the role of religion in relation with native peers, how they manage their cultural and religious background into everyday experiences. In this direction, Roberta Ricucci (2017), through several interviews with young people of the main denominations, especially Peruvian and Filipino Catholics, Romanian Orthodox and also Muslims, has identified five profiles of religiosity. Such elaboration shows interesting directions of how the future of our country (and the future of religion) is taking new configurations also in religious terms. In this sense, religion is not only religion, and it needs to be explored in social terms.

Chapter 10. Methodological appendix

“Finally, by studying transnational migration and diasporic religion we learn more we might have imagined. Transnational migrants, who use religious symbols to continually transport themselves back and forth, offer us some illuminating hints about where we are when we do our work” (Tweed, 2002; 272)

Methodologically the study draws on a qualitative research design, which includes in-depth interviews, ethnographic notes and a set of visual data.

In particular, this project has focused on ethnic churches established by catholic immigrants. In Milan, I drawn on data collected in two contexts, the first is attended by Latin American immigrants of various national origins (especially by Ecuadorians and Peruvians) and by a Filipino Community; practically, this site represents in Milan the most important religious-hub for migrants who have a catholic background. The second case is instead a significant point of reference for another Filipino community. Additionally, this work takes into consideration data collected within the Ukrainian and Salvadoran community, which, although numerically small compared to the previous two cases, nonetheless represent significant realities in the city. As regards the city of London, the thesis has focused on two ethnic churches. Below some preliminary information are provided:

MILAN		
Within the city there are almost 20 migrant churches		
Case studies, preliminary information		
<p>Church of S. Stefano, which is a Personal parish: i.e. its boundaries correspond to those of Milanese diocese (a “parish without territorial borders”). This church has become the main hub for catholic migrants in the city of Milan.</p>	<p>Two religious communities share the same church</p> <p>(1) Latin-American: mainly Peruvian and Ecuadoran, 1.000-1.300 faithful.</p>	<p>(1) Mass in Spanish on Sunday. Originally the community was born around 1995 in a small church near the city centre, then it grew more and more (given the regular migratory flows in the city) and moved to S. Stefano (around 2003) which before their arrival was practically closed.</p> <p>The chaplain is an Italian priest</p>
	<p>(2) Pilipino, 1000 faithful.</p>	<p>(2) Mass in Tagalog on Sunday. The community has moved in S. Stefano two years ago; it is one of the most important Pilipino community in the city (namely S. Tomaso community, established 30 years ago). Before it gathered in another small church of the city centre. Given the high number of faithful, the community has moved in S. Stefano (which is larger than the previous one)</p>

		There are various Pilipino chaplains
Church of S. Maria del Carmine , which is a Personal parish created for English-speaking believers	Formally the church is the home of three communities: Italian, English, Pilipino , de facto the Church over time has been transformed in a Pilipino Church.	500 Filipinos 100 Italians Mass in Tagalog and English (on Sunday and Thursday) The initial step of the English language parish goes back to as early as 1960. Over the years (end of '90) the English-speaking community has turned into a Filipino Church. There are three chaplains (Italian, Pilipino, Sri Lankan)
Others Churches involved: Salvadoran community , which meets in a space that formally is a sanctuary (dedicated to Cardinal Schuster). The Church is situated in the Eastern outskirts of the city. Ukrainian community , (Byzantine rite) at St. John in Lateran Church (The Church is shared with Italians, and situated on the east side of the city centre)	I was able to collect data on these two communities given that I worked as collaborator in the research project: "Religion and the Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Europe" sponsored by University of Notre Dame (USA) in collaboration with the University of Milan.	200 Salvadoran faithful. Officially, the community was born thirty years ago. After a period of stability, in recent years the community has started to grow again given the arrival of new Salvadorans. Mass in Spanish (on Sunday), the chaplain is Italian 200 Ukrainian faithful. The community was founded 10 years ago, and it moved to St. John in Lateran two years ago given the availability of a new place. Mass in Ukrainian (on Sunday), the chaplain is Ukrainian

LONDON
Within the city there are almost 50 communities (it is difficult to determine the exact number)
Case studies, preliminary information

<p>S. Anne’s Church, Vauxhall. Today it has become the head-office of Latin American Chaplaincy of London (in the city there are 6 Latin-American Churches)</p>	<p>Latin-American: Colombian, Ecuadoran, Bolivian, Peruvian Mass in Spanish (almost every day)</p>	<p>800-900 Latin-American 100 English There is a Spanish priest, and he is regularly helped by others priests of the same congregation The chaplaincy was officially erected in 2003, when a congregation (OAR, Orden de Agustinos Recoletos) took over the Church</p>
<p>S. Anne’s Church, Whitechapel Today it has become the head-office of the Brazilian Chaplaincy of London (in the city there are 6 Brazilian Churches)</p>	<p>Nationality: only Brazilian (few Portuguese) Mass in Portuguese (three times a week and Sunday)</p>	<p>600-700 Brazilian 50 English There is a Brazilian priest, and he is regularly helped by others Brazilian priests The chaplaincy was officially erected in 2004, and the Church was chosen as the official hub for Brazilians. Before the church was practically closed given that there were only 20/30 local believers (with Irish origin)</p>

Considerations on case studies

(1) *Milan.* To introduce the case studies it is necessary to give information about Italy, which has become a receiving country for immigrants quite recently, especially during the '90. Then, in the '00 family reunifications have become the main drivers of new immigration, and today about 5,3 million foreign immigrants reside legally in Italy (8.7% of the total population, ISTAT, 2019). Despite the emphasis given to recent arrivals of asylum seekers, the numbers have stabilized in the last four years. Immigrants are mainly European, mainly women, mainly coming from traditionally Christian countries. According to estimations, 53.6 % are Christians (about 2.800.000; 1.6 million Orthodox, 1.0 Catholics, 200,000 Protestants), 30.0 % are Muslims (about 1.5 million), 2.6 % are Buddhists (135.000), 2.0 % are Hindu (115.000), 1.5 % are migrants of other Christian faiths, including about 50 thousand (0.9%) Sikhs and 16 thousand (0.3%) Copts (see ISMU, January 2019).

It is important to underline that catholic immigrants -the focus of this PhD thesis- in Italy are mainly based in Lombardy (see ISMU, 2019), this being the first region of Italy in terms of immigrant Catholic presence (about 280.000), followed by Lazio (about 153.000). Milan -where I collected data- is the second city of Italy (1.378.689; ISTAT, 2019), with a population of 268,215 1 foreign residents (ISTAT, 2019). The main nations of origin are: Philippines (about 40.000), Egypt (35.000), China (27.000), Peru (19.000), Sri Lanka (16.000), Romania (14.000), Ecuador (13.000). According to these official statistics, Philippines, Peru, Ecuador are for example nations where Catholicism is the mainstream religion. In this sense, case studies taken into consideration give a

well balanced picture of how a significant part of migrants in the city may experience religion. As final consideration, it's important to remark a relevant event happened during the fieldwork. The new Bishop of Milanese diocese (Mario Delpini) has promoted a *Synod* on the issue of migrants, aimed to share a series of recommendations to better face the changing face of Milanese Church. In this sense, the thesis becomes even more significant; the study enters the heart of a relevant process that is taking shape within the parishes of Milanese diocese.

(2) London. According to national statistics (Census, 2011) Christianity in UK has remained the largest religion with 59.3% of people identifying themselves as Christian, 4.4% Muslim, 1,3 % Hindu and 25,7 % as “no religion”. As regards the city of London, according to the last census (2011) 48.4% of Londoners are Christian, 12.39% Muslim, 5% Hindu, 1.82% Jewish, 1.5% Sikh. (including 20.73% of “no religion” respondents). According to the reports published by the Benedict XVI centre (which provides additional statistics for Catholics in England and Wales; see Bullivant; 2016), Catholics represent the 8.3 per cent of the adult population in England and Wales. An estimated 3.8 million English and Welsh adults identify as Catholic. Meanwhile, there are an estimated 695,000 Catholics in Scotland. The total number of Catholics in Britain is therefore around 4,495,000. (There is always a certain amount of discrepancy between national Census of 2011 and a large number of other social surveys; as known, in general terms religion has always represented a challenge for quantitative studies, an issue discussed by Bullivant for the English case, 2016).

The super-diversity that characterises the city of London is well known, including its multiform religious landscape (Kershen, 2016). The city is the most diverse English area. The Census in the UK takes place every ten years, with the most recent one in 2011. According to this census, the population of London was 8,173,941; in particular, 5,175,671 people were born in UK and almost three million were instead born out of UK (see Kershen, 2016: 13). Recent estimates indicate a population of 8.896.000 of which 5.651.000 were born in UK and 3.236.000 were born out of UK; of these, about a third were born within European countries, while the other two-thirds were born outside EU (Office for National Statistics, latest data available, 24 May 2019).

The city of London is more religious compared to UK as a whole, also given the migration flows that have regularly renovated the religious landscape (Kershen, 2016: 21). For example, in the city the same Catholicism sees a major affiliation compared to the rest of England (almost twice than in the rest of England; Bullivant, 2016: 7) and in the course of time it was also repeatedly refreshed by the arrival of migrants (e.g. people coming from Ireland); in the last two decades flows from east Europe (in particular polish) have contributed to the growing of Catholicism within the city. Nevertheless an important contribute sees today the presence of Latin-Americans (who, as known, generally come from nations where Catholicism is the mainstream religion).

More generally, as pointed out by Cathy McIlwaine in a research report -the most comprehensive on London's Latin Americans, the first that has tried to estimate the size of such population starting from 2011 Census- “despite increasing flows of Latin Americans to London in recent years and their important contribution to the functioning of the city economically, socially and culturally, very little is known about this community” (McIlwaine et. al, 2011: 7). Latin-Americans represent indeed one of London's newest and fastest growing migrant groups in the city (McIlwaine, 2016). According to the latest statistics, there were around 250,000 Latin Americans in the UK in 2013, of which around 145,000 were based in London (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016: 8), representing the second fastest growing non-EU migrant population in the city. The research report elaborated by McIlwaine et. al (2011) shows how the largest Latin-American groups in the city are Colombians, Brazilians, Ecuadorians, Bolivians and Peruvians. In this sense, this study examines the most recent process of ethnic pluralisation within the English Catholic Church (Providing also evidences on the newest population of migrants within the city).

Sections on Techniques

The study draws on a qualitative research design, which includes 75 in-depth interviews both with clergy and lay members of ethnic churches, in Milan and in London. It also includes ethnographic notes collected while attending (sacred and secular) meetings and events sponsored by these realities. Finally, the thesis is presented with of a rich set of visual data. Thus the empirical study builds on a “triangulation” of qualitative methods, in this way results can be better corroborate and validate; for example, the religious narratives of migrants can be balanced by the observations of their practises in order to note also ambivalences and contradictions. The empirical research was carried out over 22 months (second and third year of PhD course), divided between Milan (12 months) and London (11 months: October 2018 – September 2019).

As regards the first method, in-depth interviews represent an important research-tool to explore the migrants’ religious experiences. Firstly, as pointed out by Morawska, such technique allows to elaborate “the *processual* nature of social phenomena, which requires analytical attention to the temporal dimension of human lives (...) migrations are questions of trajectory” (2018:114). Thanks to qualitative approach it’s possible to expand common concepts (Cardano, 2003) as for example the “religious involvement” in order to understand how migrants experience it. Interviews are indeed able to capture narratives, perceptions, values and voices embedded within migration trajectories, an element particularly important for this project given that it aims to examine how religion may become a significant component of the migration experience.

In particular I have conducted semi-structured interviews, leaving open the possibility to debate religious experiences as emerge from migrants’ storylines but maintaining at the same time the focus on key theoretical issues according to the thesis’ aims. In particular, the ministers of worship, the main referents as well as common believers were interviewed, for a total of 75 semi-structured and recorded interviews (75 interviews, 40 in Milan, 35 in London), to which several unregistered conversations that occurred during these observations have been added. (At the end of paragraph I provide a list of interviews).

In each context, a series of ethnographic-observations were carried out. Firstly, ethnography is a method that allows to understand the background of social processes (Gobo, 2008; Boccagni, Riccio; 2014), mostly those that are difficult to access (like a religious community). It gives the possibility to observe directly how human actions take shape. Secondly, ethnography involves also the possibility to collect conversations of actors “on stage” (Gobo, 2008) which may help in elaborating meanings of activities (both religious and secular) planned by migrants. The possibility to participate directly to ethnic churches has allowed me to contextualise migrants’ narratives (having in this way more “rooted” evidences), and thanks to ethnography I could observe how religion can be de facto transformed and developed by the people in action. Study religion scientifically represents indeed an empirical challenge (Spickard, Landres, McGuire; 2002) it requires attention and reflectivity in order to elaborate how values and beliefs become reality.

I have also collected data about the history of the churches, the structuring of worship activities and any other parallel activities (both ordinary and extraordinary). I have mapped the internal organization chart (e.g. the responsible of specific activities and functions, the number and the aims of any sub-groups), the possible relationships and collaborations with other institutions and organizations on the territory (both religious and non). I have analysed the prevalent socio-demographic profile and number of believers, the main needs and reasons leading them to discover, choose and attend the Church. Finally, I have carried out repeated conversations with relevant experts from the local Catholic panorama which have been very important to contextualise the data collected in a wider framework. In addition, during the fieldwork I have also collected a reach series of visual data in order to corroborate and facilitate the fruition of my work.

Finally, this research was also an intimate experience; a chance like this, a PhD thesis, happens only once in a lifetime. It has been a journey within a journey for me. Firstly the fieldwork in London

was a beautiful challenge. Secondly, I have attended churches for three years, every Saturday and Sunday of each week. I have continuously experienced religion with my eyes and mostly with my soul.

Final notes

I was able to collect data also thanks to a precious grant. Each year the “*Fondazione Roberto Franceschi Onlus*” (an Italian foundation based in the city of Milan) establishes a research funding programme named “Roberto Franceschi” aimed at current PhD students in the Italian region of Lombardy. In 2018, after having submitted my proposal (i.e. the PhD project) to the scientific commission, I won a grant. Moreover, it has been sponsored also by *Fondazione Isacchi Samaja Onlus* given the interest in my study. In particular, both foundations have rewarded me for the idea to collect data on the nexus between migration, religion and integration, including the suggestion to study the *informal welfare* sponsored by immigrants.

The list of interviews:

Religious leaders in Milan

Milan	
Name	Role
Father Alberto V.	(Italian) Priest of Latin-American Church, S. Stefano Milan, also head of the pastoral care of immigrants in Milan
Father Osial	(Filipino) Chaplain of various Filipino communities dislocated in the city of Milan
Father Alessandro	(Italian) Chaplain of various Filipino communities and responsible of pastoral care of Migrants
Father Antonio G.	(Italian) Responsible of pastoral care of Migrants, and chaplain of the Albanian Community in Milan
Father Giancarlo Q.	(Italian) Former Head of pastoral care of immigrants in Milan
Father Renè M.	(Italian) Priest of S.M. Carmine, chaplain of the Filipino community
Father Prinky	(Sri Lankan) Priest of S. M. Carmine, chaplain of the Filipino community

Father Igor. K.	(Ukrainian) Chaplain of Ukrainian community in Milan
Dr. Simona Beretta	(Italian) Secretary of pastoral care of Migrants in Milan.
Dr. Valentina Soncini	(Italian) Former President of the Catholic Association in Milan. (member of the Synod)
Pedro D. Iorio	(Italian) Head of Caritas reception service to migrants in Milan (member of the Synod)
Father Gianni Zappa	(Italian) Parish Priest in the city centre, close to various migrant Churches
Monsignor Luca Bressan	(Italian) Episcopal Vicar, Responsible social and cultural activities in the Diocese of Milan
Giorgio del Zanna	(Italian) Chairman of the Community of Saint Egidio in Milan
D. Moran	(Salvadoran) Leader and founder of Salvadoran community

Religious Leaders in London

London	
Name	Role
Father Paulo B.	(Brazilian) Priest of Brazilian Church, London, S. Anne (official Chaplain London's Brazilian Communities)
Father Carlos	(Spanish) Priest of S. Anne, London, Latin-American Church, Vauxhall
Father Juan	Mexican priest, S. Anne, Vauxhall London, Latin-American Church.
Father Andrew	Head of OAR congregation based in S. Anne Church, London
Father Thomas	(English) OAR congregation based in S. Anne Church, London

Father Francesco B.	(Italian) Head of Scalabrinian congregation in London
Cecilia Taylor C.	Senior Policy Adviser Office for Migration Policy International Affairs Department Catholic Trust for England and Wales
Marie B.	(English) Justice and Peace Commission, Archdiocese of Southwark
Joana D.	(English) Justice and Peace Commission, Archdiocese of Southwark

Interviews in Milan

Name/Pseudonym	Church/role
Michelle	Secretary and member of the Pilipino Church, S.M. Carmine, Milan
Rosalie	Pilipino Church, S.M Carmine, Milan (catechist and responsible of community)
Justin	Pilipino Church, S. M. Carmine, Milan
Annabelle	Pilipino Church, S. M. Carmine, Milan
Lota	Responsible of Filipino Church, S. Stefano, Milan (president of S. Tomaso community)
Aris	Filipino Church, S. Stefano, Milan
Ceferino J.	Filipino Church, S. Stefano, Milan
Richard	Filipino Church, S. Stefano, Milan
Kristine	Filipino Church, S. Stefano, Milan
Rosibel	Salvadoran Community
Diana	Salvadoran Community
Melanie	Salvadoran Community

Maria P.	Ukrainian Church
Isabel	Secretary S. Stefano, Latin American Church, Milan
Carlos	Peruvian, S. Stefano Milan, Latin-American Church
Marlene	Peruvian, S. Stefano Milan, Latin-American Church
Jeanine	Ecuadorian, S. Stefano Milan, Latin-American Church
Carmen	Responsible of Latin-American Church, S. Stefano Milan
Emilia	Peruvian, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin-American Church
Rosa	Ecuadorian, member of a prayer group, S. Stefano Milan, Latin American Church
Jorge	Ecuadorian Believer, member of a prayer group, S. Stefano Milan, Latin-American Church
Hernan	Peruvian, member of a prayer group, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin-American Church
Viviano	Ecuadorian, member of a Charismatic group, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin-American Church
Raquel	Ecuadorian, Member of a prayer group, Latin American Church, Milan
Enrique	Peruvian, S. Stefano Milan, Latin-American Church
Elena	Peruvian, S. Stefano, Milan, Latin-American Church
Irene	Ecuadorian, member of a prayer group, S. Stefano Milan, Latin American believer

Interviews in London

Name Pseudonym	Church/ role
Patricia	St. Anne London, Brazilian Church
Antonio	St. Anne, London, Brazilian Church
Mariana	St. Anne London, Brazilian Church
Tania	St. Anne London, Brazilian Church
Maria	Secretary of Brazilian Church in London
Telma	Secretary of Brazilian Church in London
Natalia	Member of a prayer group, S. Anne, London, Brazilian Church

Ana	Member of a Charismatic group, S. Anne, Brazilian Church London
Gabriela	Responsible and member of family-group, Brazilian Church London
Rafacla	St. Anne London, Brazilian Church (volunteer)
Veronica	Member of a Charismatic group, S. Anne, Brazilian Church London
Marcos	St. Anne London, Brazilian Church
Yolanda	Colombian, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London (internal leader)
Alejandro	Colombian, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London
Natalia	Colombian Believer, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London
Lucia	Colombian, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London (responsible of a prayer group)
Katherine	Colombian, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London (member of a prayer group)
Mariutxy	Colombian, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London (internal leader, responsible of catechism)
Anne	Ecuadorian, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London (leader of a prayer group)
Katalinaa	Ecuadorian Believer, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London
Diana	Colombian, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London member of a prayer group
Diego	Colombian, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London
Maribel	Bolivian, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London

Eugenia	Bolivian, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London
Estefany	Bolivian, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London
Carlos	Bolivian, Latin-American Church, St. Anne, Vauxhall, London (responsible of music group)

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