

On the Role of Religion in the Process of Adaptation of (Forced) Migrants

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As illustrated in Chapter 1, our study has moved from the hypothesis that religiosity, in both its individual and collective expressions, can represent a source of support and of personal and family wellbeing; more specifically, it can help life's and integration's "career" of (forced) migrants, particularly of the migrants whose biographies have been strongly marked by religious belongings and beliefs.

Other chapters of this book focus the attention on the role of religion and spirituality as far as the migrants' psychological wellbeing is concerned and, particularly, their influence on the primary socialization of children belonging to (forced) migrant families, and their potential in the process of identity's construction (Chapters 19 and 20). In this chapter, we will investigate their role in the first phases of (forced) migrants' adaptation process, as well their acknowledgment by the different actors of the reception system. Finally, in the concluding part of the chapter, we will investigate the role of religious agency in the process of refugees' public space making.

1 Religion as a "Balm for the Soul"

In the previous chapter, we have already discussed the manner in which the commissions in charge with the evaluation of asylum demands succeed (or do not succeed) in intercepting the role of asylum seekers' religious affiliations. From the applicant's point of view, as suggested by this interviewee in a very stumbling talk, the spiritual dimension can also represent a crucial support in facing such a stressing setting:

Before I took my interview in the commission I went there (*to the Buddhist temple*), because I do not understand how it works, but fear for them not to give a ... and therefore fear. So I went there, I asked: "Please help me for the ... for the interview, because I need a force". Because when they ask all the history, how to throw up all your problems (I have) inside, who's left behind, you do not want to see, like a book, when you open all

the problems, so I do not want to look at all this, but that is a time you open that all problems, problems that my father, my mother, every problem, because this is all important for them to understand. So, I need an energy to do that ... go with this problem. So I asked for Drawma, ask Tara for that to become strong. (Man – Tibet – Buddhist)

He is echoed by other interviewees who affirm that, by relying on their God, it is possible to overcome any concern about the outcome of the asylum application –or of the appeal, in the case of the second interviewee, when the first application was not successful–. Significantly, the latter interviewee insists on his intention to relieve the commissioners of the responsibility for not accepting his demand, by repeating, almost like a mantra, that he does not blame them; almost as if he wanted to recode a procedural event through a religious *lexicon*.

No, I'm not worried (*about the interview with the Commission*), I'm waiting for that day to come. I speak to the Father ... I feel comfortable because He will give me what I want. I have faith. (Man – Nigeria – Christ Church)

Interviewer: Are you worried about the appeal? Because it is next week...

I'm not worried, so I believe in God because ... I'm not worried ... I told you, God is the one that has ultimate power, so I believe in God,

I ... I don't ... they gave me a negative answer. I think maybe ... they want to go to my ... I didn't blame them for the negative that they gave me. I don't blame anybody, for the negative. They know the best.

Interviewer: But maybe they couldn't understand very well your story?

Yes. They couldn't understand it, they want the lawyer, maybe they want the lawyer to come, and read the story for them, but I have already told them the truth, and I stand in this that I told them, this that I told you now is where I stand, I don't have anything else to add to it. Tomorrow I stand in this story, it's not changing, it is what I told you, it is what I told them. Maybe the negative is they want ... the story, they want to understand it well. So, I didn't blame them. (Man – Nigeria – Christian Pentecostal Church)

Specularly, in a very fatalistic way, this interviewee considers the denial of his application as coherent with God's will. As we will illustrate later, fatalism is a common character of the migration phenomenon, particularly when the choice to migrate appears to be "irrational" and decidedly unsecure. In this specific case, in order to understand the respondent's paradoxical stance, it is useful to remember how migration is not an easy or cheap choice, but a strong

investment involving many family members and which often implies getting into debt. The fact of attributing the last word to an ultra-terrestrial identity can be a psychological stratagem to make such a big failure more tolerable. Curiously, he does not refer to his personal situation or to the elements of his story on which his asylum demand was based. On the contrary, he simply concludes by affirming that it was not the time that God wanted him to get the permit: when God wants it, he will obtain the documents.

I think, I think it's not the time that God wants me to get ... that they get me the permit. I think ... because Bible makes me understand that man proposes, God disposes. Everything in life gives glory to God, because I can propose, but God disposes, so I believe that God has not disposed my proposition, this is why they didn't give me the documents. But if the time comes that God wants me to have the documents, I will have it.
(Man – Nigeria – Catholic Christian)

Lastly, this Pakistani interviewee observes that the same God “who granted him permission to stay” will continue to assist him, helping him to solve the multiple problems with which he has to live. In this case, too, it is curious to note the affirmation according to which it is God who gave him the permit ... a five-year permit!

I don't care, I have a lot of proofs for my problems, I show, and he knows I have in original, believe me, plus I am sick, but I'm a gentle person, I don't lie too much, I say truth everything, and I thank God he believes me, he gives me permission, he gave me five years, this for me is ... I'm lucky he believes me. (Man – Pakistan – Muslim)

In the face of the exponential growth of suffering, and of unjust suffering, which leads to the abandonment of one's own land, two questions emerge, which are anything but academic: why the suffering of migrating and its dramatic unfolding? What does God want and what does He do for that confession for which I find myself in a situation of extreme tribulation? From the data offered by the interviews, a sort of atheistic protest does not emerge as a result of this double query. The problematization of God and of his actions and, therefore, an abandonment of the related religious practices, does not seem to be a foregone answer. Rather, a feeling and an interpretation of this unjust suffering emerge, according to the imprint of a religious resignation with a fatalistic character.

On the one hand, one is even willing to ascribe to God the sufferance experienced, not because of His arbitrary wickedness, but because of his providential plan which, in view of a correct progression of personal and collective history, devises painful events for me and for others, in order to fix human wickedness and thus correcting the disorder produced by men.

On the other hand, religious feelings and religious practices seem to be based on a widespread understanding, transversal to the various confessions, of the omnipotence of God. The latter is immediately identified in an "absolute power" that ends up lightening human freedom and its "powers". The "direct" action of God in the events of history is so accredited that, correspondingly, the action of the man is discredited: for better or for worse. Personal and collective history appears to be subjugated by the "almighty" God who dominates the world and manages its events in a fatalistic way. The deity acts as an ominously capricious omnipotence, available for a man-made relationship of manipulation. The "divine" appears to be tremendous in its inscrutable omnipotence and fascinating in its seductive immediacy. One's own freedom and the freedom of others are in some way absolved from their very responsibilities and from their right/duty to make history. What happens to me and to everyone is immediately related to the only cause, God; what happens is supinely accepted, as it is what He wants, without any margins for the affirmation of one's own commitment or of others'. In this perspective, the fatalistic contraction of the religious bond makes it possible to think of the divine as being tamed at the price of some propitiatory sacrifices and some prayers. Without saying that the religious man, under the aegis of this religious figure, feels authorized to consistently represent God through the form of despotism and prevarication over others.

A different approach is the one followed by this interviewee. Faced with the failure of the project to obtain a status of protection, he declares that the Church is the only place where one can feel free. In his testimony, the status of "slave" –due to the lack of documents– is opposed to that of a free man who can experience the dignity of every human being.

(...) when I arrived to Milan, in the camp of the Red Cross, I met with some Nigerians who are Christians, so the very first day I started going to church.

Interviewer: And what was your feeling?

I was feeling happy. I was really happy, because church is the only place I go that I feel happy.

Interviewer: Also in Nigeria before?

Yes.

Interviewer: Is it different to go to church here in Italy and in Nigeria?

No it is not different.

Interviewer: It is the same?

It is the same. The only difference here is that we are slaves.

Interviewer: Why?

We are slaves.

Interviewer: What does it mean?

To be slaves?

Interviewer: Yes. We know what it means, but why do you feel a slave here?

To my understanding, when you are in Europe and you do not have documents, you are not privileged in most things in life. So automatically you are slave, when you are not privileged in most things in life. Here we are slaves.

Interviewer: And do you feel this also in church?

No, this is what I'm saying. That the church is the only place where I feel happy because in church I feel I am free with God. I'm free even though I'm a slave, but I'm not a slave beside of God. (Men – Nigeria – Catholic Christian)

Trying to put in a theological perspective these paradoxical moods, we can observe, following the analysis of this Catholic priest, that it is the very experience of migrating that raises the awareness of human vulnerability. Beyond the most dramatic situations –such as those involving forced migrants– the experience of migrating becomes a sort of paradigm of the “migration” which every human being is expected to follow to get to the “promised land”. The fact of turning to God during the most dramatic phases of one’s own life is not only coherent with the human condition *tout court*, but also with the most authentic faith experience.

I believe that when a man is put in a condition of particular fragility, he magically rediscovers those values that perhaps are a bit dormant and therefore in some way are the great pillars of our lives. A little like health: as long as one is healthy, he does not notice the gift he has. When he is ill, he realizes that without health it is a mess and therefore he must try to return to health. And so is the theme of faith: many times the seafarers, people who do not attend the church at home, do not practice, but when he climbs a priest on board that for four months they do not go to a

church, they hear someone helping them pray etc. the priest celebrates Mass and they all go because it is an important moment, because it is a way to be with the Lord, to be together with others, each one in the name of his own faith. So I think the fragility of distance from home, the uncertainty of the future and so on. In some way, it makes us particularly sensitive to what is precisely the spiritual and religious dimension. When we are, I have experienced in my sailing twice the sea to force g... And you really think those are your last moments of life, pray. One says: "It's too easy!" No, it is right, the Lord when you need it, as a child thinks of his father and his mother when he needs them, even if only of a caress and therefore, those who are far away are particularly attached to their faith, their own traditions. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

In psychological terms, this kind of narrative proves the supporting function played by religion and spirituality along the entire migration route. However, once put in a religious perspective, the search for a peaceful place where to live can easily be superimposed by the search for inner peace. And the stormy sea to cross is not only the one separating Africa from Europe, but also the one that is stirred up in the depths of strongly worn-out people.

Certainly, also a road to reach an inner peace, because we say that precisely they are thirsty for peace. Not only to find a place of peace, but also to find pacification, there is a more peaceful sense of interior, because they come, however, beyond the journey, even from situations of instability. And so ... they are tormented a little bit inwardly. So I think also in the relationship with God, but I think for myself, even just to find some peace in my heart, even moments of silence. For them, a friend of mine, a Nigerian, she tells me that when she asked her what she likes to do in her spare time, she told me: "I love to have spaces of silence to read the Gospel", and she explained why she says: "I feel a lot like a sea moved inside and in those moments of silence in which I read, I try to listen to what the Lord wants to tell me, I calm down". (Woman – FBOs operator – Christian Catholic)

Given these premises, it is not surprising if every step of the migration journey can be "oxygenated" by the spiritual dimension, becoming an empowering factor. This point is even more interesting if we consider that, in many sending countries, religious affiliations (in the case of minority groups' members) and religious obligations (in the case of majority groups' members) often act as "disempowering" factors, as we have illustrated in the previous chapter.

Let us consider some emblematic examples.

In this moving account of a former seminarian, spiritual assistance is presented as what gives refreshment –where “it was very hot”– and gives hope when, in the darkest moments, one runs the risk of losing his/her strength. The story reported here suggests that, through the pastoral action, religion can help to insert a project’s component and a hope for the future –like preparing children for first communion– into the web of those existences suspended in a sort of limbo, such as the existences of people interned in refugee camps.

Then they helped us get help or to a UNHCR hospital in a small town called Shire. Here my friend healed and we went to a refugee camp where we stayed for a year: to xxx, in the North of Ethiopia. There we began to serve the Catholics, because there were no pastors and we were seminarians close to the end of the studies, so we knew the liturgical service. In this way we have been able to help people without hope, because UNHCR’s help was not much. We built a small church in the field and we stayed for about a year. People needed hope so much: it was very hot, they lost their strength. It needed some form of encouragement. Doing service means making people communicate with God, then to empower them. In a short time, the church we had built was filled with believers, including some Orthodox. Some Orthodox deacons have taken an example from us and have begun to imitate our initiative. We got in touch with the Diocese in the Ethiopian capital from which they agreed to send us a priest twice a month for a Mass. We also had catechism classes, to prepare the children for the first communion. Then I went to the capital and I spoke with the Bishop, who came to visit the camp. (Man – Eritrea – Catholic Christian)

Evidence from the fieldwork provides many other interesting examples. As suggested by these testimonies, religion is a sort of “balm for the soul”, that is the certainty that Someone is taking care of you. It happens during the most perilous journeys, when one’s survival cannot be taken for granted, as in the emblematic case of migrants who have tried to reach Italy by boat:

(...) I believe that in the journey, I know of many stories in the boats, that while the boat was waiting for a safe harbor, whether they were Christians, Orthodox, or Catholics, whatever, they had Mary’s medals in their mouths and they prayed. I believe that in those dramatic moments, where you think you can lose your life, it is clear that this is a time when faith plays an important role. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

Interviewer: In what way do you think your faith has helped you?

Because I had this strong decision to overcome, cross the sea, and stay alive, because ... I said that I have this mission to stay alive, I should not die now, and this strong decision in my opinion has brought me here with all this. (Man – Cameroon – Buddhist)

But this also happens during the long periods spent in Libya, waiting to be able to leave for Europe. Let us observe how, in the first testimony reported here, the evangelical promise “where two or more are gathered in my name, I will be there” finds an echo in a story that seems to evoke the dramatic hours that announced the passion of Christ. In the second testimony, instead, the emphasis is on the invincibility of those who entrust themselves to God.

I pray, even the time I was in Libya, on Sunday we prayed, all of us, in the night we prayed, but we did not go outside the church, where do you go to church? They would come and kill you! (...).

We organized together at home, we pray to God. God is there, God is there, God is there, when he is one, he is there, in the middle of you, he is not afraid. If you are alone, you are not alone, God is with you, because you remember when you want to pray, you are alone, you are praying, you are worshipping God, praising God, when you start praying you see the Spirit of God, you can speak in trance, when the spirit of God comes, you also speak in trance, you will speak the language that you cannot understand, when you ... Your body will be shaking, you will know the power of God is like, I know ... when you are one, or two, or three, in your house, you pray to God, you are not alone, God is there, even if you are in the cave, pray to God, is there, because God is a spirit. (Man – Nigeria – Christian Pentecostal Church)

They are serving, they cannot kill me, I know the God that I'm serving, it's only God that moves my life, it is not them. The power is in me, the power of God is in me, it is better than the one that is in them. (Man – Nigeria – Christian now attending a Pentecostal Church)

As we have noted above, the emphasis on the omnipotent divine protection mostly generates resignation and fatalism; without saying that a certain sense of invincibility (the relationship with God as a guarantee against evil and death) should be easily dismantled by history, which tells of countless martyrs of every religious confession (and of countless deaths during the migration journey).

On the other hand, the first testimony highlights a constant of the religious dynamic, on which we have already called the attention: the intimate link between precariousness and faith. It is certainly improper to identify migrants with the poor *tout court*. However, the link between the precariousness experienced in the dramatic events –occurred during both the migration and the process of adaptation– and faith –in its most elementary gestures– surely emerges here. Every need relating to the fundamental experiences of living and of living together –especially when it is dramatically disregarded– is a gateway capable of nesting the movement of faith. It is true for the hungry, where the expected food is denied; it is true for the homeless, when there is nothing but the street or, at best, a precarious hospitality; it is true for those who do not have a job or a salary, both expected and absent or not worthy of the man; it is true for those who are alone, when family and social relationships are somehow made inaccessible.

Immediately after landing in the receiving country, as confirmed by the following testimony, God appears to be the only one who can understand those who speak in a different language, the “Italians’ *idioma*”, and the only one who offers his companionship. A sort of confirmation of the above-mentioned profound vein of religious experience in relation to the drama of solitude, so severely documented by the linguistic strangeness that precludes the relationship:

Where I live there are all refugees, you do not know anything, you do not even speak the Italian language and they do not speak the language of my country (...). So I found this place to go there some time, when there is a problem, feel bad, it is not a body, but you feel your heart hurting, missing family, country, friends ... even you do not find a person here you say that, all problems ... important just for God. So, I like going there. (Man – Tibet – Buddhist)

I came to an unknown country, but the Lord did not leave me, I had the company of the Lord. (Woman – China – Church of God Almighty)

God is “here” when the everyday life leaves a large gap to bridge, as far as the dreams that accompanied the decision to migrate are concerned...

(...) I get up at 4:30 in the morning and talk to God, like talking to a father. God is not in heaven. God is here and listens (...). My son tells me “Daddy I’m hungry”. I ask: “Do you believe in God?” If you talk to God, father, father, I need this, I came to Italy because I need you, I do not want to stay

here but this country supports me ... (Man – Venezuela – Protestant Evangelical Religious leader)

... and when something goes wrong, when difficulties or family problems arise, thus making the sense of nostalgia even more acute:

(...) certainly, just arrived, because however there is all the talk to elaborate the detachment, just as M. said before, to be in a very different context, the nostalgia of home then surely in that phase and then in a moment of personal weakness I believe. In a phase in fact maybe a distant relative dies, you cannot go to the funeral. Often it is clearly experienced as a tragic moment because many cannot come back for matters of documents, of money ... so surely when life gets harder or you lose your job, I think of all those situations in which you feel weaker and you need to be more supported by the religious community and by God. (Woman – FBOs operator – Christian Catholic)

This last testimony invites us to consider the value of a religious community of reference and belonging. Once the migrant has landed in the receiving country, the religious community with its place of worship represents the “promised land” for a lifeless identity: an environment that is favorable to the recognition of oneself, to exorcise the hell of anonymity, to experience freedom. Through the network of positive relationships and ritual celebrations, a newcomer can hear his/her name in the religious place; it is heard what is whispered by God, pronounced by his “sacred minister”, it is read on the lips of those who participate in the same cult. All this, in spite of the fact of being undocumented, which seems to decree slavery, of the dissolution of personal identity, of the impossibility of fulfilling one’s own responsibilities. While one feels enslaved by being in the hands of others, who do not know your name or cannot pronounce it, in the sacred space one can express his/her own documented identity and one’s freedom can be redeemed while being in God’s hands.

In front of the dramatic persistence of many needs, the sense of religious community is associated with the sense of God. Numerous testimonies agree on expressing this connection: the intimate union with God –in listening to his speech, in the prayers said to ask for something or give thanks– is intertwined with some community figures who favor that union to the social level that is also involved in what the faithful seeks – whether it is a home in which to live, a city to move to, to work and go shopping in, or a school where children can study. *A fortiori*, this link proving the social depth of the religious phenomenon

is noteworthy in the testimony of migrants who mostly come from cultural contexts in which religion has not known the privatistic depreciation consumed in the West. Contrary to the individualistic involution of the religious phenomenon in Western countries (Chapter 3), in the faith experience of migrants, their “staying in God”, in fact, is generally bound by their “being in the community”.

It is (*the need to go to the church*) because I have to go and thank God for his protection. (Man – Nigeria – Catholic Christian)

I feel, this is my prayer, this is, I feel better, when I pray then I feel better, pray, reading the Koran, this is my belief, this is my belief, so like you, you go to church, you read the Bible, then you feel a little better. (Man – Pakistan – Muslim)

Finally, as efficaciously synthesized by this young Eritrean, on the one hand, religion supports every step of the migratory journey, and permits to “cross the border”; on the other, the migratory journey, with its burden of human suffering, increases migrants’ personal faith and makes them much more inclined to religious practices. In his moving testimony, a clear religious sentiment emerges:

Religion is an important help for us to make this path. Religion is an important help for us to take this dangerous road. Every person experiences difficult stories when they cross the border. Someone remains killed. Some see people dying in front of them. It is because you believe in God that you decide to face such dangerous situations to come to Europe. Believing in God helps to make this decision. Relatives abroad send money that helps to escape, but it is not thanks to the money that you get here. It comes thanks to God. For example, my cousin was not very interested in religion when he was in Eritrea, but crossing the border he saw things so hard that when he saved he wanted to thank God and began to pray. He crossed Sudan, the Sahara, the Mediterranean, and now he is in Germany. Now he thanks God, he has become a very believing Christian. Many people learn a lot along the way: trust in God and have good relations with Him. When they come here they keep their faith, but in Europe they do not have pastors. (Man – Eritrea – Catholic Christian)

In this light, it is also possible to understand the special rank of the sacred minister of the migrant community. In a community recognized as a safe place for storing the few personal belongings in which one’s identity and one’s

memory can still be found, the figure of the religious leader functions as a safe place for one's conscience, when it feels the need to be blessed and reassured. That safe place is at its most vital when the migrant comes from a land and a tradition where a strong sense of the divine entails a deep respect for the religious authority. Staying as close as possible to the minister is a source of joy and satisfaction, as he works in order to let the life of the faithful be blessed by God – which feels even better when the sound of such blessing is in his/her mother tongue. Because of his sacred nature, the minister of the community acts as a mediator between “me” and God's words and actions. He is seen as the most precious safe place for one's troubled conscience, when it is afflicted by everything that it still does not have; he represents God's holiness, God's hospitality and generous blessing.

However, according to a shared experience, as acutely observed in the interview reported below, the prospect that religiosity becomes increasingly tenuous, if only at the level of daily practices, is an epilogue far from impossible. Thus, the link between need and faith is reaffirmed once again, and it is fueled by the troubled events of migration. The dramatic situation of privation concerns the most ordinary forms in which life unfolds and is expressed in that repetition of the word “without”: without family, without work, without language, without money. Nevertheless, when “without” becomes “with”, the experience of faith predictably suffers an attenuation, at least as far as daily gestures are concerned.

From the interviews that dwell on the “need/faith” connection, the information that we have just highlighted transpires. And also, at least in perspective, a paradox that makes us reflect in a number of ways. As mentioned in the testimony reported in Chapter 10 (“many pastors and religious leaders who are more interested in preaching prosperity than salvation”), the preaching that “strategically” equates salvation in terms of “prosperity” is increasingly widespread in the countries of origin of migrants. However, this kind of preaching, as well as the kind of “theology” that innervates it, now echoes in Italy too. Certainly, it is not only economic prosperity to be in play; more deeply, what is at stake is the general well-being, at the level of psychological harmony, of a peaceful recomposition of the relational network, especially as far as family and marital life is concerned, and of financial success. A sort of paradox can be glimpsed when a religious proposal founded on the “myth” of prosperity promises the achievement, through religious performances, of a well-being that, according to the most notable sacred experiences and texts, should restrict even more “the eye of the needle!”

In this respect, this testimony introduces an argument that will be developed in the final part of the chapter, where we will analyze the manner in which the migrants challenge “our” faith.

(...) then I had moments, ups and downs, and sure that when I arrived it was a very difficult time for me, I found myself alone in a rented house in Milan, without family, without work, without language, without money, without anything and I had moments that I was very down but I have to say, those moments that made me read the Gospel every day, much much better than now ... other sides ... now I'm taken by a thousand other things ... enter the daily life of the West that is not really healthy, it gives you and takes you ... (Woman – Iraq – Chaldean Catholic Christian)

2 Religious Assistance in the Reception Phase

Another important aspect analyzed during the fieldwork is the “space” that can/must be given to the religious rights and the spiritual needs of asylum seekers and refugees hosted within the reception institutional system. In general terms, all the key informants have agreed on the opportunity to include both of them in daily operations, thus confirming the peculiarity of the “Italian version” of the European secularized society (Chapter 9). As a matter of fact, Italian application of secularism is very distant from the French “*laïcité*”, and implies the need to recognize and protect individual religious belongings. Coherently, none of our key informants has raised doubts about the fact that the religious and spiritual dimensions should also be recognized in the institutional system. Furthermore, almost all of them have confirmed how important it is to involve spiritual leaders and religious organizations in the reception process, according to a holistic approach, currently judged to be the best one in order to favor both the overcoming of the displacement trauma and the positive integration in the new society. As suggested by this operator, spirituality can also have a “therapeutic” impact, when it comes to dealing with traumatized people:

(...) when we talk about a complex case, we take into consideration religious belief or belonging. We would like the involvement of the ministers of worship. For a person who is very ill and has that identity structure, it may be easier to engage with the minister of worship than the therapist. (Man – Operator of the reception system)

At the same time, the solutions adopted are always different, reflecting the heterogeneity of approaches that distinguish the Italian reception system, largely entrusted with the initiative of the actors of the civil society. What is still

lacking is the formal acknowledgement of the role of the religious leaders within the reception path, besides the indications provided by the legislation in force (Chapter 9, §4). As a consequence, we can record an ample variety of “creative” solutions, together with the tendency to “confuse” spiritual assistance with psychological support or other kinds of empowering interventions, as we will analyze later.

On the other hand, there are many problematic issues and knots that need to be undone. Just to cite some examples, some key issues amply discussed during the focus group discussions are represented by:

- The opportunity to create rooms specifically for prayer inside the reception centers (rather than directing guests to worship in other places present in the local community);
- The preference for confessional worships, rather than for interreligious ones;
- The criteria for the selection of the spiritual leaders authorized to exercise their functions within the reception centers, and how to manage possible risks of circumvention and radicalization;
- The opportunity to promote ecumenical and interreligious meetings and initiatives, also as a way to raise the awareness towards religious pluralism;
- The methods for managing religious conflicts and interpersonal skirmishes due to the conflicting context of the origin countries, while avoiding their reification in the destination ones.

Overall, the issue regarding the “space” of religion within the reception system provides a brilliant example of a more general issue, concerning the need “to determine the boundaries of religion, religious jurisdiction(s), individual autonomy and equality” (Menski, Topidi, 2016: 8), which becomes even more challenging when vulnerable people are involved. On the basis of the study’s evidence, the impression is that these issues are surely emerging, but still need to be addressed properly, as they were dealt with in different ways, depending on the sensitivity of the center’s operators and managers, as well as on the characteristics of the hosted population. Curiously, the reception centers entrusted with the management of religious (Christian)-inspired organizations are not necessarily those that pay the greatest attention to the provision of religious services. In particular, the choice of some Catholic organizations not to “exhibit” any religious symbol in the rooms used for the reception of asylum seekers, in the name of a universalistic principle and out of respect for non-Christian guests, has been highly debated. On the other hand, some “lay” managers (including the services managed directly by local public bodies) have included religious services among the facilities offered to their guests.

On their part, as we have already observed (Chapter 10), various religious organizations have developed a particular sensitiveness towards migrants and refugees. Here, again, we can note an extraordinary convergence of the positions of the religious leaders of different traditions. Their shared approach is inspired by the following points:

- a) the spiritual one is an innate dimension in human nature, shared by people of every religion and also by those who declare to be agnostic;
- b) a welcoming system will not be as such if it does not recognize this dimension and is not prepared to respond to spiritual needs as well as to other primary needs;
- c) recognizing and taking care of this dimension is fundamental not only because it responds to the need, expressed or latent, of every person, but also because the satisfaction of this need makes the process of integration less difficult and favors peaceful coexistence (on this point see also Chapter 15).

Then rightly we are all pressed by the emergency, by the immediacy of primary needs, but then always missing a piece, people who arrive in difficult situations are first of all also integral people, here, complete people, who also have a religious dimension, sacral, spiritual, which is the one that can actually help. (Man – Pastoral operator – Muslim)

(...) spiritual dimension ... all men and women of the world have it regardless of the faith they profess, regardless of religion. The spiritual dimension is that which someone calls only psychological, but in the inherent nature of each one. And this I believe is part of this duty that we have to welcome these people as people ... that is, welcoming a person does not mean welcoming a body, it means welcoming a story, a sensitivity, and certainly, in some way, this ... when we talk about projects, expectations, hopes, after all we are talking about the spiritual world. So the attention to this means I do not do the practices, I'll give you a job, I'll give you ... it's ... it is walking near these people, entering for a moment with their life in their lives here.

(...) What does this mean? Whatever necessity one has, it can be a sock rather than a pair of shoes, but it can instead be an outburst or a request, a ... even simply a friendly shoulder on which to cry or with which to laugh. Therefore, our operators are called to, I say to "mark a man", these people. These people must really feel ... because then everything starts from there, no? Any speech starts from there. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

(...) because the care of the spiritual dimension in my opinion leads me out of the person, can bring out from the person the best, the highest, the deepest, the most authentic there can be and therefore can be for this reason a great integration factor: because it improves, it makes us better say that the possibility of living, of expressing our faith, makes us better. So I think it's a great factor of integration. (Woman – FBOs operator – Catholic Christian)

At the same time, our key informants have insisted on the sensitivity of the topic under discussion. It has emerged, in particular, that the respect for the religious rights of both majority and minority groups is not sufficient to solve the challenges of interreligious coexistence. In fact, the tortuous existential and migratory paths have left open wounds that often find in the “religious” issue the reason to flare up. The circumstance of having left behind authoritarian regimes, or even autocratic ones, has indelibly marked the relationship with religiosity and, in particular, with the faithful of other religions. The concept of religious pluralism, which we are inclined to consider as obvious –beyond the resistance that is observed in translating it into the daily practice of the same European societies– is anything but obvious for those coming from confessional States. According to some of the experts involved, the first reception, if not because it often implies the need to cohabit with asylum seekers of other religions, is therefore the right phase during which to set the education to religious pluralism. Regardless of the reasons that led them to emigrate, and of the role that religion played in that decision, it is precisely the context of the incoming countries that shows the relevance of this type of action, also as an antidote to the problems that could arise in the future. As a matter of fact, European receiving societies are today more and more called to manage the expectations of minority groups –avoiding that their requests instrumentally turn into an anti-immigration argument– while also laying the foundations of a cohesive society.

As a matter of fact, it is now widely known that the early stages of reception are made up of crucial moments in which to recover an emotional balance and a working capacity, as well as to lay the foundations of the path of integration. Just as in the context of a holistic approach to integration, there are many dimensions of recovery and of personal well-being that need to be considered. At the same time, some key informants have underlined how the foundations for integration in a secular society based on respect for religious pluralism must also be laid from the beginning of the reception path. It is significant to observe that this very concept was expressed by a Catholic priest, a Muslim Imam, and an expert on migration law. It might seem paradoxical, but precisely

those who suffered “because of” religion are not said to be tolerant towards other religions.

(...) they are very solid people precisely in their spirituality on the one hand and people who are struggling, however, to say how to live that mutual respect precisely because they have not been respected. As a person who has been raped in his own corporeity and then becomes particularly suspicious and then I would say that the two ... when easily either a persecuted Christian or the persecuted Muslim must speak of those who persecuted them for pseudo reasons of faith do not have the condescension and tolerance that we have that in some way we have never been offended by the different parties. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

People who require asylum and the majority of migrants, however, are not coming to Europe for that reason. But anyway they will need a reframing of what religion is, what religious pluralism is, how to integrate into a secularized society ... because they do not know it, whatever religion they may have. We need more an educational scenario than an existential scenario. The motivation to escape is not predominantly that, but this does not mean that civil society and institutions must do not take care of religious acceptance. (Man – Religious leader – Muslim)

The essential thing is to educate to diversity, to respect, because for many who come from confessional contexts, or with a state religion, it may seem shocking, precisely, but we must bring the reasoning on the opportunity. It becomes a vision of life, the possibility, finally, of conceiving a free public space, free from constraints and free from the impossibility of parrying. (Man – Expert)

Finally, as acutely suggested by this interviewee, the simple existence of a free and pluralistic society is not a sufficient condition to achieve a peaceful coexistence. Freedom is a right, but it is also a “duty” and a responsibility, the awareness of which is not automatically acquired once landed in a free and democratic society:

(...) here they have freedom but do not understand what it is ... because freedom is not ... sorry I give an example: “Freedom is not I do that fuck I want”. It is not true, this is not freedom ... that is, I interpreted it in the first few months, when I went out at 9 pm in Corso Sempione to walk

alone, without being afraid ... now there is the fear, however, to say, I have never been able to do this in my country, this is freedom, freedom that you put on what you want, but not that you have to go naked because you say "I am free" ... respecting the dignity, the place ... to say what you want, to express yourself as you want ... this is freedom, it is not as it is understood by many ... (Woman – Iraq – Chaldean Catholic Christian)

On the other hand, as we will analyze in the following paragraph, it is equally significant to observe how education to religious pluralism is a need that also concerns the host society:

(...) we are Catholics, but we are Catholics of Eastern rite, so we have a different tradition and also a different calendar, our liturgical calendar, so we are a minority ... even among the minorities of other ethnic groups, other Catholic migrants, but that they are of Latin rite, therefore easily inserted, integrable into the Church, also in its liturgical calendar and all. Instead we have a completely different tradition, so we are seen, often then people confuse, for the simple fact that we have another rite, we are confused with the Orthodox, instead we are not Orthodox, we are Catholics, and even there is ... in the calendar the fact that we celebrate Christmas on a different date, Easter on another different date, sometimes creates conflicts with some parish priests, because they do not understand why we do not celebrate Christmas or Easter with them. It is necessary to explain ... some refuse to accept it, but ... there are a number of difficulties, even as minorities in the minorities, which we must face. (Man – Religious Leader – Catholic Christian of Eritrean rite)

3 How (Forced) Migrants Challenge Host Society's Churches

As we will analyze in Chapter 16, through the account of a paradigmatic initiative launched by the Archdioceses of Milan, the issue of religious pluralism particularly challenges the Italian Catholic Church, since it has until recently benefited from a situation of undisputed hegemony within the Italian religion landscape. Despite the historical presence of various religious minorities (Chapter 9), Italian public institutions and private organizations had often operated in an environment reflecting a sort of "invisibility" of religion, basing on the presumption that Italy was a mono-religious country, and this situation also influenced the attitude of many religious leaders and single believers. However, in the last decades, as a consequence of immigration, religious minorities

have grown significantly: the issue of interreligious co-existence, traditionally underexplored, has emerged, putting the country into a better position for gaining awareness of the unfolding processes by which it is increasingly becoming a multi-faith society. Besides the challenges represented by the presence of minority religions (particularly Islam, which today covers around 5% of the population residing in Italy), and by the huge presence of Christian Orthodox (around 2%, mainly migrants coming from East Europe),¹ this has implied the need to confront with different ritual and liturgical traditions, brought by the arrival of Catholic migrants who, as highlighted by the above-reported testimony of an Eritrean priest, are often completely unknown by Italian Catholics, or even confused with other confessions. In general terms, faithful of non-(Roman) Catholic tradition are today solicited to become more familiar with the concept of religious pluralism, and better equipped to confront with other confessions and religious habits. Before discussing this topic, we have to consider the manner in which host society's Churches have been reacting to the arrival of migrants and asylum seekers. More precisely, it is exactly by analyzing their approach towards newcomers that we can grasp the challenging nature of the relationship between migrants and established Italian Churches.

As we have already pointed out (Chapter 10, §1; see also Chapter 14), (Italian) Catholic Churches and faith-based organizations of different inspiration share a common effort in welcoming migrants and refugees. In particular, many religious groups have implemented, independently from the official reception system, various initiatives specifically addressed to (forced) migrants and refugees. This aspect was not among the main topics we planned to investigate within this part of the study, but it has repeatedly emerged during the fieldwork. Indeed, every time they have been solicited to describe the religious and spiritual needs of refugees and asylum seekers, the religious leaders involved in the study have ended up in depicting their own engagement in this field.

(...) that is, to meet migrants according to their needs. So, Italian language and culture, promotion and defense of health. How important it is to accompany migrants and accompany them on a journey of health, because migrants come here to work, as Italians abroad often bring home money, send money home ... instead they must be accompanied in health, they are neglected in health. So we have the defense project, the prevention of cancer for women, and I think of the Ukrainian communities, because first-generation Ukrainian women are older in age, they are almost my age or slightly younger. And so the risk of breast cancer is considerable, then

1 ISMU estimates on ISTAT and Pew Research Center data.

coming from the Chernobyl area, nearby, etc. but here is the prevention of health that projects together with the local health authorities, both with the diocesan Caritas, the health center of the diocesan Caritas, projects designed together to defend the migrant, for the health of the migrant and therefore the communities, to create in the communities, beyond the study of the Italian language, the places of prevention for health, where nobody is afraid to ask questions, to be oriented to specialized centers, to be invited to take exams ... there is a fear of approaching hospitals from many migrants that is dangerous to their health, so this, the defense of health, language, because language is the first thing, integration is the language ... go to the market and know how to say pepper or eggplant is a different thing. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

What's more, in their description, spiritual and religious assistance is often mixed up with different forms of social assistance, empathetic sustain, or "tutoring"/"coaching". As a matter of fact, both the experience of interviewed migrants and of the managers of hosting centers and religious communities prove how the assistance addressed to meet religious sentiments intermingles with the basic everyday needs and expectations. Even the above-reported interview confirms that it is not possible to offer care related to the sacred link with the Deity if not through the answer to these needs and expectations. According to what has emerged, it is only through the latter that the religious sentiment is generated, with all its rituality and living experience. Significantly, the interview contains a specific reference to health and language, body and relationship, rest and feast, motherhood/fatherhood and work; whatever the identity of a person, where does this identity ignite its freedom if not here? Where else can it bow to the transcendent for a "thank you" or for "help"? If not here, in these elementary living experiences? Are there other places where the intuition of a God and the taste for his performing could strike? It is asserted, in these interviews, that the attention for the sacred bond of those who are welcomed and accompanied in integration paths can be seen in the rigorous assumption of those fundamental forms of existence that the experience of migration makes problematic and impractical. There is no cure for the sacred bond in its formally religious expressions without the passionate care of those dimensions of experience and their sacred profile. An Evangelical Christian pastor, who was involved in one of the focus groups, even employed the expression "Christian counselling" to allude to an institutionalized practice based on the use of the Bible in searching the answers to offer to the people in need. This is a model that has already been extensively tested and which should now be adopted to tackle the specific needs of (forced) migrants and asylum seekers.

Coherently with this kind of approach, migrants' spiritual needs are often reduced, in the description made by the religious leaders, to the migrants' need to practice their cult according to their past experience and traditions. This means, first of all, the possibility to attend the celebrations in the migrants' mother tongue, with traditional rituals, songs and liturgies, and to meet and spend free time in spaces provided by their places of worship. A point that has almost inevitably led to the memory of Italian emigrants abroad:

Who is used to celebrating the liturgy in a very festive, very dynamic way, so we can sing songs, clap hands, etc. our style is a little Genoese that is very sober and therefore risks discouraging many people who come from the Catholic faith but then maybe many have been absorbed in some way or by Evangelicals or Pentecostals, however also seven pseudo Christians because they approach their way of praying more to what was the way of praying in their country. So these communities have chaplains, the term that is not used but I do not know what other term to use, ethnic chaplains, chaplains of their lands, which speak their language, which use their customs and habits just for ... just as there are in the world the missions were called Italian, they are nothing more than Italian priests than in Paris rather than in New York etc. who have accompanied the communities of Italian emigrants in their growth in faith. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

(...) I thought she was crying because she had lost her job, because she was far from her husband, because her daughter was studying and she was missing them, right? She had been treated badly, I do not know. Instead she told me that she could for the first time pray in Romanian, confess in her language, sing with the songs of her tradition. She has confused me, because I had already gone with mine, my mental prejudices: so, the daughter who does not have her, her husband works in France, work is precarious. No, the first generation wants to hear their own languages. So hear your tongue in a foreign land, eat Romanian food. We started this way, but why did the Italians meet in the Belgian, French and German communities and they ate fettuccine?! And it was important that they find themselves. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

As a matter of fact, despite our repeated solicitations, many religious leaders have shown a certain difficulty in dealing with the concept of "migrants' spiritual needs"; a specific reflection on this aspect is in fact substantially lacking. For example, in their description of the role of worships in the face of newcomers' arrivals, almost all the religious leaders involved in the study have referred

to them as places to meet, to support each other, and as places of “identity compensation”. Much emphasis has been placed on the initiatives implemented to support the inclusion process (language courses, matching with the labor demand, social assistance...). As stated by this Catholic priest, the risk could be that of “skipping” spiritual needs, to the point of discovering that they are exactly the migrants who encourage to be less materialistic –or, in evangelical terms, “to choose the best part”–:

(...) in a general sense, I believe that all those who do this kind of welcome do not have particular attention to this dimension. So we are all always very concerned about giving the food, the documents, job opportunities, without taking into account what then is the real engine of our ... the pursuit of happiness that can also come from a job, from a home, which cannot be only that, then the risk is that perhaps we are the very materialistic in the West and therefore easily pretend or do not take into account, even worse, the most spiritual part of each of us, so attentive to practical needs, that we forget the reason why one looks for a home, for a job, then your own happiness. And so this surely would mean that it would take a little bit to return to a culture, to the man in his integrity. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

Quite surprisingly –but coherently with the study background– within this effort to meet migrants’ cultural, social, and economic needs, there are exactly their spiritual needs that risks being unmet. Undoubtedly, the habit to meet religious demand where it emerges, that is through the most elementary needs dramatically perceived, produces the risk of disregarding exactly the very spiritual dimension. The following testimony is emblematic. At last, the authentic spiritual assistance has to be grounded in a human promotion. However, this circumstance involves the risk of a possible involution of the religious communities: these are so entangled in sophisticated initiatives of “material support” that they are disengaged in that proximity that listens to the expectation of God – an expectation that ends up turning into *the announcement*, as well as into the interpretation of the sacred texts, the exhortation to faith, a blessing and a consolation, and that invites to an intense experience of faith. In the following testimony, a Catholic priest reveals, through a biographic anecdote, how it is precisely the immigrants who do solicit to welcome, besides their own material needs, those of a spiritual nature.

(...) there were these guys last year in the sports hall, that this AB was a pretty infernal place, in the sense that there were 250 of these on the camp beds, dumped there, when running, with difficulty we managed to

create a structure, we brought them there and these happy ones, finally inside a house, the showers, the towel and so on. It was a Saturday afternoon. At a certain point, about fifteen of them took me aside, put me in the middle of a circle, they told me: "We have to ask you something". And I inside me I said: "But what I want there ... we had done races, fatal labors, what do they still want?" And then one of them advances and says: "We have two requests". Oh well, "Tell me". So a little resigned. Then he says: "The first we are English speakers, we ask you if you can find one or two Bibles in English. The second is this: we are Christians, today is Saturday and we would like to know if tomorrow there is a function to celebrate Sunday". And I am a priest and I said: "Look at what a man of faith you are". These tossed, brought in this new structure etc. they remembered that today is Saturday, because then you lose; I always lost the sense of time on ships. And their two requests have certainly involved two needs that I had not thought about. I thought about them all: towel, phone card, read this one ... and they told me: "Well, thank you, we are happy, but we need these two things". This was one of the many slaps I got in my face! (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

Indeed, in-depth interviews to a group of people in charge with the pastoral care of migrants have permitted us to better clarify this sort of "overlapping" between spiritual assistance and human promotion, which starts by accompanying the migrants in their first steps into the new society. Inspired by the ancient experience of priests and nuns working with Italian emigrants in the "new world", and then in Northern Europe, pastoral operators have identified migrants as people in need, people to whom address their special care and "to serve". According to their testimony, spiritual assistance cannot be separated from the simple act of taking care of migrants and their basic needs; thus doing –as suggested by one of our interviewees– "you will touch their heart".

Then the "Migrantes" (*The Foundation of the Italian Episcopal Conference in charge of the pastoral care of migrants, authors' note*) is the care, the support, the accompaniment of migrants in the pastoral centers at the service of migrants. It is not a pastoral care *ex novo*, because it was born from the experience of Italians abroad, when the Scalabrinian missionaries and then priests, following the Italian communities abroad, created this pastoral care and accompanied the Italian migrants to integrate where they were: Canada, United States, Australia, how many problems for the first Italian migrants in the great Australian "farms". There is an interesting book by the Migrantes Foundation on mental illnesses, the

mental problems of the first Italians in these lost farms. Then how much the presence of the priest, the presence of the nuns, I think of the Scalabrinian nuns and so on, they have helped and supported the Italian migrants. It's really a human, spiritual accompaniment ... I think of the tragedy of Marcinelle² and how much the priests and nuns had been close to those poor women, to their children. For that great tragedy they played a very important role of consolation, of support, of help, not of confrontation but of accompaniment, as important. Here all this is treasured and experienced for the Church and we live it today as a great experience in the reality of the communities present here. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

(...) there is a need for an accompaniment just a little ... something that maybe in the reception centers cannot be done, but a little face to face. If you happen to be close, I see that other associations, maybe they can do it less, we have a little more in this DNA, this needs not only to give what you need to survive ... first then to help them find ... but you also know a spiritual need can also be rediscovering dignity. For example, a person who lives on the street and to whom no one has ever said that maybe he could live differently and help him, and it happened, we have several experiences on this and on other things, and help you find your way back home ... Is it not perhaps satisfying a great spiritual need? (Woman – FBOs operator – Catholic Christian)

(...) welcome a family, meet them, answer maybe just at first impact in that way no? But it is precisely to cross that need there, to meet that man there, to be there those gestures through which you then reach the heart. When you called, I said: "What do you mean by spiritual assistance?" Because we do not, in fact I told you, we're not doing spiritual assistance, right? But precisely through our work, no? Our service ... we answer the need of the man who arrives, through whose relationship we get to that spiritual need, of meaning, need of hope, no?

(...) Then we are just certain that serving a need comes to the heart. There is not, how to say: "I'll help you there, but then I want something else". No, no, the experience is also that you are sure that you touch the strings of the heart of man ... (Women – Nuns – Catholic Christians)

² The tragedy occurred in the mine of Marcinelle, in Belgium, the 8th August 1956, in which hundreds of miners died, the majority of those were Italians.

So, yes for me personally the spiritual accompaniment, there is ... if you can call it that, it goes more through the everyday life of the things of life.
(Woman – FBOs operator – Catholic Christian)

Finally, it is exactly through their physical presence that religious operators can try to answer refugees' spiritual needs. As described in this eloquent testimony, showing an empathetic attitude toward those who suffered a lot during the journey, and who continue to experiment solitude and isolation, is the most immediate way to satisfy their spiritual needs.

(...) this is a discovery that took place after a short time to try to respond precisely to those that we understood to be the inner, spiritual needs. Because the first need seemed to us to be close to a friendly presence and someone who could participate in the pain and in some way learn to deal with those that were wounds of the heart because most live, as xxx said, the separation clearly from the family, from the figures of reference, from ... ties a little frayed ... the drama of the journey for all is very strong. I would say that most of our friends told us about the prison in Libya; however, the period spent in Libya as something that has marked them forever. In personal terms, they all suffered torture, however harassment, women in any case ... abuses of all kinds. And even during the crossing at sea they saw friends die. So they find themselves having to face a very great pain, a pain that does not make them sleep at night, a pain that ... and that's why they ask first of all a human proximity and someone who tries to stay close to them and they say it clearly. I speak ... I have no family, no friends, I need someone close to me. So they look for someone who listens to them, who listens to their story, without having to evaluate it in terms of "accepted" or "not accepted", then to receive it and in some way support it. And then in this sense we organize prayers with the community, we also concretely try to help them to live a spiritual dimension, both personal and communitarian, by making a bridge with the realities that are present on the territory, the Islamic realities say, with the communities of the mosques present ... with the prayer rooms ... with which we are in relationship. And with the Christians instead inviting them to our prayer and to all the moments of reflection on the Gospel for Christians of course ... and then there is this beautiful prayer we say every year, which is called "Prayer of hope", in which we remember all the names of the people who died at sea during the voyage and many of these names have been given us by them. And this year, for example, a friend of ours who is an Imam from the Ivory Coast, his name is M.M., he is a Muslim.

They made a moment of prayer with another Imam outside the Church of the Annunciation, then they entered and during the prayer he cried and thanked at the same time why he was reminded of all the people he saw dying on the boat. So, first of all this need for friendship ... This need to live spirituality, because they are also far from the communities with which they lived there. Since religion is also a bond with others, especially not just a private matter, they ask for a community dimension in order to live their religion. (Woman – FBOs operator – Catholic Christian)

On his turn, in this moving testimony, a Catholic priest describes how the ethnic chaplain is the “safe place” which permits to overcome the sense of estrangement experienced by newcomers:

So the Latin American community has a room, if you open it, it is full of suitcases. (...) when they arrive, they do not know where to put the baggage: one thing is to leave it to payment at the Termini station (*the Roma central station, author's note*), another thing is in a safe place, that you feel at home, the community. Then that room for suitcases, and the suitcase in the imagination of the migrant, but it is still so, is certainly more beautiful than that of the Italians of the nineteenth or twentieth century or after the Second World War (...), are perhaps more beautiful but the content is life, there is the whole of the migrant inside. That's what they bring, so it's precious to them, that of photos, memories, computers, cell phones, before there were not now, but there is what you can bring everything. Where do I put it? In a place that welcomes me, the community, so that room is much better than the station terms pay. I give it, I put it in the Latin American community entrusted to the Scalabrinian Fathers and it's like keeping it in my house until I find a place. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

Finally, every form of help in the little and big tasks newcomers have to face gain a specific theological meaning once put in a spiritual and pastoral perspective:

(...) if you find a house that welcomes you, that is the Church, that supports you, that helps you to study Italian, that takes care of your soul so try to make you stay at home even if away from home, it helps you to recreate a family even if you do not have a blood family but a family of faith, if it helps you to get better, to live your daily life, share your hard

work to find a job, share your hard work to find a home, share your effort for a residence permit, help you find the channels, for a civil lawyer, when you need a criminal lawyer, what you need. It is beside you, it cries with you and smiles with you, makes a feast, embraces you if you were perhaps in reunion, helps you in reuniting your family. Of course it works for integration, damn it! Because you feel welcomed, supported, you do not feel alone. And loneliness leads you then, if you do not find answers, more easily to crime, more easily to do what you would never imagine doing, if instead be welcomed, supported, accompanied by a hug, a smile, that is some advice on how to go to the police station, which is a patronage that helps you for work, that is other families that welcome you when you do not have a home, and of course that helps you live better. And if it helps you to live better, in addition to prayer, which is very important, then better deal with your daily life. Integration is a journey. Of course, yes, we must create welcoming communities, ever more welcoming, ever more attentive to hugs, smiles, to give just directions and even when we have no answers to look for them, not to resign ourselves not to find them, to accompany and if it were just crying, even crying together. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

Furthermore, as suggested by this Evangelical pastor, material and psychological support becomes an instrument of evangelization of those people who never patently experienced the presence of God:

The support they receive is linked to the word of God, to the promises that God makes in his word to those who believe in him. There is a God who takes care of them, he loves them. According to Chinese culture, there is no God. The fact that you are someone who takes care of them, who listens to them, who supports them, who cares about them can be very important. (Woman – Religious leader – Evangelical Christian)

To be more precise, many religious leaders and pastoral operators (particularly within the Catholic Church) appear definitely reluctant to the prospect of understanding the reception aids as a means to encourage the conversion of the newcomers. The following testimony is just one of the many proving the extreme “prudence” with which they consider this possibility:

We also had some cases of ... fascinated by the beauty of the Gospel he asked to make a journey of catechesis, of knowledge of the Gospel.

Someone asked for the baptism but I said: “We are careful not to confuse things, not to think that as a welcoming is made by the Church, we are here to convert them all. We are all thinking of converting ourselves, then we see, now we see”. (Man – Religious Leader – Catholic Christian)

Finally, also linguistic and cultural barriers can be easily overcome when the newcomers perceive the presence of God through the proximity of His ministers:

People for centuries prayed in Latin without understanding anything. There have been many saints in centuries, many good people who understand the Gospel much more than we who are exegetes. So I would dare say that precisely for the specifically spiritual part, language is the last obstacle because precisely the affection, the welcome, a look, a smile, a handshake, a hug that indicate this proximity does not have a different language. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

Last but not least, as observed by this Catholic nun, by displaying their care for the newcomers, religious people are simply taking care of their own spirituality:

(...) And then, excuse me, it seems that, perhaps I say one thing ... but it seems to me that, at least I do not have a concern, when I meet the boys, when I meet the families, their spiritual care. I have the concern of my spiritual care which is what allows me to look at them and to allow them to truly be what I am. (Woman – Nun – Christian Catholic)

Lastly, we will now analyze how the presence of migrants who guard their faith according to communicative paradigms and celebratory codes originating from their land challenges the Italian communities, until calling them to a conversion in the resumption of their most authentic traditions and their sacred texts. Evidently –this aspect has already emerged abundantly– the call for a reform of experience and religious practice also comes from the communities encountered in the country that welcomes and radically questions the quality of the faith of migrants. Thus, integration finds its most convincing fruitfulness in a kind of reciprocity. On the one hand, through its reading of the foundational texts, its celebratory ways, its style of community life, the faith of migrants comes to “integrate” (that is to make it more mature, but also to move towards the “whole”) the faith of the hosting communities. The first enriches

the second since it reveals and offers aspects of the religious experience that, due to different traditions and history, were perhaps scarcely lived or even ignored in the indigenous communities. On the other hand, in the same way, the faith of the indigenous communities encountered in the host country manages to integrate the faith of the migrants, revealing and offering them some values of the religious experience which tend to be neglected in the believing practice of migrants.

From this point of view, in the various interviews, we seem to glimpse some major themes in which this mutual integration unfolds. The religious experience of migrants gives back to the religious communities of the host country the primacy of “feeling” as the heart of the faith; mainly, with respect to a “knowledge” and a “doing” that in the West (not only the Christian West) ended up dismissing the feeling, equating it with emotionalism and childishness. This experience ends up questioning about “joy” as an inevitable trait in the authentic relationship with God. Besides, as stated in one of the above-reported interviews, it testifies to a freedom and a frankness in proclaiming and practicing one’s faith in a way that knows no timidity or false human respect even in a largely secularized world.

At the same time, the religious experience they have intercepted in the communities of the host country offers them a sense of “religious freedom”, with practical declinations both at a family and at a social level – we will return to this point in the following paragraph. Finally, another value particularly appreciated by migrants seems to be the ability to make –with rigor and passion– the connection between the announcement/celebration of faith and the human promotion in every sector of society.

What’s more, as captured by this moving testimony, the arrival of migrants who have never found the faith is even more challenging in both human and spiritual terms, since it offers the unique opportunity to listen to the Word of the Lord with the ears of those who have never heard it.

When xxx asked me to begin a journey of biblical reading, we began to read the Gospel (...). So, at a certain point, I read the parable of the merciful Father (...). And I thought that for thirty years now I have been a Pastor I had never read the parable of the prodigal son to someone who did not already know it. And so, thinking back to that parable that speaks of a merciful God who forgives you, doesn’t he? That is, of this celebration of God ... for the first time I listened to this parable with the ears of someone who has never heard it. Simply this thing has impressed me and also moved me. (Man – Religious leader – Protestant Christian)

4 Religious Agency in the Process of (Forced) Migrants' Public Space Making

In the previous paragraphs, we have analyzed various aspects connected to the role played by religion and spirituality in the process of adaptation of (forced) migrants. In this final paragraph, we will discuss how the evidence collected during this part of the study can help us to develop the prospect of re-humanization of (forced) migrants along the four lines of research identified above (Chapter 2):

- a) identity;
- b) religious freedom;
- c) citizenship;
- d) common good.

As already described (Chapter 10), many of the migrants interviewed have emphasized how religion is a source of individual and collective *identity*, shaped by the intra-familiar transmission of religious values and beliefs (as we will deeply analyze in Part 5), but also –and especially– by the experience of discrimination and persecution suffered before emigrating, as well as by the troubles encountered during the migratory journey. Religious identity represents a source of resistance and resilience, but it is also the limit beyond which it is not possible to accept any violations. Therefore, the concept of religious identity provides a meaning to the decision to migrate, even for those who “did not know they had a religious identity”: this concept has been unveiled only after having migrated to another country, where they first experienced both a context of religious freedom and the possibility to be helped by religious people. Finally, religious identity is a crucial resource providing (forced) migrants with an extraordinary ability to face problems and challenging situations, as unanimously asserted by the following interviewees, who are coming from different countries and have different religious backgrounds:

(...) it was very difficult, but I remember when I was very young, my parents always talked about this thing, this sacrifice that we always have to make to resist, just to show that we have our identity, and then they gave me force to fight these problems. (Woman – Iran – Bahá'í)

(...) I am right to be Catholic until I die, if I die tomorrow or if I die in fifty years ... These are my roots, this is my identity. If I remove my identity, it means that I have nothing that supports me. (Man – Egypt – Coptic Catholic Christian)

Since I was a child, my father told me to read the Bible every day, every morning and, before going to his job, he used to read the Bible for five to ten minutes and he taught me that when you are starting to learn the Bible, your problems will be fewer, Jesus will help you and so you can just relax. (Man – Pakistan – Catholic Christian)

If we consider the collective dimension of the religious identity, we can observe that religious affiliations reinforce the sense of belonging to a community of peers, i.e. a sort of enlarged family that makes its members feel “at home” and loved – a key form of support for those who experience the status of stranger, for those who have to deal with everyday frustrations and who fear a sense of solitude.

I know the Focolari movement from 1982, in Egypt. Here is something that pushed me to grow, because I felt loved, because a foreigner, when changing places for religious reasons, does not need money, but to feel loved, a sense of family, this is what he is missing. (Man – Egypt – Coptic Catholic Christian)

There is another reason for the celebration that is, for the Bahá'í people, in addition to participation in the activities and the administrative system, to meet and be aware of the daily life of others. The Bahá'ís to meet only ... that is, a party is organized. Maybe you eat ... all the people are there to increase community solidarity. So the Bahá'í community, at the local, national and international levels, is connected through this 19th century celebration.

(...) therefore, let's say that our community for us is like our family and as members of the community they are also our family. (Couple (Man and Woman) – Iran – Bahá'í)

In this same perspective, religion functions as an identity anchor, and as an instrument of defense for those who perceive the hosting society as an anomic one, to the point of menacing migrants' personal moral integrity and their offspring's socialization (see also Chapter 20). Finally, the migrants' community gathered around the Church offers the possibility to maintain a link with one's past and one's roots, and to safe one's original identity.

(...) on the one hand, it is a function I think of link to their past because even this I think is an important aspect. There is for many of them a fundamental aspect of their history, of the history of their family, that is, I do

not know a Latin American with its Catholic faith, or today also many that are of Evangelical confession, however it is a link with one's own history. Or a Muslim as we said before. (Woman – FBOs operator – Catholic Christian)

It has been said that the religious community often functions as a social place of “identity compensation” (§3), or better yet, an identity anchoring. It saves from the icy waters of anonymity, since your name resounds in it and, eventually, it becomes the subject of attributions of rights and duties. A second fundamental reason concerns the religious experience as a way of life: the reference or belonging to the religious community are experienced as bastions of resistance with respect to that corruption of moral-religious integrity that the host world seems to foster because of its widespread secularization. Finally, the circulation of words in the same language, the immediacy in cultivating personal and national memory, the custom of celebrating God's providence in the language of the fathers, guarantee the bond with one's roots. A circumstance that certainly seems profitable in terms of identity custody. However, the metaphor of the tree and the roots evokes a rigid and static identity: a pattern that is not absent in the so-called “ethnic communities”, where migrants usually meet and celebrate their religious rites (§3). With this in mind, would the metaphor of a river and its springs be more adequate to express the migrants' religious identity? It does evoke a “traditional principle” that is still active and fruitful (the springs) and that feeds a flow open to promising contributions and contaminations – thus concurring to the process of migrants' public space making.

As a matter of fact, religious identity becomes even clearer once compared to the situation of the destination country, where religious affiliation is lived in a much milder way. Quite significantly, this woman, despite a biography strongly marked by her membership to a minority, and persecuted, religious group –which we could expect to have indelibly marked her existence– observes how “religion is always something that you must grow inside of you”:

(...) then we have a strength that I do not feel so much in Italy that we try to keep tradition, even religion as a tradition, in the sense that I am Christian and I must be and I have to say it, but here in Italy we say: ah, yes, I am a Christian but I'm not a practitioner; ah, but I'm not ... but I say, but what are you not? But thank God you are in a Catholic country! We, at this point, are very strong, we are very jealous. Then, even after religion is always something that you have to grow yourself, it's not just something

that you inherit from yours, but you also have to work on it, you have to feel it too, otherwise it will just be ... (Woman – Iraq – Chaldean Catholic Christian)

Inspired by this kind of feelings, we can grasp a first important contribution provided by the process of refugees' public space making. As brilliantly described by this FBOs staff-member, migrants' religiosity is "more religious" than that of the locals. If not for this reason, as discussed in another part of this volume (Chapter 16), independently of their motive to migrate, migrants challenge European secularized society, and particularly those who demand to be acknowledged as religious. Fundamentally, as exemplified by the following statements, this sentiment has emerged from both the "insiders" (the religious leaders and the pastoral operators) and the "outsiders" (the Catholic migrants coming from non-Christian countries):

(...) we probably, as a Western society, are a fairly secularized society, while in other contexts, basically those who leave, come from a context, there is an economic migrant, migrant who comes here seeking asylum for humanitarian reasons, leaving a situation a little different even at the level of society ... so for them, in my opinion, the religious factor is their own identity. There's ... like ... it's also very providential. That is why it is not like ... at least from my experience, from what I think, it is not that they first look for the house and work, and then they go to church. Indeed, they go to church to look for ... there is the paradox is a bit that we ask the Lord to send us these things and then see ... is a religion very "religious" in quotes not? At least, I think of the Africans with whom I had more to do but also them, maybe the Chinese are more discreet from this point of view ... but if they pray even three hours a day, they do it, they have always done it because it is probably right of their identity. Is there ... maybe you recognize that too, and then even ... that is also the identity because often, according to me, religion and their ethnic identity often merge? So ... I do not even know the African community, also Arab, there is the Coptic, there is the Muslim and then, in short, it is so...

(...) even if in fact it is they who accompany me as a spiritual guide. They say: "I have prayed!". All right, good! Maybe there are those who question me more from this point of view. (...) Then they provoke me, trusting this Providence, both the Africans to Allah, and they ... probably we Westerners have lost something, I do not know! So I am constantly provoked from this point of view, in short. They tell me: "Saturday we

read the Bible for four hours". Saturday I'm going to have a coffee, I see some friends! (Woman – FBOs operator – Catholic Christian)

I'll bring them to church every Sunday; I'll tell them to read the Bible, to join Christian groups, to join Christian culture, because without faith, without religion we are nothing. When Jesus is not in your life, you have nothing in your life. In Pakistan, when children are 3 or 4, they send them to the mosque and to learn, and even children from 4 or 5 learn the Koran orally without reading. But Christian children don't, but I think it is also important to learn the Bible also like this, they should learn the Bible by heart even when they are 4 or 5, before learning to read. (Man – Pakistan – Catholic Christian)

Furthermore, we can note that the migrants' presence and their desire to be acknowledged as (forced) migrants further develop the concept of *religious pluralism*. The example provided by this Eritrean priest is definitely emblematic. The special identity of Eritrean Catholics is not only mirrored by the shared experience of persecution, but also "embedded" in a singular ritual – the "Gèéz" –, which reinforces the diasporic character of this community. It is quite significant to observe that, once again, the appeal to be recognized as a legitimate component of a pluralistic society seems to be addressed first to other Catholics (see also Chapters 16, 19, and 20).

The number of Catholic Eritreans in Europe is enormous and they are accustomed to a different ritual, even to a different language, the Gèéz. In my congregation, we also celebrate the Latin Mass, but the Gèéz is very important for us. You study it for years, to celebrate the liturgical ceremony in Gèéz you have to be an expert (...). There are some particular prayers in Gèéz that the priests abroad do not know, but we, who did the seminar in Eritrea, we do.

(...) It is very important for Eritreans to participate in the Mass celebrated with their rite, in Gèéz. The problem is not of linguistic understanding: the skeleton of the rite is the same as the Latin Church. The fact is that our prayers are linked to our culture. Culture and prayer are in close relationship. While we pray, we understand what we are praying for, because everything is linked to our culture. It helps us to pray a lot with our ritual, rather than using a language that has no connection with our culture. On the basis of my experience, I can say that prayers are very linked to our way of thinking, to behave, to judge what is good and what is not. All of this is linked to our culture. (Man – Eritrea – Catholic Christian)

As a matter of fact, religious pluralism, intended as a crucial element of the democratic governance, is not only a principle inscribed in the legislation (Chapter 9), but also a goal that is still to be achieved in the Italian society, which has been rapidly passing from a mono-religious to a multi-faith society. Up until recently, the Italian population was fairly homogeneous (or at least perceived as such) in terms of ethnicity and religion. As we have already observed, because of immigration, all religious minorities have grown significantly, and the issue of interreligious co-existence, traditionally underrated, has emerged, allowing the country to gain more awareness of how much religion is encapsulated in allegedly secularized/neutral behavioral and legal patterns (Chapter 3). Besides, as observed by this Catholic priest, the Church itself is challenged by the pluralism that the migrants bring with them; a pluralism made up of different religions, but also of a plurality of traditions within each religion confession:

(...) if in the end, the right to equality is guaranteed in the communities, what is not sometimes even listened to is the instance of differentiation that sometimes arises from the migrants, and I say in particular from migrants with a Catholic background. The right, the right to differentiation (...).

(A) sacrosanct instance of differentiation that migrants advance precisely because they instinctively want their identity, their singularity to be recognized and therefore also valued in favor of the whole community. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

It is not enough that we go and welcome, we must get involved, and this is the important thing of interculturalism: that is not only to welcome who comes, does not change only what comes, but we also change, in welcoming. Our identity becomes somewhat more fluid and I think this is the richness, but also the fatigue of interculturalism. Because however I have to put into play and I can no longer define myself in a certain way, but I have to expect to change. (Woman – Religious leader – Methodist Evangelical Church)

It is rather superfluous to observe that forced migrants, particularly those emigrated for religious motives, have a crucial role to play in this process. This, however, implies a cooperative stance, that is a cooperative way to intend ones' membership to the new society. In this perspective, we can really appreciate the importance of educating newcomers to the concept of religious pluralism, since –as we have seen (§3)– they often come from illiberal societies and have mainly experienced their religious identity as an antagonistic marker.

It is exactly through the impact with a democratic society –such as the Italian one– that many migrants have had the opportunity to experience, for the first time, the idea of religious pluralism. Once again, it is essential to observe how people of different origins and religious memberships share the same concept according to which living in a democratic State provides a meaning to the very concept of religious freedom and personal freedom, which are based on the principle of the inviolable dignity of each individual.

The social structures of the democratic State enshrine religious freedom as an implication of the freedom of thought and conscience; in fact, it has been within the same substantially dominant religious structure that many migrants have started to get closer to the idea and the practice of religious freedom. At least on paper, the communicative and educational modules in the most widespread religious community in Italy, i.e. the Catholic Church, adheres to the announced God in such a way that it reflects the profound meaning of freedom. Faith is the responsibility of everyone's freedom. Personal freedom is meant as people's freedom to behave independently of both God's teaching and one's family or community tradition (however relevant it may be, it cannot be understood as oppressive and it will not replace one's capacity of judgment and personal decision).

The novelty of this situation changes the parameters of thought and practice of many migrants –especially of those coming from countries that are fundamentally theocratic and/or traditionally characterized by a state religion that suppresses the spaces and the voices of other religious experiences. We have already observed that, for many of them, the need to migrate has arisen precisely because of the overt denial of religious freedom. Now –here is one of the most delicate challenges in the integration process– they find themselves in a social and political context that is certainly democratic, but in a cultural-political situation that does sympathize with various forms of ethnic and religious discrimination. Today, in Italy, the religious group that is most likely to be discriminated against is the one that, in the country of origin of many (forced) migrants, used to be in force in its exclusive and persecutory hegemony. Here, these migrants, while benefitting from this modulation of the Italian democracy, are sometimes inclined to replicate the same exclusive and persecutory forms for which they had found themselves in the need to migrate; in this sense, they sometimes adopt an aggressive attitude towards religious minorities. As showed by the following testimony, when they fail to heal the wounds of forced migration, migrants risk being overwhelmed by resentment, ending up looking for a new emotional balance that would ensure their psychological and relational well-being. In these cases, religious teachings risk being overturned, and religious cleavages absolutized, to the point of erecting impassable barriers:

(...) for me, it would be the ideal that comes another Hitler against Muslims. Because, however, there are always these wounds inside of you. I did not leave my land because I wanted to. I have been forced. This wound always remains, until death, no one can erase it. I did not hurt anyone. But everyone hurt me. Why do I have to accept it? A. (*his wife*) was very Christian and said that we must love one another. Yes, it's true. But Jesus condemned the tree that does not bear fruit. I, for me, they are the fruitless trees. But why do they have to stay? (Man – Egypt – Coptic Catholic Christian)

No, if I have children they will be Christians. They will be born in Europe so they will not even know about the wrong part of religion. They will only know about Christianity. (Man – Nigeria – Catholic Christian)

(...) the things that I do not share very much, even though I'm a foreigner, that I should not say it, really, but I say it anyway, is that there is so much welcoming to other religions here and indeed we take it with such enthusiasm and so much hospitality and admiration, where an Italian may not even admire his own true religion, I do not know if I explained myself and I do not like it so much because I accept how much I am so lucky to accept and accept your diversity ... then I accept you, that you're different, and instead here you try to give the best to this person just because he/she's different, because he/she's different ... okay, he/she's not bad! Not bad! But you are also happy with what you have? And on other side what do Muslims do then? They try to take advantage of it in the sense that they see this thing and try to impose what they are ... maybe they do not wear the veil in their country but try to put it in Italy ... to say look I'm different, I'm Muslim ... that is to impose their things ... mosque that they claim they have it, they have it, how much freedom did they give us in our countries? If you go to Saudi Arabia for example, even if there are millions of Christians, Filipinos working there ... there is no right to a church in Saudi Arabia, but here we have to give all rights ... (Woman – Iraq – Chaldean Catholic Christian)

These considerations lead us to the second main dimension involved in the process of rehumanization of asylum seekers, that is the concept of *religious freedom*.

On an elementary level, this concept can be grasped through the everyday experience, whenever a foreign migrant touches the privilege of living in a

democratic society, founded on the principles of universal equality and human dignity. As suggested by the following statements, beyond the principle of equality between all religious traditions –and therefore the prohibition of discrimination on a religious basis– it is precisely the concept of the inviolable dignity of every person, that everyone can claim for the mere fact of being a *person*, which materializes in the daily experience of many migrants:

Here in Italy, it is not as a religion to ... everyone treats them like humans, they treat well, like a person, alone, like in a family ... (...) In Egypt they have many weapons, we are saying steps ... (Man – Egypt – Coptic Orthodox Christian)

I see the rule here and for Christians and Muslims are totally the same, because when you go to questura (*police headquarters, author's note*) they don't show any preference for Muslims or Christians, they prefer the rules. (Man – Pakistan – Catholic Christian)

I feel like if I've saved my life, I feel I found the peace, I feel I'm free to start a new life, I feel so happy, I feel so special, what is special is the way they treat us, and I like the manner they use to approach, the way everything has been done is something a normal human being should emulate.

Interviewer: Can you make an example?

Respect, the way of behaving, when you see someone and say: "ciao, ciao come stai? Come stai? Bene?" There is a lot of respect, people leave in joy, nobody wants to kill you ... everybody is equal. In Nigeria is not like this. In Nigeria you have to have absolute respect for people older than you, there is a lot of difference between the young and old but also between the poor and the rich. The poor have always been suppressed ... the gap is too much. (Man – Nigeria – Catholic Christian)

Secondly, the notion of religious freedom directly calls into question the respect for religious rights, including those of minority groups. Migrants with a different religious background share the awareness that only after their arrival in Italy they have had the opportunity to fully experience their faith:

In Italy, going to church helps us to pray for documents and so on, it's an opportunity to feel free to pray, to go to church, to pray like this, it's totally different from Pakistan where it's difficult also to pray. I remember it was Easter, after praying I come to my home, I see television, there was a blast

in church and almost 82 persons died just because they were Christians. Here there is no fear ... in Pakistan there is no security for this.... (Man – Pakistan – Catholic Christian)

Whenever I can (*I go to the Buddhist center*), because I feel very well here. I had the good fortune to come to a country where there is this religious freedom. Everyone can do what he wants, while not disturbing social serenity, so ... and ... Buddhism being a religion of peace, of ... education and culture, often when I go there in xxx, yes? It is there that the center of the Soka Gakkai is located. I always go there. (Man – Cameron – Buddhist)

I have never had problems (*in Italy*) to express my religious opinion. Neither with colleagues at the university, nor with my current colleagues. I never had problems.... No one has ever offended me or laughed in my face.

(...) (*In Italy*) we learned a lot, but thanks to the very heterogeneous Bahá'í community. Thanks to the exercises we have been able to do here and which we could not do in Iran because the administrative system does not exist there. We knew on paper how it worked but we only experienced it here. (Couple [Man and Woman] – Iran – Bahá'í)

Thirdly, this concept also involves the protection towards the risk of being victims of deviated understandings of religious duties and precepts. In the following excerpt, for example, a Nigerian man says that there is no way that, in Italy, people can encounter any forms of violent and occult religiosity such as those he had known in the context of provenance:

Worshipping ghost here? I don't know. Because, I don't know. Because ... How can they worship ghost here? You can't come here, you start worshipping the ghost. In Italy there are not, I don't see people, I see in Italy people that worship God. I see in Italy people that worship God. Italy's people are good people, because how they do their things, they have fear of God, and they have the law, there is the law, the law in Italy is working, the law in Italy is not as the law in my country. The law in my country is not working. In Italy, the law is working, so they have human sympathy. So ... I didn't see them, I can't ... you understand what I mean. (Man – Nigeria – Christian attending the Pentecostal Church)

He is echoed by this other Muslim interviewee, who notes that in Italy it is possible to live one's faith freely, despite the stern gaze of other immigrants:

In Italy being a Muslim ... I do not think there is any difference, I do not feel different from others. I say that I do not feel different from others when I'm with Italians, I feel good. But when I'm with other Arabs and Muslims, for example, maybe, sometimes, I drink a few glasses of wine and they look at me badly! Because they say: "You are a Muslim and you drink wine"! Because wine is forbidden, but it is forbidden if you have to go to pray, of course, you must not drink, but if you are with your friends, if you are in the party and it is not a time of prayer, excuse me why? Because wine makes you feel high, and when you want to go pray you have to be 100% awake and you do not have to drink wine and so, when I'm with them and I drink a glass of wine, I feel the annoyance, but I do not care, I go on. (Woman – Yemen – Muslim)

Interestingly, the appreciation for religious freedom is shown also by those who were almost unaware of the fact of being subjected to limitations in this field. Almost as if those who migrated for other reasons –mainly economic ones–, at some point realized the importance of living in a democratic context, whose distinctive icon is represented by (religious) freedom and mutual respect.

We sing a lot in our liturgies. This is felt and therefore it can be risky for those living in contexts like China. For people who have experienced a story similar to those of these two girls, it is a relief to come here and be able to sing, to do something publicly, without having to hide.

(...) The most important thing found in Italy: democracy, religious freedom. For them, it's the most important thing, they came for this. (Couple of women – China – Evangelic Christians [experience reported by their Pastor in Italy])

Finally, our study proves that religious agency can certainly be an integral part of (forced) migrants' public space making, the latter intended as a process targeted to the invention of new ways to live together. This prospect, as we will describe now, is shared by many of them. However, the harmonious cohabitation of different religious groups is not an automatic outcome of the arrival of people with "non-conformistic" religious backgrounds. As we have already discussed (Chapter 11), providing education about religious pluralism is a fundamental ingredient to build a cohesive society, and to facilitate the process of newcomers' adaptation. At the same time, among the most suggestive insights emerged from the fieldwork there is the fact that religion and spirituality provide the migrants with the *lexicon*, not only to face everyday challenges and troubles, but also to understand personal and community lives and give a

meaning to their experiences of sufferance. Once put in a religious perspective, experiences such as those of persecution and exile gain an unusual significance, thus giving the migrants an extraordinary resource at both individual and collective level. Indeed, while offering the opportunity for a personal development, the spiritual re-elaboration of these traumas breaks down the logic of revenge and rancor, and lays the foundation for a generative attitude, oriented towards the construction of the *common good*. This point leads us to the third dimension that is implied in our reasoning.

The concept under discussion is brilliantly expressed by this couple of Bahá'í spouses, who trace a direct relationship between the following four factors: the experience of discrimination, individual empowerment, the reinforcement of personal faith, and the engagement for the common wellbeing.

(...) there are unmotivated people, but we can generally say that all the Bahá'ís are examples of how not to demotivate and not to commit any act of aggression! How can I say ... perseverance. Bahá'ís are examples of perseverance. You could also look it up in the websites, there are many testimonies. Then I wanted to say that we have grown up with discrimination, so in our life there is something called discrimination, which exists from our parents who first suffered it and then it comes to us...

(...) we ended up here, but basically there is a reason ... global and profound that is to resist discrimination to get ... To grow, to take this crisis as an opportunity for growth and understand that these discriminations are for our beliefs, our religion. So it's their problem, it's not my problem. They discriminate against me but the problem is theirs. If I get depressed, I have a double problem with myself. They are wrong but I do not have to be aggressive with them, I have to be peaceful because it does not work. We believe that aggression is not useful for any reason, so I can grow and understand that my faith and belief is more important than anything and so it is important that I find something for the growth of my study, my skills and then give service to the same community that discriminated against me. (Couple [Man and Woman] – Iran – Bahá'í)

In the same line of reasoning, a Pakistani man and a Chinese woman provide two other interesting testimonies. They both suggest that it was religion that, through the testimonies of other believers who took care of them, instilled in them the motivation to help others.

In Italy, I learned to help, so I was not good in Italian ... but I see some Italian people helping me; so, now, when I see some Pakistani people not

able to speak Italian, I start helping them ... so this is like a circle of help.
(Man – Pakistan – Catholic Christian)

(...) coming here, I lost things, my father, my sisters. I came here with my mother, I lost my home, my education, the university; but I do not care, it's not important to me. Maybe it's important to live. Religion is more important to me. Even working to make money is no longer important, I want to volunteer, to help. If you want to do something, it is enough to have some people; I want to have God in my life, to have Love and to share it with other people. (Woman – China – Church of God Almighty)

Other testimonies as well highlight that a liberal society is the natural humus which permits religiosity to widespread all its potential for the common good. This young woman coming from Iran, for example, stresses that it is the faith which, in principle, has provided a meaning to her life; but it is a liberal context which has permitted to caught this meaning, through the choice of helping people in need and contributing to the prosperity of society:

(...) having my faith has given me a way of ... a purpose of life, a way of life, how to live and how to help people, how to have a life of service for others. Because in the Bahá'í faith this goal is very important to help others, to serve, to educate the younger generations, so my religion, my faith has given me an instrument to live a life of service, not just going to university, wake up, go to university, go to work, come back and do nothing, instead of being useful for society. And this thing abroad helped me a lot, because it is freer, everything is freer than in Iran, so I could do all this activity with the kids, with the kids who had problems, with so many different people, so I was helped to be useful for society, also to have this feeling that I have a purpose in my life. (Woman – Iran – Bahá'í)

Another example is provided by this Iranian woman. In her testimony, the experience of conversion –in this specific case from Islam to Christianity– seems to mark, in a metaphoric manner, a transition to a liberal-democratic way of life, as well as to a more conscious and mature personal approach to religiosity:

(...) especially when you live in a country where you are still alone ... you feel much more this need, so ... If, for example ... it happened that ... when in Islam they say that God decides on all destinies. So, I thought

that God had taken my mother away from me, so I should have had it with God (*she laughs*). So, for a while, I did not even want to talk, that is ... about subjects that concerned God I did not even want to hear them because I was saying “How is this possible? Do you have fun playing with it?” And then you know, changing this point of view helps you to live more peacefully (...). So, changing point of view helps you a lot to accept things, to have more serenity, this is important.

(...) That is in the sense that before you saw God in a higher point, looking at us, from above, from above ... always just looking at you to see what sin you're making, or maybe, I know, you're always on trial ... So, seeing God who stands next to you, who helps you on your journey, is a very big change. (Woman – Iran – Protestant Christian [former Muslim])

To sum it up, the interviews disclose a flowering of religious experiences among virtuous practices oriented to the common good. Small gestures or public commitments in favor of the *polis* and of those inhabitants who are in a precarious condition and suffer from a lack of linguistic competence and from having no house, no job, no social relations, and no documented identity. The democratic configuration of the socio-cultural framework encountered in Italy facilitates the fruitfulness of religious practices in behaviors of commitment to the common good. Besides –it should never be forgotten–, the migrant is encouraged to translate his/her faith into good practices precisely because of a “contagion”, that is as a form of “restitution” of the services offered by the public administration as well as of the care and assistance from the religious community and its members. When they perceive the proximity of God, thanks to the benevolent and beneficent proximity of the other, migrants are activated in the benefited logic of emulation/participation in which the solidarity potential of the religious experience is released in doing to others what has been done to him/herself.

Significantly, help is offered without any kind of selection or hindrance based on the religious affiliation. This experience, which is marked by a broad sense of gratitude, fuels the attitude to “give back” the good that one has been given, in the form of commitment to the common good – which, in turn, should move away from corporatist models. If the religious experience feeds on the intimacy with God, in the sense that the believer acts according to God's will, what is considered to be its ultimately authenticating trait can be found in the act of “giving something to someone” – i.e. giving back what one has been given for free, without expecting anything in return, and starting to “assist” instead of just “being assisted”.

(...) I think it is a great spiritual need for their desire to move from the condition of being assisted, namely being people who only receive help, to living that dimension which, for us, is strongly evangelical and spiritual, where “there is more joy in giving than in receiving”, that is, giving support to a weaker person, and therefore they have become involved in a discourse of closeness with the elderly, with the children of the suburbs who voluntarily give us a helping hand with the poor. And it is a contagion, a truly very fruitful alliance, positive for all we say. Imagine an old man in the institute, however, who also lived through difficult times in Italy, at the time of fascism ... then he finds himself immersed in a difficult culture, a culture that tells you that you must be afraid of the different, you have to look at the world with anxiety and fear, the meeting with a refugee who loves you, helps him to reassure himself, to open up to the other, to the future, and even the elderly are mines for the fact that refugees are far from the family, they also need words of comfort. (Woman – FBOs operator – Catholic Christian)

Finally, we have to consider the manner in which (forced) migrants build their role in the public space also by soliciting a new understanding of the concept of *citizenship* and of its different components. Coherently with our initial assumptions, interviews provide evidence of how (forced) migrants, through their citizenship’s practices, are producing a *multi-religious social capital* which, in its turn, can contribute to the creation of a common good. More in detail, we can consider three different kinds of practices that, following the well-known Hirschman’s trilogy (1970), can be identified as, respectively, *voice*, *exit*, and *loyalty*.

The first practice is exemplified by the chronicle provided by this Nigerian man, who directly experienced the cruel violence perpetrated by terrorist groups in the name of religion. His suffered testimony –in which it is not easy to distinguish the content of reality from the metaphorical one– speaks about a shared mobilization of Christians and “authentic” Muslims, united in the *protest* (voice) towards Boko Haram and its illegitimate claim to be recognized as an Islamic troupe:

(...) it’s just the ... like ignorant people, it’s like stereotypes and things like that. And so, when Boko Haram came, it came and they were an Islamic group but they also killed Muslims so people were like: no, Boko Haram is not an Islamic group, some people like many Christians, especially Christians from the South, they felt that Boko Haram was just like an Islamic terrorist group but people from the North, people like me who have

Muslim friends and know what a real Muslim is, I wouldn't say Boko Haram are Muslims, we know Boko Haram are not Muslims; Muslims knew that Boko Haram are not Muslims, they are just a terrorist group and the way they use is not as something to give them support or something to give them credibility. So, I was there like when Boko Haram came and the real Muslims and the real Christians were able to unite and face Boko Haram and said: "No, this one is a war just against terrorism". (Man – Nigeria – Christian now attending an Adventist Church)

This kind of experience can be observed in the many cases in which believers of different religions and with different migratory backgrounds promoted public demonstrations, in Italy and all around Europe, in order to contrast both the criminalization of (Muslim) migrants and the ideological use of religious motives to justify terroristic attacks (see, for example, the mobilization "Not in my name",³ rightly after the terrorist attacks in Paris). It can also be seen in the many cases where advocacy coalitions were formed with the aim of supporting a "post-national" idea of citizenship (Soysal, 1994), based on porous States' borders, and of progressively expanding the systems of protection. In the end, once experienced as an obstacle to achieve rights and opportunities, religion turns out to be a vehicle to conquer them, through individual and collective action.

A second example of citizenship's practice is offered by this Yemeni woman, who declared to have left her country because of the deviant understanding of religious precepts by the religious authorities, and because of their attempt to control both women's "brains" and women's "bodies". During the interview, she insisted on the need to respect the principle according to which religious authorities must not exercise political power. According to her, religion cannot be reduced to an instrument of social control, or a means to harass the most vulnerable people; on the other hand, no one –neither the political authorities, nor the religious authorities– has the right to invade the private relationship between God and the single believer:

I am a Muslim and, as we all know, Islam now, as a religion, is not true Islam. Now, Islam has become politics, an ideology. Some people, certain regimes use religion because of their interests, so religion has become a hard thing, a rigid thing, a soulless thing and then religion is influencing

3 A campaign, launched in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, through social media, by young Muslims (often second-generation immigrants) intent on taking a decisive distance from the terrorists who call for a holy war.

women and children more and more because those are the weakest parts of society, it was always like this, even before in Europe, when Christianity went through hard times, like us, times of darkness. Because they use religion to control people and the same thing happens now in the Arab world, they use religion, they did not live it like in Europe that now religion has become something else and they understood it after years of wars, of battle, of death of so many people, they have come to the point that religion should be left in peace and you must not mix religion with politics, understood? You must not. Religion is just religion and politics is another thing. You cannot put both things together. Because this is dangerous. It is not only in Yemen, you can be in other countries; I speak of the Arab world in general, the Arab world. You can be the Imam of a mosque, like a priest, you can be a Muslim Imam and you can also work with politics, you can work ... this is not good. You can be an Imam and at the same time you are a member of the parliament, or a member of the military. It's all mixed up, all a mess. So religion is all ruined, and therefore this ugly figure of the Muslim, I am sorry because Islam is not so, the religion is not so, it is not this bad thing. Religion is a simple thing, it is a simple relationship between us and God, privately. No one must enter into this relationship. Nobody has the, let's say ... permission to intervene in this relationship. Everyone has one's own relationship with God and that's it, nobody has to control you or block him with the name of God or the name of religion. This is what happens in the Arab world. I say it sincerely ... (Woman – Yemen – Muslim)

In front of the gap separating her conception of “true” religion and the misleading interpretation made by many religious leaders –“motivated by non-religious aims”–, this Muslim woman chose to abandon her origin country. Once in Italy, she decided, once more, to adopt an *exit* strategy –she gave up attending the mosque–, intended as a line of action (the only possible one) useful to affirm her own distance from people who “are not able to represent our religion”. In Simmelian terms (see Chapter 3, §4.1), this behavior could be described as the choice to take a distance from religion as a way to affirm one's religiosity.

No, I do not go to any mosque here, I do not like it because I went once and I did not like to go because there are people there ... you do not feel at peace, there is discrimination against women, they put women in a room and men in another. We are not together ... I do not like it that way. Then people, those who run mosques are people ... I cannot be, to

represent our religion. I'm sorry but this is the truth, I'm sorry. Because even with an Imam from the mosque I went with my husband to take a picture in the mosque and the Imam did not allow us to take a picture. But can you imagine this thing? He said God said it was forbidden. But what is this God? Because I cannot hear lies and shut up, this is my character. So I arrived in Italy at the age of 44, it's not easy, because they cannot mess with me at this age; they messed with me when I was young and I did not understand anything. But with my age I now have open eyes and I understand everything, so here ... "Sorry but who said that we cannot take pictures?" And he said: "God!" And I said: "So, why do we have direct transmission from Mecca? Why is that not forbidden?" And he was silent, he could not answer me. On the contrary, he told me that since I thought I knew everything, I could go and become the Imam. He made this joke. Those are the people who control Italy here ... lousy people. (Woman – Yemen – Muslim)

In the same line of reasoning, we can see that the very presence of migrants, who suffered the violation of their religious rights and of their freedom, challenges European "tired" democracies, since through their experience they could regain the awareness of the importance of religious rights, intended as an archetype –as we have already commented– of both individual rights and the quality of a democracy. At the same time, through their presence, (forced) migrants challenge established religions, and could turn into an extraordinary source of revitalization for European Churches and for European "believers": as observed by a young woman coming from Iran, for many European young people, who live in a democratic and secularized society, the relationship with religiosity could not be so different than that experienced in an illiberal or autocratic society.

And do you know what the first thing is for them? Being able to freely express faith without fear of losing your life. Does it seem trivial? Look is essential. It is ... I saw the Albanians again after years of persecution, being able to express the faith where the only thing they did, they could secretly do the sign of the cross, an Albanian woman said: "P. has taken away everything, but this is not me, they could remove it secretly". They could not have any religious signs; they could not have anything, the Albanians. Under the dictatorship and in short ... they were certainly persecuted very seriously until 1994. But there is the only thing that remained for me, before going to bed, secretly, nobody saw me; it was the sign of the cross. Then you can freely express your faith without incurring in serious risks. Is it trivial? No, it's vital. It is the first thing: to be able to go to a

church, to be able to confess, to pray, to make the sign of the cross, to freely express, to put a rosary on the finger, to be able to show Christians simply, without fear of the risk of life. Is it trivial? (...). Because the right to faith must be defended for all, must be protected for all, everyone has the right to express faith in the respect of their traditions, their culture, their faith. And we must help those who are all free to express in faith, to welcome Christians who in many parts of the world today find it hard to express faith. And then we try to express the closeness to all ... in a network like I told you before, but above all to allow him to pray and then the celebrations with them really become a source of emotion, to be able to return to celebrate the Eucharist, not in the basements, not secretly, but with the open doors of the church. (Man – Religious leader – Catholic Christian)

(...) in my opinion, a kind of brainwashing, which actually has an opposite effect, in the sense that they do this to force you, but you overcome it only as an exam, afterwards you do not remember what you had studied. And ... then nothing. Instead I do not know a thing that ... I found a lot in common here, then when I was studying at the academy, I saw my friends who were mostly Catholic. Then they did all these paths of the Catholics, like communion ... then, when it was enough, they no longer went to church ... that is, it seems to me, I do not know, maybe I'm wrong, maybe not, but it seems to me that they were like me, maybe I did all these things in my Islam, I did things because I had to do them ... (Woman – Iran – Protestant Christian [former Muslim])

On the other hand, as suggested by this pastoral operator, it is exactly by welcoming newcomers that established religious communities lay the foundations of a peaceful coexistence, inspired by the values of humanism, which are the same that gave life to the European democracies:

(...) the custom, for example, of welcoming, sharing the same churches (*with the Orthodox, author's note*) is the best way to actually transmit the kind of attitude we have, so the bishops themselves remain open-mouthed to hear the description of what happens here and this, in my opinion, is one of the signs that we distribute and that we will see how they will flourish, but the reception is something that never remains fruitless. (Man – Pastoral operator – Catholic Christian)

Finally, moving on to considering the third paradigmatic pattern of citizenship's practice, this young Bahá'í offers a brilliant example of an approach

based on the concept of *loyalty*. Her personal engagement with (Italian) children, independently of their religion, reflects an authentic desire to participate in the settlement society, and to contribute in the creation of a common good.

This particular activity that I do is a group that is called Youths' Group for middle school kids; we give a space for them. It does not matter what religion they come from, what background, what origin, it matters just to have a space together and try to pull out the virtues and the positive things that they have within them and put them into practice to help others. So, channeling positive energy that these kids have, put them into practice to be useful for society, to improve the environment they live. So every week we see each other and read a book that is a storybook of children of their age and then we talk about different concepts, such as justice, peace, unity, these things, and then we also have a moment of practice, then do something for our environment – for example, going to clean the park, going to visit the elderly center, to give them a way to serve, to do something for their environment. And I like this a lot, because I live with them and it's a lot of fun, they have lots of energy and then you can see how you can help these kids, because society considers them ... that they are very ... they are in an age that is very difficult, let's say ... instead, when you trust them, they can do everything and this thing is very beautiful. (Woman – Iran – Bahá'í)

This kind of stance is the most coherent with a *generative idea of citizenship*, that is a citizenship able to embrace multiple identities, aimed at supporting the empowerment of people who mainly risk to be excluded, and fueled by participative practices oriented toward the common good (Martinelli, 2013). As a matter of fact, citizenship is a process: for everyone, but particularly for those who suffered from a sense of strangeness in their own land, and then have been experiencing the concept of hospitality. Several of our interviewees spoke about their path from a condition (and a feeling) of parasitic presence, of marginality with respect to the *polis* and its social plots, towards forms and practices of social protagonism. What's more, some interviews show that it is exactly the religious experience and the belonging to a religious community that promotes a generative virtue in relation to the common good, since they activate and encourage training in practical forms of citizenship: from the education of the children to the care of the environment, from the responsibility for a working activity to the tax contribution for the well-being of the country in which “you feel at home”. As a matter of fact, as we have already mentioned,

this stance is strongly favored by a spiritual understanding of one's own life-experience, including the experience of suffering and of (forcibly) migrating. At the same time, as suggested by this pastoral operator, it represents the accomplishment of the most authentic (migrants') spiritual need: the need to give something to those in need; more particularly, to share, with those who have not yet discovered it, the true meaning of life:

(...) I saw it just as a satisfaction of her spiritual need: that of giving something to those who have less than her. This is already a person ... she does not work, but the fact that she felt ... and told us: "But, you are really precious, because you give us the idea, the support, the support, but also the cue to throw us out. And do us too, because we are a little hesitant in another city. We are not rooted, no?". Here, and this seems to us the most satisfying ... of the greatest spirituality because to teach people or not to teach, I have nothing to teach, but to tell them how life must be lived well. (Woman – FBOS operator – Christian Catholic)

It is almost superfluous to observe that this type of posture is not the natural result of living in a democratic context. Numerous variables influence the relationship between religiosity and the attitude towards the host society and its well-being: from the values transmitted by the parents to the personal way of elaborating the migratory experience; from the behavior of the people met in Italy to the attitude of religious leaders. Their singular combination explains the multiplicity of possible individual feelings and behaviors. However, our study allowed us to grasp the importance of certain societal conditions and actions. Among them, the contrast to the widespread "religious illiteracy" and the education to religious pluralism. In particular, regaining the awareness of "our" –i.e. the Italian one, strongly shaped by Christianity– cultural and religious identity constitutes the indispensable premise for the construction of a society founded on authentic religious pluralism oriented towards the common good. We will analyze this point in Chapter 16, through the illustration of the synodal experience conducted in the Diocese of Milan. Here, it must be observed how this premise represents, in its turn, a supportive condition to let migrants and refugees contribute to the creation of a multi-religious social capital.