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Francesca Scrinzi

European University Institute
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
Global Governance Programme

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Abstract

Protestant Evangelical churches are expanding in the global South. In Europe too, while Christian confessions such as Catholicism and 'mainline' Protestant churches are losing worshippers, migration-driven Evangelical churches, especially Pentecostals, are growing. This paper investigates the role of faith and Evangelical churches in helping migrants to negotiate class demotion and integration, attain respectability and resist racialization. The paper applies a gender perspective to the study of the narratives and practices of Latin American men and women who are members of an Evangelical church in Italy. It finds that the church provides its members with gendered norms, enabling men and women to identify with valued models of feminine/masculine Christian morality and respectability. Through religious participation, migrants members may dissociate from dominant stigmatising representations of Latin American drunkards, 'gangs', 'broken families' and 'bad mothers' as well as from Pentecostal religious practices, which are regarded as 'unorthodox' in Italy. The paper also identifies generational differences in the way in which migrants make use of Evangelical religion to resist racism. Finally, the analysis points to ambivalent processes of 'domestication' of migrant men and of migrant women's agency, which combine with an overall resilient gendered asymmetry in the distribution of power in the church.

Keywords

We are witnessing a shift of Christianity from the global North to the global South. Protestant Evangelical[1], particularly Pentecostal, churches are expanding in the global South, associated with socio-economic disadvantage but increasingly affecting also the socially mobile middle-classes[2]. Whereas in 1900 over 80% of all Christians lived in Europe and Northern America, by 2005 this proportion had fallen to under 40%, and will likely fall below 30% before 2050[3]. As Christianity continues to decline in the Global North, Africans, Asians and Latin Americans have become more typical representatives of Christianity than Americans or Europeans. In 2014, Latin America passed Europe as the continent with the most Christians. In 1900, Europe had six times as many Christians as Latin America[4]. In Europe, while Christian confessions such as Catholicism and 'mainline' Protestant churches are losing worshippers, migration-driven Evangelical churches, especially Pentecostals, are growing. In Italy today, migrant Christianity accounts for one of the major forces in the country's growing religious pluralism. According to Caritas Migrantes, among the 5.011.307 migrants regularly residing in Italy, 53.9% are Christians (2.702.074); 32.9% are Muslims (1.650.902); 2.6% are Hindus (131.254); and 1.9% are Buddhist (97.362)[5]. Estimations on the number of Protestant migrants in Italy range from 212,000[6] to 260,000 individuals, coming from Romania, Latin America and Africa[7].

Compared with Islam, which has been made hyper-visible in public and scholarly debates over the past decades, Evangelical migrants are nearly invisible yet they fully participate in the tensions underpinning religious pluralism in Europe. Existing studies of migration and religion in Europe focus mainly on Muslims[8], especially through policy analysis and theoretical/historical discussion, and only to a lesser extent on other confessions[9]. Evangelical migrants occupy a peculiar position in context of the processes of secularization and 'unchurching' of Europe: while they may be perceived as anti-modernist, they share the Christian belonging with non-migrant citizens. They may appear as a reassuring Christian presence, as opposed to Muslims; or may be stigmatised as retrograde. They appear as the Christian racialised Others, providing a mirror in which Europe can reflect itself and re-examine Eurocentric/androcentric definitions of Christianity.

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[1] Scholars studying Evangelicalism may use different categories (Evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Protestant, etc.): this is due to the fragmented and locally-organised nature of these churches. Further these churches are defined by different histories and institutional arrangements in each country. Here I will use the distinction propose by the Pew Research Center (Washington), between, on the one hand, mainline Protestant historical churches (originated from the Reform) and, on the other, Evangelical churches. These have more recent origins; they are characterized by an emphasis on the personal experience of conversion and the encounter with God - the 'born-again' experience - as well as by religious activism aimed at converting others. Evangelicalism includes some Pentecostal churches, which emphasise the blessings of the Holy Spirit, such as glossolalia and healing practices; thus Evangelical may be Pentecostal but not all Pentecostal are Evangelical. Pentecostalism has been defined as an 'emotional Protestantism'. See J.-P. Willaime (1999) 'Le Pentecôtisme : contours et paradoxes d'un protestantisme émotionnel', *Archives des sciences sociales des religions*, n. 105, pages 5-28.

[2] A. Corten and R. Marshall-Fratani (2001) *Between Babel and Pentecost*, Indiana University Press; J. García-Ruiz and P. Michel (2012) *Et Dieu sous-traita le Salut au marché*, Armand Colin; D. Martin (2004) 'Evangelical Expansion in Global Society', in Lewis, D. (ed.), *Christianity Reborn*, Eerdmans.

[3] Center for the Study of Global Christianity (2013) *Christianity in its Global Context, 1970–2020. Society, Religion, and Mission*, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, USA.

[4] Todd M. Johnson, Gina A. Zurlo, Albert W. Hickman, and Peter F. Crossing (2016) 'Christianity 2016: Latin America and Projecting Religions to 2050', *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, 40(1), 22–29.

[5] Caritas/Migrantes (2012) *XIII Rapporto Immigrazione*, Roma.

[6] M. Introvigne and P. Zoccatelli (eds) (2015) *Le religioni in Italia*, CESNUR, http://www.cesnur.com/

[7] P. Naso, A. Passerelli and T. Pispisa (2014) Fratelli e sorelle di Jerry Maslo. L'immigrazione evangelica in Italia, Torino: Claudiana.

[8] F. J. Buijs and J. Rath (2006) 'Muslims in Europe: The state of research', *IMISCOE Working papers*.

[9] P. Bramadat and M. Koening, eds (2009) *International Migration and the Governance of Religious Diversity*, McGill University Press, pages 2-3.

Existing studies of migration and Evangelical churches have examined their role as 'brokers' of integration and as providers of Refuge, Respectability and Resources[10], both engaging with host society actors and entertaining transnational relations[11]. These churches provide migrants with symbolic resources for positive self-identification[12]; they also materially sustain the migrants, providing services such as job search, childcare and linguistic/professional training. Evangelical Churches are crucial spaces in the migrants' lives beyond the religious sphere to affect family, employment, education, health and political participation[13] as well as spaces where they interact with co-ethnics, other migrants and natives; and where second-generation migrants are socialised[14]. Studies of migration-driven Evangelicalism in Europe thus provide important qualitative data on identity formation and sociability *within* the churches as well as in transnational religious networks, including how these are embedded in local markets in the global South[15]. However they have not systematically analysed the connection between Evangelical churches, as agents of integration, and the host society context. What was noted with regard to scholarship on migration and religion in the USA can be said of the current growing literature on Evangelical migrants in Europe: there is a lack of studies on how religion shapes the migrants' lives in other social spheres beyond the religious organisation, such as employment[16]. Yet the specific ways in which migrants are included into post-industrial labour markets and affected by unemployment are central to their experiences of marginalisation and prospects for social mobility.

How do migrant women and men mobilise their religious beliefs and networks to negotiate respectability and to resist racism? This paper offers some initial findings of an on-going research project that investigates the role of faith and Evangelical churches in helping migrants negotiate integration, resist racialization and class demotion in Italy. The paper applies a gender perspective to the study of the narratives and practices of Latin American men and women who are members of an Evangelical church in Italy; it also identifies generational differences in the way in which migrants make use of Evangelical religion to make sense of their lives and their strategies to attain respectability.

Evangelical migrants and gender in Europe

A series of qualitative studies of Evangelical migrants in Europe have focused on issues of gender. This is not surprising because of what has been termed the 'gender paradox[17]' of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity. Evangelical movements world-wide are highly feminised yet they tend to hold conservative positions in the matter of gender, the family and sexuality. In these churches the promotion of traditional models of motherhood and the exclusion of women from institutional roles as pastors may combines with sexist assumptions according to which women are especially endowed with spiritual gifts. Indeed, the singing, dancing and the ecstatic experience, associated with spiritual

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[10]   C. Hirschman (2004) 'The role of religion in the origin and adaptation of immigrant groups in the United States', *IMR* 38(3).

[11]   R. van Dijk (1997) 'Discourses of transsubjectivity in the Ghanaian Pentecostal diaspora', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 23(2).

[12]   A. Ugba (2009) *Shades of belonging*, African World Press.

[13]   C. Menjivar (2003) 'Religion and immigration in comparative perspective', *Sociology of Religion* 64(1).

[14]   R. Burgess (2011) 'Bringing Back the Gospel', *Journal of Religion in Europe* 4.

[15]   R. Van Dijk (1997), *op. cit.*; G. Hüwelmeier and Krause K. (2010) *Traveling spirits*, Routledge; L. Endelstein et al. (2010) *Dieu change en ville*, Harmattan; S. Coleman (1993) 'Protestantism and the World Order' *Sociology of Religion* 54; D. Garbin (2014) 'Regrounding the sacred', *Global Networks* 14(3).

[16]   W. Cadge and E. Ecklund (2007) 'Immigration and religion', *Annual Review of Sociology* 33.

[17]   B. Martin (2007) 'The Pentecostal Gender Paradox: A Cautionary Tale for the Sociology of Religion', in: Richard K. Fenn (ed.) *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Malden.

gifts, are central to these religious movements: these emotional religious expressions are constructed as 'naturally feminine'. In Evangelical and Pentecostal confessions gender hierarchies are sacralised, but religion can be used by female members to access forms of autonomy which may subvert the existing gender order. These strategies are favoured by the fact that in these churches, which are rather unstructured organisations, there is a rather loose relationship between ecclesiastical office and sacred power: this is associated with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are widely available, to men as well as to women. According to the typology elaborated by Linda Woodhead[18], which identifies various religions in relation to gender, Evangelicalism is more likely than other confessions to be used as 'tactical religion': in highly conservative religious organisations, such as Evangelical churches, female members can make use of the spaces which are assigned to them in order to deal with the costs of the subordination which they experience[19].

The migratory context can favour such re-negotiations and re-interpretations of religious teachings about the different roles and obligations of men and women and the development of alternative practices, such as the emergence of female pastors, because it involves a pluralisation of norms and the re-organisation of the gendered division of work. Existing studies of Evangelical migrants and gender show how these churches operate as sites where gender conflicts are negotiated and women may be empowered[20]. Pentecostal rituals may function as 'technologies of gender[21]', enabling men and women to accommodate with understandings of gender and with shifting patterns of the gendered division of work in the immigration context. Further, because of the Evangelical emphasis on family values, conversion involves a 'reformation of machismo'[22] and a process of 'domestication' of men involving their socialisation to domestic tasks, which produces economic and material benefits for their wives and children. Other studies, focusing on Pentecostal migrant churches in the USA, show that, despite the Evangelical conservative teachings and gendered norms, male conversion induces more egalitarian gender relations both in the church and in the home; and that the Pentecostal conservative sexual ethics applies equally to women and men[23]. However, other studies have unveiled that women's resistance to gendered inequalities combines with their cooperation in the reproduction of patriarchy in these churches[24].

Further, issues of gender are key in constructing the relationships between migrants joining pre-existing mainline Evangelical churches one the one hand, and, on the other, the native Evangelicals who are members of these churches in Europe. I call 'ethnic churches' subsidiary 'ethnic' branches with alternative rituals, spaces and languages that have been created *within* pre-existing (Protestant mainline) churches to cater for migrant members in host countries[25]. Arrangements are diverse however these 'ethnic' branches are *de facto* trans-denominational (their migrant members self-identify as Baptists, Pentecostals, Evangelicals…) and provide migrants with some autonomy for religious self-organisation including migrant pastors, yet they enable the 'native' religious leadership

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[18] L. Woodhead (2007) 'Gender Differences in Religious Practice and Significance', James Beckford, N. J. Demerath III (eds), *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Malden.

[19] R. Marie Griffith (1997), *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

[20] G. Hüwelmeier (2010) 'Female believers on the move', in Bonifacio G. and V. Angeles, (eds), *Gender, Religion and Migration*, Lanham: Lexington Books.

[21] J. Rey (2013) 'Mermaids and Spirit Spouses: Rituals as Technologies of Gender in Transnational African Pentecostal Spaces', *Religion and Gender*. 3(1), 60–75.

[22] E. Brusco (1995), *The Reformation of Machismo*, University of Texas Press.

[23] L. A. Lorentzen and R. Mira (2005), 'El milagro esta en casa', *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 32 n. 1, pages 57-71.

[24] Kelly H. Chong (2006) 'Negotiating Patriarchy. South Korean Evangelical Women and the Politics of Gender, *Gender & Society*, 20(6), 697-724.

[25] M. Griera (2008), 'Are you a real Christian?', *Etnográfica* 12(2), http://etnografica.revues.org/1787 Drawing on this publication, the category 'ethnic churches' is used in this paper for convenience.

to maintain control of the organisation and its public representation while sustaining membership growth. Indeed, Evangelical 'ethnic churches' are located halfway between, on the one hand, the pre-existing 'native' Protestant churches, and on the other the 'migrant independent Evangelical churches' founded and led by migrant individuals or missionaries as franchises of 'multinational' churches from the global South. The former are middle-class and have formal relationship with national institutions; the latter cater for working-class believers and tend to be precarious, located in suburbs, with little ties with 'autochthonous' churches; they are also powerful actors in transnational networks, and identify not on ethnic/national but universal Christian bases[26]. Migrant independent churches, particularly African ones, tend to be ascribed to cultural/class difference by 'native' churches and face problems in being legalised and formally integrated into the Protestant associations' 'establishment'; relationships between 'native' and migrant churches are fraught with racism and fear that the migrants' 'unorthodox' rituals (such as the Pentecostal practices of speaking in tongue and healing rituals) might undermine the public legitimacy of a minority faith such as Italian Protestantism[27]. Crucially, negotiations between the native religious leadership and the migrant members concern issues of gender, the family and sexuality: Evangelical 'Southern' Christianity tends to be more conservative on moral issues than Protestant churches in Europe[28]. However significant exceptions exist and divergent positions on moral issues exist also in European Protestantism[29]. It should also be noted that moral issues may be an 'instrumental' marker used by religious actors to position themselves and forge alliances in the national/international religious field[30].

Latin American migration, racialisation and gender in Italy

Migration from Latin American countries is associated with the collapse of national economies under the impact of neoliberal policies and the declining life conditions in urban contexts, at the turn of the new millennium; at that time, Ecuador experienced job loss, the reduction of collective support and an increase in poverty which had no precedents in the history of Latin America[31]. Latin Americans have migrated to Europe from the 1970s and 1980s, due to political exile. From 2000 onwards, the number of Latin Americans escaping economic difficult conditions in their home countries to make a living in the USA and in Europe has exponentially grown. Their education levels tend to be relatively high (university or secondary school); these migratory flows are largely feminised[32]. Most Latin American migrants in Europe have settled in Spain and in Italy due to historical and linguistic ties as well as thanks to the important role played by the Catholic Church in mediating and favouring these migratory flows to Southern Europe. In Italy, after a sharp increase at the beginning of the 2000s, the presence of Latin American migrants has remained stable. Today, Latin Americans are not listed amongst top ten most represented migrant groups in Italy. However, if we consider data on female migrants only, Peruvian and Ecuadorian women reach the 9th and 10th positions, with almost 60,000 and 54,000

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[26] G. ter Haar (2008) 'Enchantment and identity: African Christians in Europe', *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* n. 143.

[27] M. Griera (2008), *op. cit.*; G. ter Haar (2008) *op. cit.*; K. Krause (2011) 'Cosmopolitan charismatics?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34(3); M. Wood and J. Eade (2014) 'La construction des religions publiques', in Y. Fer et G. Malogne-Fer (eds) *Le protestantisme évangélique à l'épreuve des cultures*, Harmattan.

[28] P. Jenkins (2007) The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity, Oxford University Press.

[29] J.-P. Willaime (2013) 'Diversité protestante et homosexualité', in F. Rochefort et M.E. Sanna, F. (eds) *Normes religieuses et genre. Mutations, resistances et reconfiguration XIXe-XXIe siècle*, Paris, Armand Colin.

[30] C. Brittain and A. McKinnon (2011) 'Homosexuality and the Construction of 'Anglican Orthodoxy'', *Sociology of Religion* 72(3).

[31] A. Acosta (2005) 'L'esodo ecuadoriano fra crisi economica, immaginari sociali e famiglie transnazionali', in M. Ambrosini and L. Queirolo Palmas (eds), *I Latinos alla scoperta dell'Europa*, Milano: Franco Angeli.

[32] C. McIlwaine (2011) *Cross-border Migration among Latin Americans*, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

present respectively[33]; in Italy, 63.4% of all Latin American migrants are women[34]. In the Liguria region, Ecuadorians are among the first three most represented nationalities (together with Albanians and Moroccans). Most Ecuadorian migrants in Liguria live in Genoa and are female[35].

Drawing on their widespread networks of parishes and associations, Catholic institutions have been at the forefront of migration management in Italy, often filling the political vacuum in terms of organisational, financial, and spiritual assistance to migrants alongside other civil society organisations. In particular, the Catholic Church's has historically held a role as a mediator of female (internal and international) migrants' inclusion into the domestic/care service sector in this country. Parishes and Catholic associations provide services of recruitment, training and administrative support for migrant care/domestic workers[36]. The Church may also act to select and orient emigration from the home countries, such as Latin American countries, towards Italy, more specifically channelling women (and men) into paid domestic and care work[37]. Indeed, in Italy Latin Americans are over-represented in paid and domestic work, constituting 8% of migrants but 33% of those employed in this sector[38]. In addition, Catholic religious institutions are important political actors in public debates and politics on immigration and multiculturalism in Italy[39].

In this context, gendered constructions stigmatising or idealising sections of the migrant/racialised population are predicated upon a distinction between the private space of the home, where migrants – both female and male – are made invisible and tolerated, and the public space, the appropriation of which by (male and female) migrants tends to be stigmatised. Religion is also central to the construction of such gendered and ethno-cultural distinctions between the 'good' migrants that are easy to integrate and those whose integration is deemed impossible because – it is assumed - their culture and religion are radically different and do not fit Western liberal democratic standards. In a Catholic majority society such as Italy, where national belonging is closely associated with Catholicism[40], ideas of 'religious proximity'/'distance' are mobilised to legitimate the insertion of migrants into 3-D jobs (dirty, dangerous and demanding). Indeed, widespread stereotypes depict domestic/care workers from Catholic countries, such as Latin Americans and Filipinos – who are also mostly women and whose inclusion into domestic/care service jobs is also channelled by the Church –

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[33] ISTAT (2013). *Rapporto annuale 2013*, Rome: ISTAT.

[34] Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS/Immigrazione Dossier Statistico (2014), *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2014*, Rome.

[35] Caritas/Migrantes (2012) *op. cit.*

[36] E. Gallo and F. Scrinzi (2016) *Migration, Masculinities and Reproductive Labour. Men of the Home*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

[37] Italy systematically relies on (mainly female) migrant labour to fill the gaps of its limited Welfare state. In 2010, 1,538,000 care workers were employed by Italian households, corresponding to a 42 percent rise compared with 2001: 82.6 percent were female and 71.6 were migrants. See CENSIS (2010) 'Rischi e prevenzione per i lavoratori domestici', *Note & Commenti* n. 9, http://www.censis.it/12?relational_resource_77=108452&resource_66=108452&relational_resource_397=108452&relational_resource_410=108452&relational_resource_411=108452&relational_resource_412=108452&relational_resource_413=108452 With one of the highest rates of elderly inhabitants in the world and generous monetary transfers supporting the demand for private home-based elderly care, Italy has been identified as exemplifying a form of 'migrant-in–the family system', where cash-for-care allowances have resulted in families outsourcing care services to paid migrant care workers. See F. Bettio, Simonazzi, A., and Villa, P. (2006) 'Change in Care Regimes and Female Migration: the 'Care Drain' in the Mediterranean'. *Journal of European Social Policy* 16(3), pages 271-85.

[38] S. Pasquinelli and G. Rusmini (eds) (2013). Badare non basta. Il lavoro di cura: attori, progetti, politiche, Roma: Ediesse.

[39] X. Itçaina (2006) 'The Roman Catholic Church and the Immigration Issue'. *American Behavioural Scientist* 49(11): 1471-1488.

[40] E. Pace (2013) 'Achilles and the tortoise. A society monopolized by Catholicism faced with an unexpected religious pluralism'. *Social Compass* 60(3): 315–331.

as a useful and docile presence[41]. Eastern Europeans – also a feminised migrant group - because of their religious proximity with their Italian employers, are considered as good care workers who treat the elderly with respect and dignity[42]. In Italy, other migrants are highly visible in the public space and tend to be stigmatised and sexualised. Migrant men, especially Muslim and Romani men, tend to be seen as violent, misogynist, rapists or criminals. Gender functions as a 'catalyst'[43] and justification for the racialising stigmatisation of migrant men.

Thus gender is key to the social construction of Otherness as well as the representation of of criminality, danger and victimhood. The definition of public (masculine) and private (feminine) spaces is key to these contemporary processes of gendered racialisation of migrants in Italy and more broadly in Europe. Since public spaces serve as a 'stage for constructions of difference and sameness'[44], the 'hyper-visibility' of racialised men means that their gendered appropriation of public spaces is stigmatised as a deviant racial practice. The construction of the migrants' masculinity lies at the core of an 'apocalyptic crime talk' which associates racialised men with gendered deviant behaviours, especially in the public sphere[45]. Indeed, the process of re-masculinisation of Latin American migration in Italy and in Spain due to the increase of family reunion of children and spouses in the 2000s has been associated with changes in the perception of these migrants as 'culturally close' to the Italians and the emergence of a 'moral panic' about Latin American migrant men in the public space[46]. A public discourse has emerged over the 2000s which represents Latin American men as used to drinking and fights. Latin America male youth – arrived through family reunion - was made hypervisible in the media and associated with the criminal and deviant behaviours of 'gangs' (*pandillas*) imported from the home countries; media narratives and public discourses emphasised gender-specific deviant behaviour for boys[47] and girls, as the latter were associated with teenage pregnancies and stigmatised as sexually active at an early age[48]. Both boys and girls were associated with school failure. Reflecting the conditions of migrant and racialised youth in other European countries, young Latin Americans in Italy are affected by a greater vulnerability and precariousness if compared with the native working-class youth, along similar trends: an early departure from the school system, the need of economically supporting their own parents and siblings, and the orientation towards vocational training education. The racialisation of 'Latin American gangs' and 'urban tribes' in the 2000s in Italy has constructed these phenomena as an expression of ethnic difference; instead, the ways in which they are inscribed in structural inequalities pertaining to class, racism and gender are made invisible. Drop-out from school of these young migrants is linked to their insertion into the 'gangs' rather than to racist discrimination and to the limited economic and cultural capital that is available to them. Similarly, in the UK the involvement of racialised young men in anti-social behaviour in public spaces is analysed as a 'protest masculinity' in which these men call for respect from their peers to compensate for the indignity of exclusion from employment, a major attribute of

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[41] F. Scrinzi (2013) Genre, migrations et emplois de care en France et en Italie, Paris: Editions Pétra ; E. Gallo and F. Scrinzi (2016), Migration, Masculinities and Reproductive Labour. Men of the Home, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

[42] G. Lamura, H. Döhner, C.Kofahl, (eds) (2008) Family Carers of Older People in Europe. A Six-Country Comparative Study (Hamburg: Lit Verlag).

[43] S. Woodcock (2010) 'Gender as catalyst for violence against Roma in Italy'. *Patterns of Prejudice* 44(5): 469–488: 478.

[44] P. Ehrkamp (2008) 'Risking publicity. Masculinities and the racialisation of public neighbourhood space'. *Social & Cultural Geography* 9(2): 117-33: 119.

[45] J. Schneider and J. Schneider (2008) 'The anthropology of crime and criminalisation'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37: 351-73.

[46] S. Castellani, L. Queirolo Palmas and F. Lagomarsino (2014) 'La banda y la iglesia', in *Periferias, Fronteras y Diálogos*, Universitat Rovira I Virgili, pages 936-962.

[47] 'Genova, torna l'incubo "pandillas"', *Il Secolo XIX*, 31st January 2016, http://www.ilsecoloxix.it/p/genova/2016/01/31/AS24DkOB-genova_pandillas_incubo.shtml

[48] C. Pagnotta and L. Stagi (2010) 'Il genere delle organizzazioni di strada' in E. Colombo (ed.) *Figli di migranti in Italia*, pages 139-176.

hegemonic masculinity and adulthood[49]. Transgression and deviant behaviour of these young men (and by a minority of young women in these 'street organisations') in the public space are represented as the pathological outcome of immigration and the failed integration of culturally different groups. Moreover, conflictive youth is explained through its being raised in dysfunctional migrant families.

This symbolic treatment of female-led Latin American families in Italy echoes the political and media discourse in the home countries. Ecuadorian government's officials and the media stigmatizes transnational families as 'broken families' and transnational mothers as 'bad mothers'; more particularly, these discourses emphasize the pathological effects that the international migration of women has on the children left-behind. Specific publicly funded social programmes have been developed in Ecuador to address these issues, more specifically the deviant behaviour of young women and men whose *mothers* (not fathers) are absent, such as being involved in 'gangs' for boys and teenage pregnancy for girls[50]. The transnational social ties that women (and men) construct to accommodate for physical separation and emotional losses are overlooked in this dominant representation[51]. In reality, transnational networks of care may rely on local resources and on unpaid and paid care (female and male) providers which cross geographical spaces and generations[52], surpassing the 'mother-child dyad'[53] which is implicit in these stigmatizing discourses on transnational motherhood/families.

This section has highlighted how in Italy, in the context of a gendered and racialised division of work, pertaining more specifically to the massive insertion of Latin American women into paid care/domestic work, gender-specific processes of racialisation affect Ecuadorians. This discussion of racism and gender in the context of Latin American migration in Italy thus provides the background against which my Ecuadorian informants live, work and participate in religious practices in the city of Genoa.

Methodology

This paper presents some preliminary findings of a two-year on-going research project[54]. To date, the data collection has not yet been completed; the paper relies on ten biographical interviews with female and male Latin American migrant members of an Evangelical church (most of whom come from Ecuador) based in Genoa, a medium-sized town in Northern Italy. I have also conducted participant observations at Sunday worships as well as at the meetings of various cell groups of the church (women's cell group, youth cell groups, Bible study cell group, evangelisation cell group, and the local cell group which includes the few Italian members of the church).

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[49] McDowell, L., Rootham, E. and Hardgrove, A. (2014) 'Precarious work, protest masculinity and communal regulation', *Work, Employment and Society* 28(6), 847-864.

[50] G. Herrera (2011) 'Rethinking the Family through Migration', in C. McIlwaine (2011) *Cross-border Migration among Latin Americans*, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 53-70.

[51] J. Pribilsky (2004) 'Aprendemos a convivir': conjugal relations, co-parenting, and family life among Ecuadorian transnational migrants in New York City and the Ecuadorian Andes', *Global Networks* 4, 3, 313–334.

[52] E. Gallo and F. Scrinzi (2016), *Migration, Masculinities and Reproductive Labour. Men of the Home*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

[53] G. Herrera (2011), 'Rethinking the Family through Migration', in C. McIlwaine (2011) *Cross-border Migration among Latin Americans*, NY: Palgrave MacMillan: 62.

[54] The wider research project (*MIGRANTCHRISTIANITY. Migration, Religion and Work in Comparative Perspective: Evangelical 'ethnic churches' in Southern Europe*, Marie Sklodowska-Curie Research Fellowship, European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies/Global Governance Programme, 2015-2018) aims at investigating how Evangelical churches (at the meso-level) mediate the effects of the structural context, including immigration policies and labour markets, on the individuals' lives, and contribute to construct representations of migrant Christianity, in specific local/national contexts in two different countries: the cities of Genoa and Verona in Italy and of Madrid and Vic in Spain.

The 'ethnic church' which is the object of this study will be called *Iglesia*. It was founded in 1992 to cater for the growing presence of Ecuadorian and Peruvian believers in Genoa; it originated from the separation of these Latin American believers from the pre-existing local Waldensian church. The *Iglesia* had a Spanish male pastor who is still very active in leading the *Iglesia*, even if a new (female) pastor, the pastor's Italian wife, has now taken over from him. The 'native' Waldensian church and the *Iglesia* share the main space used for their Sunday worships (using it respectively in the morning and in the evening) but the *Iglesia* has now a 'cultural centre' – a flat near the church which its members use for the gatherings of the various cell groups' as well as for religious activities such as collective prayers and wakes. The members of the 'native' church and of the 'ethnic' church rarely meet; however they all attend the training activities and workshops organized by the pastor and addressed for instance to lay religious leaders in both churches or to those who coordinate cell groups. The pastor is actively engaged in the project of making the *Iglesia* a 'multicultural' space. In the Sunday worships, he addresses the community of believers emphasising the need for fully integrating into the Italian society and for maintaining the *Iglesia* as an interdenominational, multinational and bilingual church. He promotes the practice of Italian/Spanish bilingualism in worship and in the gatherings of the various cell groups, against the inclination of some of the older members. In this respect, the (native, non-Latin American) leadership in the *Iglesia* reflects the position of the national Protestant federation: 'ethnic churches' are seen as a space for integration of migrants into the Italian society.

The *Iglesia* includes members who converted to Evangelicalism in Italy and others who were members of Evangelical churches in Latin America, including many coming from Pentecostal churches. Tensions emerge with regard to issues of the family, sexuality and moral teachings; for instance, some members consider that the pastor's positions are too liberal in the matter of unmarried couples who attend the worship; they are critical of the fact that the pastor smokes; and criticize the use of 'disrespectful' choreographies and dances during the worship (these are performed by the youth cell group with banners, music and singing). The aspiration of some (older) members coming from Latin American Pentecostal churches to practice glossolalia (speaking in tongues) and a more 'emotional' style of worship were accommodated to some extent, through establishing separate spaces/times of prayer for these rituals. For example, night wakes held at the 'cultural centre' enable some of the members to devote themselves to expressions of faith which may involve crying and speaking in tongues; however the pastor made it clear that these practices are not welcome during the Sunday worship which is attended by most of the community. These developments reflect those of other 'churches in diaspora', which are necessarily theologically open and hold a heteroclite style of religious service, to accommodate diverse expectations from members of different religious origins and theological background[55].

Overall the style of worship is very different from that practice in the 'native' Waldensian church. An important part of the *Iglesia* gatherings – whether those of the cell groups or the Sunday worship - are devoted to praying. Religious gatherings involve music and singing: some members sing their prayers using a microphone while others play (pop) music with electric basses, guitars and drums. Praying in the *Iglesia* thus means singing to live music, clapping and raising hands; or taking the floor and reciting prayers while the rest of the group listen; the members pray with their eyes closed and holding hands, often standing up in a circle. In the worship as well as in the cell groups' gatherings, the songs' lyrics together with images are displayed on a large screen for everybody to read and sing. The songs' lyrics use the words of romantic pop songs to celebrate the believers' love for God. Similarly, many informants used the repertoire of romantic love and of couple relationships to describe their personal encounter with God (for instance, some referred to people who had converted as '*enamorados de Dios*'), and the daily intimate connection and dialogue which they maintained with God. The few Italian converts who are members of the *Iglesia* (these are men married to Latin American women) suggest that in this Evangelical 'ethnic church' they found there what they lacked

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[55] O. Sheringham (2011) 'Everyday Transnationalism', in C. McIlwaine (2011) *Cross-border Migration among Latin Americans*, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 235-254.

in their Catholic religious practice; they consider Catholicism as a formal, ritualized and superficial religiosity, while they feel that in the *Iglesia* faith is 'for real', and is experienced intensely and daily.

Respectability and Evangelical masculinities and femininities

This section is concerned with the ways in which the *Iglesia* provides its members with gender-specific models of Christian morality which they use to negotiate gendered processes of racialisation in Genoa. This section is based on observations conducted in gatherings of female non-mixed as well as of mixed cell groups' of the *Iglesia* and on interviews with female and male members.

To begin with, the data suggests that the women's cell group promotes a certain model of 'Christian femininity' among Latin American women, questioning to some extent traditional femininity but also criticising the 'immoral' and individualistic femininity which is attributed to Italian women. The women's cell group gathers twice a month. Most members are women with children in their 50s or 60s who have arrived in Italy about fifteen years ago, when migration from Latin America to Italy intensified; a minority are younger (in their 30s and 40s). All the women I have interviewed so far had to leave their children and/or husbands in the home country to make a living in Italy; for years they have sent remittances back home; some have still transnational family responsibilities in terms of intergenerational care or economic support for their elderly parents. All of them work in Italy as elderly carers, cleaners, or baby-sitters. In this context, the women's group serves as a space of socialization and mutual support for highly isolated female live-in migrant care workers, especially in the first phase of migration, when Latin American women worked as live-in elderly-carers and had not yet had their families joined them through family reunion. Many of my female informants told me that, when they first arrived in Italy, they had very long working days and were very isolated. Those who were irregular migrants avoided public spaces as much as possible because of fear of police controls and rarely left the home. They saw few people and – at a time when Skype did not exist yet - talked to their family once a week over the phone. When they started to attend church, they found there a fictive family, largely made of other Latin American women who worked as care workers, which provided them with emotional and material support. In addition, they relies on the church as a provider of free childcare services as well as to find employment – mainly in the domestic/care services sector – through word-of-mouth. In addition, some women of the *Iglesia* organised a service to match demand and offer of paid care work, based on the informal networks of the church (including the Italian pastor and members of the 'native' *Chiesa Valdese* with which the *Iglesia* is associated and of which shares the spaces).

The women of the feminine cell group, called 'women's network', gather to pray but also to read and discuss the Bible; for instance, they discuss female Biblical characters and how these may be relevant to their own lives; they also have discussions focusing on specific issues: for example, a presentation on contraceptive and reproductive health given by a female doctor is planned. Some of the meetings which I attended aimed specifically at promoting the women's self-esteem. These sessions were organised by the group's leader and by one of the members, who acted as facilitator and gave a speech. These two (younger) women encouraged (older) women to take time for themselves instead of devoting themselves to their husbands and children all the time, thus challenging traditional gendered socialisation. The women were encouraged to think that they were not 'bad mothers' if, in addition to caring for their own families, they thought about themselves too. The talk did not question the so-called 'natural' women's role as mothers and wives in the domestic sphere but encouraged them to combine these roles with caring for themselves and their own needs. In particular, the sessions were aimed at countering the widespread experience of downgrading social mobility linked to migration and insertion into domestic and care services. Women were asked to say to the rest of the group what were their studies and skills; it appeared that many women abandoned their studies to get married in the home country and that they experienced class demotion because of migration. Several older women quit their jobs or studies when they got married members and had children; they had studied as or worked as secretaries, teachers, seamstresses before emigration. The female facilitator concluded

that it was clear that the women in the group were capable of doing many more things than just cleaning and caring for elderly people. At the same time, in the talk the facilitator took a distance from a model of (Italian) dominant middle-class femininity which she identified with egoism, vanity and immorality: it was suggested that Italian (middle-class) women don't care for their children and husbands, that they only think about their careers and never spend time in the home with their families; their lives are all about working or going to the gym or to the aesthetician's. In other meetings too, commenting the story of Anna, an infertile female character of the Bible, some members criticised those (Italian) women who devote their youth to the career and then rely on medically assisted procreation to have children when they are too old for that, suggesting that these women jeopardise the health of their babies because of egocentricity. Thus the *Iglesia* promotes a positive identification of Latin American women as 'Christian women' which can compensate for the downgrading social mobility of migrant domestic/care workers as well as for the stigmatisation experienced by these transnational mothers as 'bad mothers'.

Even if a men's cell group no longer exists in the *Iglesia*, observations conducted in Bible study groups and in evangelisation groups, where both male and female members are active, suggest that normative models of Christian masculinity inform the activities and participation of men in the church. As observed in other contexts[56], Evangelicalism is strongly focused on traditional family values and newly converted men are encouraged to get involved in childcare and to give up behaviours displaying dominant masculinity (acting as womanisers who drink and smoke and spend their time outside the home). In this context, Christian masculinity requires men to conform to an ethics where they are expected to act as good fathers and husbands and fulfil their responsibilities as breadwinners.

My male informants told me about their intense family life: Saturdays are devoted to spending time together with their wives and children, for instance going to the cinema or watching TV; Sundays are devoted to going to the worship and cell groups' gatherings (while the children attend the youth group's meeting or the Sunday school). The socialisation of their teenage boys and girls outside the family and outside the church is not approved by these fathers. Ricardo told me that his nephew was killed in a fight because he had fallen into 'bad acquaintances' at the time when his single mother was absent; he told me that the boy needed a father and that he would have liked to live with him and his wife, where he found a structured household with the rules and roles which he desperately needed. Abel has a young child and spends as much as time as possible in the family; he is an active member of the church and the leader of one of the local cell groups; a good part of his religious practice takes place at home; for example, he prays with his wife and son before taking dinner and early in the morning before going to work. Some men referred to the period of their life before conversion as a moment when they were 'lost': they used to get drunk and were unfaithful to their wives/partners. In the collective discussions in the meetings, these men often identified negatively vis-à-vis non-Christian Latin American men who live in Genoa, describing them as Godless people interested only in 'mundane' activities. Thus Latin American men invest the family and the domestic sphere as one important site of their religious activism while taking a distance from sinful and stigmatised Latin American masculinity displayed in the public space.

Further, both my male and female informants used religion to make sense of their insertion in paid care and domestic work. To some extent they considered caring for their elderly employers as a 'Christian calling' and explained that, because they are Christians, for them paid care work was not just a job: they did that 'with love'. Teresa told me that she used to tell her employers that, if needed, she can stay longer at night or in the weekend, because for her elderly care is more than her profession. Juan said that Italian employers tend to prefer Evangelical migrants because they know that they are honest and they can trust them. At the same time, however, Rosa and other women of the *Iglesia* pointed that being a Christian does not mean 'being stupid' or let the others take advantage of one's good will! They said that they expect respect from their employers and they know which are

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[56] E. Brusco (1995), *The Reformation of Machismo*, University of Texas Press.

their rights as workers. These arguments hold specific relevance for migrant men, for whom entering a feminised non-skilled job involves class demotion with strong gender implications. Echoing existing research findings[57], religious beliefs – and more particularly Christian values of self-sacrifice and dedication to the others - are thus important resource for these men to negotiate their sense of masculinity and their engagement in the 'dirty work' of caring, which may include feeding and bathing their employers.

It should be noted that men's 'domestication' through Evangelical conversion does not necessarily associate with egalitarianism in gender relations in the family and the church. So far the analysis draws an ambivalent picture. Some women have come to hold recognised roles in the church through an extension of the so-called 'feminine' responsibilities in the private sphere. For example, Rocio's story shows that Evangelical migrant women resist the downgrading social mobility which is involved in international migration by transferring the skills and experiences developed in their studies or in their professional lives before emigration to the religious sphere, and in so doing they may attain visibility and become respected figures in the church. Rocio studied to become a school teacher in Ecuador; she never worked however as a teacher because when she got married her husband did not want her to work; in Italy she works as a cleaner. She has been a teacher in Sunday school of the church for years and now coordinates the Sunday church activities. In the *Iglesia,* while various (single) female members attain visibility in the church and are given public responsibilities (such as treasurer, leaders of local cell groups and groups' facilitators), the participation of whole families in the church provides a more traditional picture: men act as heads of the household and hold the main religious roles. In family prayers, gender and generational relations structure religious practices as the home constitutes a small church, where the husband acts as the leader, his wife as the facilitator of prayers in an ancillary role, and the children take responsibility for praying. Similarly, in the church prayer meetings, married men tend to be leaders; married women however can replace their husbands in their 'masculine' roles of leading a cell group when these are absent. Thus overall in the *Iglesia* the 'gendered division of religious work[58]' seems to remain traditional, assigning women to tasks which are socially constructed as 'naturally feminine' and are seen as an extension of the women's domestic responsibilities – such as teaching children in the Sunday school or cooking for collective meals. Also, in prayer meetings and in Bible study groups, women pray for the group and facilitate the meetings while men preach and explain the Bible.

These findings echo existing studies suggesting that Latin American Evangelical female converts find in these churches a way to secure protection against violent partners and an opportunity to meet nicer and family-oriented men; and that in Jesus they find a new 'partner' filling the lack of love in their personal lives[59]. Beyond this, other scholars suggest that religion provides individuals with a space in which they can discover new understandings of personal freedom: Evangelical converts in Algeria experience their religious practice as 'freedom', choice and truth, as opposed to other religions, associated with exteriority and obligation[60]. For instance, one of my informants, Jessica, has gone through a series of painful events in her life, which included separating from her partner, raising

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[57] E. Gallo and F. Scrinzi (2016), *Migration, Masculinities and Reproductive Labour. Men of the Home*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

[58] B. de Gasquet (2010) 'Genre', in R. Azria et alii (eds), *Dictionnaire critique des faits religieux*, Paris, PUF.

[59] M. Maskens (2011) 'Récits de conversion, identité narrative et dispositif d'évangélisation pentecôtiste à Bruxelles', *Uzance* n. 1, 68-98.

[60] N. Marzouki (2012) 'Conversion as Statelessness: A Study of Contemporary Algerian Conversions to Evangelical Christianity', *Middle East Law and Governance* 4: 69–105. This is consistent with feminist analyses of religion criticising the liberal approach to secularism which is implicit in mainstream scholarly understandings of religion. This critical approach intends religion as a contextual process and as the result of a daily negotiations where religious norms are not predefined and external to the subject rather they constitute the moral self. This approach emphasises the materiality and embedded nature of religious norms in bodily practices. A. Fiorentini and G. Rebucini (2015), 'Saba Mahmood : pour une anthropologie critique du "déplacement"', *Tracés. Revue de Sciences humaines* n. 15.

her children on her own as a transnational mother, illness and the death of her elder son. Jessica regrets that she has not found another partner and that she is single; she said that it is difficult that she will find a man because of all her personal problems, but she is 'married to Jesus' and she is not alone in that respect. Conversion for her was the discovery that Jesus loves *her*; a former Catholic believer, she said that the Catholic Church lags behind the Evangelical church when it comes to making people feel that God does love them. She said that, despite all her problems, she is not going to give up her faith: religion gives her the strength to overcome all her personal issues to choose to reassert her beliefs.

Gender, respectability and Evangelical conversion in migrant youth trajectories

The previous section has suggested that the self-presentation as Latin American Christians in the wider context of the Italian society held gender-specific meanings for female and male members of the *Iglesia*. As we will see in this section, this gendered polarisation between Christian models of respectability on the one hand and, on the other, racialised stigmatisation, is particularly acute in the case of the youth cell group.

Members of the youth cell group are often high school students (or in a few cases university students) who have to combine their studies with precarious jobs such as pizza deliveries for the boys and cleaning or baby-sitting for the girls. Some had to quit their studies to provide economic support to their parents and siblings. All the young members of the *Iglesia* whom I have interviewed so far have arrived in Italy through family reunion and have lived at least for some time separated from their mothers, fathers and/or siblings. My informants are not interested in returning to Ecuador but would like to be able to achieve residential autonomy, to be free from the responsibility of providing financial support to their families, to be able to start their own family and achieve professional specialisation and economic security in Italy. These young members expressed moderate positions on issues such as drinking, smoking and using choreographies in the church, which are at the heart of tensions in the *Iglesia* and produce discontent among its Pentecostal members. Romantic relationships among members are not rare and they do not necessarily lead to marriage, even if this is criticised by some of the older members. Unlike most members belonging to the older generation, these young members have constituted a truly bilingual religious environment. Many discussions as well as singing and praying are held in Italian; a few members of the group are not from Latin America (one boy from Albania and one from Haiti); and almost all members are fluent or very good at speaking Italian. Some of them are actively involved in the youth group of the Italian Protestant federation (FCEI) and participate in the FCEI gatherings together with Italian boys and girls, including some of migrant-background.

The *Iglesia* youth group enables migrant boys and girls to socialise in a 'protected' space, per opposition to socialising in stigmatised public spaces such as Latin American disco pubs in the city; at the same time, it offers boys and girls a space which is not directly under the control of their families and the religious leadership, and which is physically separated from the church. The activities organised on Saturday afternoons by the youth cell group (praying with music and singing as well as social activities such as meals, concerts and football competitions) are not attended only by young people who are 'full members' of the *Iglesia*. Some members of the youth group attend the Sunday worship and are involved in other ways in the church while some others go are there simply to socialise but do not attend the Sunday worship. The youth group was presented by one of its coordinators as an alternative to deviant activities in the 'gangs': she said that it was founded in an attempt to rescue some boys from their involvement in the 'gangs'. Indeed, the two male youth subgroups – which gathered boys of different ages - were given names which may sound like '*pandillas*''s names, such as 'Brothers'. Years ago, some boys quit the youth cell group to became members of 'gangs'; the reverse has also happened. To some extent, the social networks of young Ecuadorians involved in the 'gangs' and those involved in the *Iglesia* overlap. The biographical interviews presented below suggest that the Evangelical 'ethnic church' offers male and female migrant youth an opportunity to cope with the gendered ethnic stigma associating boys with crime and

girls with 'indecent conduct'. More specifically, religion enables young men and women to make religious sense of biographical breaks and discontinuities: conversion narratives are structured around the idea of a purification from sin, the distinction between before and after the encounter with God, and between leading a sinful and unhappy *versus* a Christian and peaceful life.

As other young members, Isabel (now 24 years old) joined the church through her family soon after she arrived in Italy for family reunion: her mother and aunt were already members of the *Iglesia*. However she became actively involved in the youth cell group and became a convert only later on, when she met her future husband, who was also a member of the *Iglesia*. Before that, she said that she used to hand around with friends outside the church; they were not Christians and spent time drinking in pubs. To her, integrating the church constituted a pathway into adult sentimental and family life and the dismissal of her previous 'sinful' life and acquaintances outside the church. Through discovering the love for God, she discovered sentimental love and – as she put it - another (better) way of socialising and having fun. Looking back at her past life, she felt that God had always protected her, even when she was not yet a Christian: in fact, each time that her non-Christian friends invited her to go to disco pubs with them, God prevented her from going in one way or another. She mentioned that in this way God had protected her from the risk of sexual violence. She felt that meeting her husband and participating actively in the church was part of the plan of God for her. Like her, her husband is one of the leaders of the youth cell group.

Wilson too, who is 26 years old, converted to Evangelicalism and joined the church after a period of his life when he was living 'without a guide', first in Ecuador as a teenager - while his parents were absent and he was living on his own - then in Italy, when he eventually joined his mother. He is now one of the leader of the youth cell group and an active member of the *Iglesia*. Commenting on his past life and the members of 'gangs' that he used to know, he defined himself as a simple guy: he said that he doesn't need to get drunk or to be 'high' on adrenaline to feel alive or happy; God makes him happy. His relatively secure professional status as a specialised manual worker in the port, which he achieved over the years, is reflected in his religious leadership and the respect which the young members of the church express to him. Professional stability (as opposed to the precariousness of the rest of the boys in the group) confers respectability and authority to him in the religious sphere. At the same time, attaining a valued social role as a religious leader conferred him the opportunity to conform to adult masculinity, which he lacked in his personal life. Wilson lives with his parents and supports them economically; he would like to live on his own, have his own family and start his own business.

These examples show that life histories allow for investigating the connections between biographical changes and transitions in different spheres (family, work, religion) across the public/private divide. Not only religion can facilitate economic insertion through conferring respectability but the reverse is also true: economic stability can confer authority and legitimacy as a religious leader, such as in the case of Wilson. In the case of Isabel, religion offers an opportunity to dissociate from the gendered ethnic stigma and to enter a legitimate condition and a valued status as a married woman; for Isabel, this transition combined with becoming an active member of the church and acquiring visibility in the community and a leading role among the younger members of the *Iglesia* (both boys and girls). Unlike other young women of the church, Isabel has maintained her engagement as a local religious leader despite maternity.

Further, Wilson's story points to the dyad migration-salvation, which is a marker of other informants' narratives too. Here, migration and salvation overlap: conversion is described in terms of decision made by the individual and emerging from the biographical break constituted by international migration. Wilson said that he could make sense of the decision taken by his mother to separate and leave him in the home country while she went to Italy only when he too came to Italy and converted to Evangelicalism; his being a parentless child who later became a 'lost' teenager leading a sinful life, was God's will. When he made the decision to join his mother in Italy, he also decided to quit smoking, drinking and to start a new life. He said that he felt that, having taken the decision to move

to Italy, he had to make full change in his life, for the better. Yet at the same time, conversion is described as an overwhelming event which powerfully disrupts and transforms personal life, against the individual will: Wilson describes conversion as an emotional encounter with Jesus and as 'falling in love with Him'. This echoes existing studies showing for instance that the narratives of Pentecostal African migrant converts emphasise their individual agency and choice while at the same time putting to the fore the superior divine agency which chose them for the mission of evangelising the European immigration society[61]. More broadly, recent scholarship points to the relevance of the individual dimension of contemporary religious conversions, which conflicts with past mass conversions[62].

Conclusion

Based on these research findings, some conclusive remarks can be made which raise further questions and directions for the analysis.

First, it can be argued that the *Iglesia* fulfils the role which is generally assigned to 'ethnic branches' by mainline Protestant federations, that is providing a space where migrants can negotiate integration and attain respectability in the wider immigration society. Through the 'ethnic branch', Latin American Evangelicalism can be dissociated from dominant stigmatising representations of Latin American male drunkards, 'gangs', broken families and bad mothers as well as from Pentecostal 'unorthodox' religious practices and radical moral teachings, which are marginalised or made invisible in the *Iglesia*. The *Iglesia* enables its members to access legitimacy in the public space through identification with an organisation which is legally recognised and overall positively valued in the wider immigration society, such as the *Tavola Valdese* (National Waldensian Board)/FCEI, as opposed to other Latin American 'independent churches' in the city. Further research could explore how Latin American Evangelicals actively engage in processes constructing cultural difference, for example by comparing themselves with other migrant religions and particularly the hypervisible Muslim population, which they tend to regard as a 'competitor' in the global mission of evangelisation.

Second, the *Iglesia* provides its members with gendered norms and socialises differently men and women, enabling them to identify with valued models of feminine/masculine Christian morality and respectability, based on the construction of two negative (and equally immoral) out-groups: the stigmatised Latin American male and female migrants and the 'Italian (middle-class) femininity'. Identification with 'Christian' masculinity and femininity enables my informants to resist gendered racialisation and to negotiate stigmatizing constructions surrounding Latin American women and men in Italy. In the future, interviews with men and women could be used to understand how transnational families rely on religion as a resource. It appears that Latin American women use religious networks in the *Iglesia* to access informal unpaid childcare; but how do they use religion to cope with dominant stigmatising discourses and the emotional hardship of lone parenting and feelings of guilt? And how do men use religion to make sense of migrant fatherhood? In addition, religion is used to make sense of work experiences. This direction for the analysis responds to recent debates on the need to apprehend everyday-lived religion beyond institutionalised contexts, and applying a 'lived religion'[63] approach to acknowledge how religion provides individuals with a structure of meaning beyond institutionalised religious spaces and practices, such as in the workplace and work-related activities.

Third, the analysis indicated that young migrant women and men too activate religious belonging and participation to identify with valued models of femininity and masculinity by taking a distance

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[61] M. Maskens (2011), op. cit.

[62] O. Roy (2013) 'Conclusion. What matters with conversions?', in N. Marzouki and O. Roy (eds) *Religious conversions in the Mediterranean World*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 175-188.

[63] R. Williams (2010) 'Space for God. Lived Religion at Work, Home, and Play' *Sociology of Religion* 71(3).

from association with the 'gangs' phenomenon. These data complement existing analyses of the gendered construction of Latin American youth in the *pandillas*[64]. Building on these ethnographic studies, my initial research findings concur to indicate that the *Iglesia* appears as the opposite and corresponding figure of the 'gang': both these organisations provide their members with symbolic resources to counter discrimination and to identify with a valued group. Migrant youth use the 'ethnic church' to facilitate integration in Italy and seek social mobility, expressing their aspiration to live in a 'multicultural' Italian context, rather than using religion to develop and sustain transnational ties and identification with their home countries. Further, based on this literature, the 'gangs' attempt to transform the ethnic stigma in an emblem to claim respect in the street through systematic display of their identity in public spaces. Further research could investigate how the *Iglesia* – a minority religion church in a Catholic majority society – is displayed and represented in the public space in the city. Observations of (rare) evangelisation activities organised by the church in the street could support this analysis.

Fourth, the analysis has pointed to processes of the 'domestication' of migrant men in the *Iglesia* and has provided examples of Latin American women's agency in the church. So far, the research findings point to the ambivalence between, on the one hand, the 'tactical[65]' nature of religion which can be appropriated by migrant women to carve out spaces of autonomy and leadership in the church, and, on the other, the resilient asymmetry in the distribution of power in the church. Women are not passive victims of conservative religious movements and dupes of false consciousness. However to appreciate that there is a dimension of resistance and agency of women within these religious organisations should not lead to romanticise the emergence of female leadership and to obscure the persisting sexist nature of many religious organisations[66]. Further research could investigate to what extent family and conjugal status shape the gendered division of work in the religious sphere, facilitating or hindering the participation of women in valued and more 'public' and visible roles in the church.

This preliminary analysis, largely focused on the role played by religion and the *Iglesia* as providers of material and symbolic resources for the migrants' search for integration, respectability and self-esteem, needs to be nuanced in the light of recent discussions of religious conversion. These consider conversion as a rather elusive object of sociological investigation, especially in contemporary societies[67]. Sociological accounts, based on instrumentality and social mobility, can't fully grasp the various dimensions of conversion: while these are important factors which can explain religious trajectories, the converts' agenda can't be easily reduced to a strategy or trajectory to achieve integration. Further, even if joining Evangelicalism is explicitly linked by converts to the objective of escaping drug abuse and social marginality, this 'intentionality' does not involve that their move was insincere[68]. It thus remains to explore how participation in Evangelical churches may involve a broader meaning of self-empowerment for Latin American migrants converting to a minority religion in a Catholic majority society such as Italy.

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[64] S. Castellani, L. Queirolo Palmas and F. Lagomarsino (2014), op. cit.

[65] L. Woodhead (2007), op. cit.

[66] K. H. Chong (2006) 'Negotiating Patriarchy. South Korean Evangelical Women and the Politics of Gender, *Gender & Society*, 20(6), 697-724.

[67] O. Roy (2013), op. cit.

[68] D. Smilde (2007) Reason to Believe: Cultural Agency in Latin American Evangelicalism, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Author contacts:

Francesca Scrinzi

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, EUI

Villa La Fonte

Via delle Fontanelle, 18

50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)

Italy

Email: francesca.scrinizi@eui.eu