



26 september 2014, Instituto Mora, Mexico City – Migrantologos network

New Religious Spaces of Difference. Resources and Risks in the New Italian Religious Landscape

Adriano Cancellieri
(Università Iuav di Venezia)



On the ground

Not a discussion on the idea of 'intercultural city' but an **analysis on *the ground*** focused on actors and negotiations in an increasingly different local society (city of Padua, Italy);

Religion as a prism of analysis (as a specific field of difference) more and more relevant, mainly in historically mono-confessional countries (like Italy)

Religion matters

- **The richness of religious practices and religious narrations in migrants' everydaylives** (new places of worship; rituals performed in public spaces, everyday, often banal religious practices): Romanian Orthodoxes, Sikhs, Muslims, new Pentecostals and **new Catholic groups (the last ones are the object of my analysis)**.
- **Religion is a foundational category** that contribute to support perceptions (e.g. of self, time and space), structure actions and build social relations
- Religion affects the world of the visible: through the materiality and sensoriality of religious practices (e.g. the sensoriality of a religious procession)
- Religion affects the world of the invisible: representations, narrations, imagination.

The local dominant Catholic church

- Local dominant church has **the 'spatial power'** to give space to new religious groups (see **Pastoral Care for migrants**). It has a position of control and interference in the spatial accessibility and spatial appropriation of these groups
- New Catholic groups: 'ethno-linguistic' groups with **different degrees of dependency and autonomy and different dimensions**
- These new and fervent Catholic groups are increasingly used as exemplary devotees in the strategy of multicultural inclusion chosen by the official Church: it the so-called '**reverse mission**'
- These new religious places represent a departure from the parish strategy of serving a local settled population: they become a meaningful point of reference for many migrants coming from different parts of the city.

New spaces and new leaderships: ambivalence at play

New religious spaces are multifunctional: 'enchanted places', 'safe havens' from external exclusionary practices, places for exchanging goods, information and services, transnational hubs that has the ability to reconcile multiple (ethnic, religious and secular) belongings)

Risks

- **Enclavism**: these groups reinforce ethnic and linguistic boundaries between themselves and the local context;
- Strengthening traditional and conservative leaderships (see the position of priests relating abortion)

Resources

- These new spaces constitute a 'spatial capital' that can facilitate the local insertion and a '**segmented assimilation**'
- **These spaces help immigrants managing and negotiating their social and political identities**: e.g. through the Santacruzán parade, Filipino migrants colour and sacralize a specific space and time of their new country of settlement, '**claiming a space for God and themselves in a new home**' (Tondo 2010: 219). They can express their voice and to support their right to *behave* in the space or, better, their right to *be* and to *have* space.

The plurality of Catholicisms

- **Different religious and ethnic customs** defy local society and 'could prove divisive and challenge the authority of traditional religious leaders and rituals as well as the centrality of worship within the local church' (Eade, 2012);
- **Emotional engagement:** in many new Christian groups during the rituals, the priest and devoted shake, dance, lift their arms, move their hips, sway back and forth: mind, body, and spirit are a unity, in ways similar to the Pentecostal movements' rituals;
- The conflict between grassroots catholicisms and institutional leaders.

Towards a *city of negotiations* (1)

To recognize the plurality of actors and spaces and the necessity to **give them social and political visibilisation**: to make this growing richness of religious spaces visible in the public sphere because migrants are spatial **actors** who continuously use and re-signify urban spaces to gain access to symbolic and material resources

To support policies and practices of **encounter** and **socio-spatial justice** among **multiple belongings** (e.g. age, gender, ethnic, religious; see **intersectionality**) in the materiality of everyday life (it is the everyday multiculturalism that affects people's lives) through a continuously pragmatic work of social and cultural '*translation*'/mediation/communication but...

Towards a *city of negotiations* (2)

...also to give relevance to narrations, representations, legislations and uneven power relationships who are present in the 'here and now of the encounter' but are generated beyond it: see the triadic model of Fincher and Iveson (2008) who propose to support together 'redistribution, recognition and encounter'

Intercultural city could be a new performative narrative if it is understood as a city of negotiations both in the everyday life encounters (e.g. taking into consideration the migrants' right to the city and the autochthonous fear of loss and change) and in the sphere of narratives and legislations (mass-media and political arena) who affect everyday life.

The city of negotiations **is not a carnival** but it **is not neither a hell**: it a city characterized by a continuous dialogical process of translation of social practices and 'collective meanings', strongly supported by a renewed **urban pragmatism** and a clear idea of **socio-spatial justice** at institutional and grassroots level.

Muchas gracias !

adriano.cancellieri@gmail.com

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