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**From Invisibility to Visibility: the Appropriation of Public Space through  
a Religious Ritual**  
**The Filipino Procession of *Santacruzán* in Padua**

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## **From Invisibility to Visibility? The Appropriation of Public Space through a Religious Ritual. The Filipino Procession of *Santacruzán* in Padua**

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### **Abstract**

Being mainly employed as domestic workers and care providers since the 1980, Filipino migrants has been, and still is, largely invisible in Italian public space. Since 1991, once a year, on the last Sunday of May, they transform the secular streets of Padua, city of Saint Anthony, into their own temporary “sacred space” celebrating the finding of the Holy Cross (*Santacruzán*).

Based on ethnographic research and in depth interviews, the paper analyses the preparation of the ritual and the performance as means to interpret the Filipino local and transnational territorialisation and their public visibility and invisibility.

Visibility is a central political question, closely associated to recognition, that involves social interactions and asymmetries of power. Urban space is here considered as a material and symbolic place of visibility where identity and the process of boundary making are inscribed and performed.

Specifically, this paper aims at addressing the following questions: What's the meaning Filipino give to this religious ritual in the public space? What do they want to obtain through this performance under the gaze of the local society? Do Filipino migrants succeed in fulfilling their expectations and what type of difficulties and support did they meet in this process? Is the parade a success in terms of visibility?

### **Introduction**

The Filipino population is one of the earliest settlements of migrant workers in Italy, a country of recent immigration when compared to the rest of Europe. The first women arrived between the '70s and the '80s to work as domestic helpers and were mainly living full time with their employers. Men joined only ten years later and family reunification increased drastically at the end of the '90s. Constrained by their labour status Filipina women were alone and isolated practically with no access to the everyday life, space and rhythms of Italian cities.

In Padua, city of Saint Anthony<sup>1</sup> and location of our case study, they used to gather once a week on Thursday afternoons, their day off, in the centre's piazza as they usually do in diaspora's other towns. In Tel Aviv they meet in the Central Bus Station, in Singapore in the Botanical Gardens, in Hong Kong after the Sunday Mass in the business district around Statue Square. There, amplified by the architectural structure the sounds of their joyful meetings and animated picnics are 'deafening'. As underlined by De Haardt (2010:169) “if they did not have the streets, the parks, the gyms, the marketplaces and the churches, i.e. if they did not have the actual urban space, they simply could not survive”. In

Padua, their rituals of gathering and fleeting encounters after work in the evening were quickly considered as too noisy by local citizens. Their unexpected visibility and sociability challenged the usual social representation of their subordinated status. The Church has been the answer given to the migrant Filipino domestic workers as it offers them a safe and bounded space to meet. The Church's hospitality, inside the chaplaincy of the Nativity, a church located close to the centre, which they still share today with the local parishioners, have paradoxically made the Filipino community again 'invisible' to Italian society. Filipino reputation of being the perfect migrant "not creating problems", and the absence of urban spaces that are ethnically Filipinos still contribute to their invisibility to the Italian collective gaze.

This paper aims to analyse the process through which Filipino migrants have in twenty years used space and built their access to the local urban context. Space is indeed a key lens for examining how minority groups settle their presence in host communities (Soja 1996). Their use of urban space reflects their practices of "place making" (Smith 1987) and managing visibility. Visibility is a key issue that involves social interaction and asymmetries of power; it is "closely associated to recognition" and "access to the places of visibility is a central political question" (Brighenti 2007: 329, 333). For social actors and above all for social invisible migrants, it means empowerment, having a voice to invert stigma and social representations and a stage to set up their own performance (Goffman 1971).

In the case of Filipinos, a religious ritual became the means to get access to public and secular space. Since 1991 once a year on the last Sunday of May, they transform the secular streets of Padua into their own temporary "sacred space" by celebrating the finding of the Holy Cross with the *Santacruzán* procession, the only 'imported' procession in the city of San Antony's famous parade. As noted by Johnson and Werbner (2010: 25) embodied ritual religious performance in diaspora "is not simply about ethnic boundary making processes". It also enables diasporic communities to transcend through performance the 'migrant' label assigned to them by contemporary migration regimes (Liebelt 2010). By the same token, this brings back the complex relationship between religiosity and urban space (Hancock and Srinivas 2008, Orsi 1999). Urban scholars have not always given due attention to the vibrancy and importance of religion in contemporary cities (Irazabal and Dyrness 2010), above all in the lives of migrants. Religion in cities questions the interaction between sacred space and secular space (Knott 2005) and the polisemic character of lived space (Rodman 1992).

In the first section of the article we present a brief portrait of the Filipino migration in Italy and in Padua contextualising the research setting and describing our methodology. Then, we proceed with the ethnographic description of the procession by analysing how the performance takes place. In the last section, we examine how Filipinos use the parade to show their local and transnational territorialisation in urban space and to build a relationship with the Italian public by renegotiating Filipino identity under the gaze of outsiders (Nagy 2008). Specifically, we aim at addressing the following questions: What do Filipino migrants want to obtain through this religious visibility? What do they intend to communicate to the host society? Do they succeed in fulfilling their expectations and what type of difficulties and support did they meet in this process? Is the parade a success in terms of visibility?

### **Context and methodology**

The Philippines is one of the top labour-exporting countries in the world: nearly 10% of its population currently lives abroad. Overseas Filipino migrants, called *balikbayan*, are considered as 'national heroes' to the point that, in The Philippines, June 7th was established as "Migrant Workers Day".

The Filipino diaspora embraces more than 130 countries shaping a transnational territory between The Philippines and, above all, Usa, Middle East, Asia Pacific and some European Countries (Parreñas 2001). Within Europe, Italy is the main destination of the current migration flows and the second country for number of residents, after United Kingdom, with 123.584 residents.

#### *Filipino migration in Italy and in Padua*

The Filipino migration represents the sixth largest immigrant group in Italy and in Padua. Its distribution is very atypical if we compare it to the other main migratory flows (in order, Romanians, Moroccans, Albanians, Chinese and Ukrainians), which are widespread around the country, even in small and medium towns (Colombo and Sciortino 2004). Filipino presence is characterized by a strong concentration in larger cities (above all in Rome and Milan), due to the demand for domestic female workers and the functioning of the migration chains. We can observe the same characteristics in Padua, the third largest cities in North Eastern part of Italy: Filipinos represent 5.6% of all migrants residents in the city and the fourth one for number of arrivals in 2009.

In this settlement process Catholic missionaries and Filipino religious institutions in contact with Italian parishes have strongly supported this migratory flow by receiving requests for domestic helpers or caregivers (Ambrosini 1999). As a consequence, Filipino migrations have experienced a strict segregation of work along gender lines and the word “filippina” has become synonymous with domestic helper. However, in the last ten years, the process of family reunification is contributing to an ongoing correction in the gender imbalance.

Thanks to this economic niche Filipinos have the lowest rates of unemployment compared with the other foreign groups and Filipino women have the higher level of participation to the labour force (88.3% - Istat 2009). Moreover, according to a recent survey (Zanfrini and Asis 2007), despite their modest income, more than three out of four say they are satisfied or even very satisfied with their earnings in Italy.

Compared to other nationalities, Filipinos have a limited presence in the industrial sector and in the so-called ethnic business (Flot-Fresnoza and Pécoud 2007). Their strong ties networks explain the successful insertion in labour market but have dark sides effects on their low upward mobility (Constable 1997; Parreñas 2001).

#### *The perfect migrant: the social invisibility*

All researches on Filipinos highlight the long-standing association of the community as global servants of capitalism with its firm ethnoracial hierarchies (Parreñas 2001). These social representations contribute to the Filipino migrant stereotype of a docile and hard worker who does not create problems to Italian society at large. This subaltern integration model does not create a real competition with autochthonous population. According to Caritas (2010), Italians consider Filipinos the most loved migrant community and they are preferred as domestic workers compared to all other migrant groups (Andall 2000).

This integration model results in several risks for the future. Despite years of residence in Italy, many Filipinos still find difficult to speak Italian, have few interactions with Italian local population and have a low rate of applications for Italian naturalization.

Notwithstanding their social isolation in workplace, Filipinos have a very rich associational life; but, also in this case, their activism is deeply bounded in the community and their participation in the local society is very shy compared to what is observed in Filipino diaspora in Usa (Gonzales 2009)

### *The mediation of the Church*

Everywhere in Europe, the Catholic Church mediates the Filipino's main social interactions with local contexts. Filipinos are well known for their religiosity and strong attachments to popular devotions and seasonal fiestas (Tondo 2010). They are often members of a religious association and women, generally spent their extra-work time, for religious practices (Liebelt 2010).

Pastoral Care of Migrants, the Catholic Church's structure in charge to take care of religious and social migrant's needs, plays an important role in this mediation. Through the local parishes the Pastoral gives hospitality to Filipino priests and spaces for Mass celebrations and other religious activities.

In *Padua*, Filipinos are the first migrant group that established a community chaplaincy (*The Filipino Chaplaincy of Padua*), in 1991, twenty years ago. This initiative has given the possibility to have a home-space of expression to maintain and nurture their distinct cultural and religious identity. In such a frame, twenty years ago, Filipino migrants in Padua decided to go outside their chaplaincy once a year for better nurturing their Filipino cultural-religious identity (Irazabal and Dyrness 2010) organizing the *Santacruzán* parade. A ritual that has become a magnet for many Filipino migrants, gathering participation and producing an apparently coherent transnational and translocal community.

### *Methodology*

The study draws on the results of qualitative data gathered among Filipino people in Padua over a one-year period. Two ethnographic observations of *Santacruzán* ritual (May 2010 and 2011) have been conducted, included the production of a video. The parade is the prism through which we analyse the Filipino local and transnational territorialisation and their public visibility and invisibility. We focused as well on other public rituals such as Saint Anthony's procession on thirteenth June and the annual Mass of all Christian migrants in Saint Anthony's Basilica to which Filipinos participate actively. We conducted regular observations for one year in the Filipino Chaplaincy after Sunday Mass and during other lay and religious Filipino meetings. Finally twenty in-depth interviews were carried out with Italian and Filipino priests, Filipino members of the *Chaplaincy Pastoral Council* and the *Filipino Community*<sup>ii</sup>, pioneers and teenagers who participated to the ritual. This multi-combined approach allowed us to explore the Filipino strategies of negotiation and communication with the local society

## **Religion moves to the streets: inscribing *Santacruzán* in the public space**

*Virgin most powerful, Virgin most merciful, Virgin most faithful [...] Queen of Patriarchs, Queen of Prophets, Queen of Martyrs.* These Virgin Mary's names are the sash titles worn by the beautiful and colourful Filipino girls, dressed like queens in a beauty pageant, who march down the public streets of the city of Padua.

This sensuous and embodied religious parade in public space is the Filipino's *Santacruzán/Flores de Mayo*. It is a combination of a commemoration of the story of Empress Helen's (mother of Constantine the Great) search for the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified (the Holy Cross- *Santacruzán*) and a May procession depicting the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, at the end of the Marian May, when Filipinos daily pray the Rosary and offer flowers to the Statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This ritual is annually celebrated all over the Philippines and in many Filipino diaspora's countries with a *format* widespread all over the world, each time translating (and, partly, betraying) home cultural practices and familiar landscapes, in specific local contexts.

The first *Santacruzán* procession in Padua, almost twenty years ago, has been celebrated with few participants inside the Filipino Chaplaincy's church; then it gradually went out inscribing the Filipino presence in more central and visible city streets. For a couple of years, around the Chaplaincy's church; in 1996 Filipinos decided to ask for more visibility and to parade in the central city public space. Since that year the Padua's *Santacruzán* leaves from the piazza in front of the old cathedral (*Duomo*), the bishop's siege, and goes down in some central city streets for about two kilometres before arriving in the Church of the Nativity. The mediation of volunteer associations and local church, as well as the municipality's consideration of the *Filipino Community of Padua*, a registered association since 1988, have been crucial factors in this success.

The Filipino Chaplaincy started twenty years ago with about only twenty people and now gathers hundreds of Filipino believers. In parallel, the parade started as a timid attempt to re-territorialisation and now has become a proud moment of Filipino public visibility that attracts people from all over the Veneto region, as well as from the city of Milan, where many Filipinos have relatives and friends.

### *The 'management' of the ritual*

The day of *Santacruzán* procession is preceded by months of preparation. The performance implies a significant entrepreneurial organisation that, every year, keeps busy many Filipino people. In 2010 the *Chaplaincy's Pastoral Council* and the *Filipino*

*Community of Padua*, who were in charge of the parade, elected an Executive Committee composed by more than fifty Filipinos. Every person was engaged in a different task: the invitations (i.e. the Filipino Consuls and Ambassador), the Church decorations, the sound system and car service during the procession, the choir and rosary preparation, the first aid, the food distribution, the icons organizations, the documentation and even the t-shirt printing and the audit evaluation (some days after the parade).

In this organization women play a relevant role: there are 70% of women in the parade's Executive Committee and 100% in Chaplaincy's Pastoral Council. Women spent their few spare time to the masterful coordination of the organization and, generally speaking, to religious activities. This community activism sometimes transforms themselves from domestic workers into community managers subverting the patriarchal authority of institutional and religious social order. While they are essentially portrayed as victims by structuralist perspective, as underlined by Tacoli (1999), the migration context offers the possibility to increase their own autonomy combining self-interest with self-sacrifice. These spaces of women's empowerment are also observed in other Asiatic communities in diaspora (Chen 2008).

One of the main 'players' of the *Santacruzán* is the family in charge of sponsoring the celebrations. Every year, one family assumes this responsibility; they pay a large part of the costs, especially for the food, but in return, their daughter has the honour to be the *Hermana Mayor*, that is, the most important figurant of the procession and the girl in charge to invite all other figurants. By the same token, this duty involves a strong spiritual dimension being a way to have special favours and receive guidance and assistance from God (Nagy 2008).

Despite the serious cost compared to the average salary, being the sponsor is a sign of recognition of the family's status and prestige. As underlined by Tondo (2010), this position of honour and privilege is only possible for recognised leaders of the community or successful migrants who decide to invest their social and cultural capital.

#### *The parade: a community performance*

Padua, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2010, in front of the old Duomo, Bishop's siege. It's four o'clock of a sunny spring afternoon. Many girls with coloured and elegant dresses are chatting together, children are running and playing everywhere, and the joyous buzzing is gradually increasing. Almost all people are Filipinos. In the middle of this growing crowd it is possible to recognize who is in charge to organize the parade's figurants and to move flowers and

decorations: the *Filipino Community Youth* with their pink t-shirts, the *Marshals* with their red t-shirts, the ladies of the *Executive Committee* with their white t-shirts and some older ladies with their Filipino traditional elegant yellow clothes. A voice at the megaphone gives some indications. The square is filling up and the parade's figurants are almost ready. At once the megaphone announces the Bishop's arrival and the buzzing strongly decreased, substituted by a big applause and, after a while, by the Bishop's words: "I'm very happy that you are here to celebrate this procession according to your faith and your Filipino tradition. I always say: you have to bring your beautiful traditions in Italy but you have not to take sins and faults of Italian people!". It's seems like a request of a reverse mission! Many Filipinos applause with a gratified laughter: it is a highly symbolic recognition of the Filipino presence in the local Catholic church strongly wanted and appreciated by Filipino believers. The Bishop's benediction ended with a Marian prayer. After a while the buzzing starts again but in a few seconds a lady of the Executive Committee takes the megaphone and the apparent chaotic assembly turns quickly in an ordered queue of figurants. All is ready. It is four thirty : the prayer at the megaphone begins and the procession starts!

The first figurants are eight little children wearing long white dresses with back wings to make them look like angels: each one has a white flowered crown and carries a letter to complete the words "A-v-e M-a-r-i-a". After the children, some young altar boys and girls, one of them holding a cross; the leader of the *Filipino Community of Padua* with the Filipino traditional native costume (called *Barong Tagalog*) and some old ladies, also dressed with Asian traditional clothes. Dignified and proud they march down the street.

Behind them, the most colourful part of the procession begins: thirty-five girls, called *sagalas*, dressed in an exquisite, colourful gown, looking as regal in Philippine finery, each of them wearing a crown and a sash indicating a different Virgin Mary's litany title. The first is the *Virgin most Prudent*, followed by the *Virgin most venerable* and the *Virgin most renowned*. They parade through the street escorted by young boys wearing *Barong Tagalog*, both walking under mobile arches heavily decorated with coloured flowers.

This long part of the parade appears as a kaleidoscope of colours more similar to a beauty parade than to a religious procession. But the sash titles, *Queen of Angels*, *Queen of Patriarchs*, *Queen of Prophets*, *Queen of Virgins*, *Queen of all Saints*, correspond to a lived form of devotion. The beauties are not flaunted but elegant and colourful and are clearly trying to amaze the public, as it is underlined by a former *sagalas*: "I liked to rouge myself in those situations. Such occasions are the days in which you could be well dressed and rouged".

The last three *sagalas* are the most important figurants: firstly the *Reyna Banderada*, also called the queen of the Philippines, a young lady dressed in a long red gown carrying a Filipino flag. She represents the coming of Christianity in the Philippines. Just after that, the second most important figurant is the *Reyna Elena* representing Empress Helen that marches with a child representing her son Constantine, the Great Emperor of Rome. She wears a very elegant pink dress and is very beautiful under a pink and flower-decorated arch. She has a basket of flowers in her hands and is followed by a child, with a big crown leant on a pillow, and by two men holding a cross.

But the first for importance is the last one, the *Hermana Mayor*, all in white, who marches under a snow-white and bright arch: it is the bigger and most decorated one. *Hermana Mayor* is the focus of the ritual and, after the procession, she will have the privilege to crown the holy image of Blessed Virgin Mary during the Mass in Filipino's Chaplaincy Church.

This first part of the parade, composed by about one hundred and fifty figurants, is a vitalistic and emotional religious embodiment in public space; a sensorial way to expose the self and the body, simultaneously including its secular and religious dimensions (Holloway 2006). The parade appears as a beauty pageant framed within a religious ritual (or vice versa?).

In Filipino popular religiosity the boundaries between profane and religious dimensions are porous. Most of Filipino religious rituals and fiestas, introduced by the Spanish colonizers, have blended with local Filipino beliefs, rituals and practices creating a folk Catholicism strongly marked by Filipino flavour (Gonzales 2009). Ironically these popular religious practices are marginal into the Filipino Catholic Church while they seem to be more encouraged by the official Catholic Church in some countries of immigration (Tondo 2010), as in our case study.

In this first part, largely dominated by the *Sagalas*, there are also other important actors: we refer to some small groups of Filipinos, coming from the same city or village in the Philippines, marching down the street holding the icons of their saint patron over flowered altars. In every Filipino town, village, and sometimes also in every neighbourhood, there is a saint patron who is a central point of reference and to whom annual fiestas are dedicated. A way to re-territorialise the Filipino devotion is just to re-locate it in diaspora, both through saints' fiestas and by moving their icons to the streets (of Padua, in this case). Filipinos consider icons a highly mobile presence protecting and strengthening them like a talisman wherever they are, transforming in such a way impersonal spaces in home

spaces (Paerregaard 2008; Tondo 2010). In Filipino spirituality, icons are the mediators that connect believers to the divine that becoming accessible and touchable (Tondo 2010). Filipinos have an anthropomorphic idea of God considered engaged with the affairs of humankind and they consider their icons almost a part of the family.

The presence in the *Santacrusan* parade of the local saint patrons shows the importance of local identity for Filipino people. Filipinos assume their national identity when they migrate while in the Philippines local and regional identity continues to dominate ordinary day-to-day communications and transactions. As much relevant are the religious differentiation in Filipino people: a myriad of specific Christian group (i.e. the charismatic group of *El Shaddai* and the movement of *Iglesia ni Cristo*) are present both in the Philippines and in diaspora and all march down in the *Santacruzán*. Through rituals such as the *Santacruzán*, every year, historical regional distrust and religious differences, openly recognizable, are translated into a celebration of unity (Tondo 2010).

However the parade does not end with the beauty pageant and the saint icons; on the contrary the larger number of people (more than two hundred) walk after the *Hermana Mayor*. First of all the *Hermana Mayor*'s parents, that is, the sponsor family: they are very elegant and proud, in a very visible position, surrounded by the excited and joyful *sagalas*' mothers who march down with many children and a lot of strollers.

In the meantime the prayer's sound is louder and louder. The car with the megaphone is coming, followed by many devotees, above all middle ages women, who are singing the prayers, guided by the Pastoral Council's ladies. This second part of the procession is not so coloured and cheerful as the first one. It is more similar to the traditional Italian Corpus Christi procession.

After the praying ladies, the most important and the biggest icon, the Blessed Virgin Mary, rises up in her majesty, over a flower-decorated altar carried by four people.

The devotion to the Virgin Mary is strongly meaningful: Mary is 'Mama Mary', a designation that personalizes Filipino deep relationship with Jesus' mother. Relevant number of Mary's sacred icons 'dwell' in private homes where they become the focus of prayer and devotion. When the Virgin Mary's icon marches down the street, the cultural-religious parade reaches its climax, closing the performance. The Filipino chaplain, walking behind the Virgin's icon, followed by a blurred crowd, seems to check and control this spatial boundary.

### *The interactions with the different publics*

There is also another procession around the main one. Along the streets hundreds of Filipinos stay at the border of the procession, from the beginning to the end of the ritual. Most of them are taking pictures or videos, some making comments and rumours; others are simply there, to recharge themselves with this durkheimian ritual of collective effervescence.

This second interstitial procession is more disorderly and less disciplined than the official parade. This public strongly contributes to the Filipino temporary appropriation of the city's public space and to the construction of a different urban landscape. Padua, for one afternoon, becomes a Filipino space; it becomes a space where Filipinos are the majority. Italians, tourists and other immigrants compose another public of the ritual, meeting the procession in a serendipitous way. Such audience is surprised and overcome by this *strange* and exotic spatial appropriation. Many are enjoying themselves, some are curious and some others are perplexed. During the parade the number of these spectators with questioning gazes gradually increases. Someone tries to get some explanations: What is this? Why the girls are dressed in such a way? Is it a wedding? Is it a Carnival? Is he a real bishop? Others have some answers ready: She looks like Snow White – indicating the *Reyna Banderada*; It is a Chinese wedding! Somebody else: It's strange to see so many young! I didn't know we got so many Filipinos in Padua!

The public space is always a potentially zone of contact (Pratt 1992; Clifford 1997) exposed to the meeting of biographical strangers (Lofland 1998). But in this sense Filipinos have not made great efforts to explain the ritual to the stranger audience: no writing, no signs, no leaflets. The serendipitous interactions result, in this way, strongly ambiguous as well as ephemeral.

It is five o'clock. The streets turn back to the car traffic and the Filipinos arrived to their usual space of 'haven', the Chaplaincy Church, where pictures are taken to remember these days and these precious memories are sent to all relatives and friends in the Philippines as well in other diaspora's countries. After that they will celebrate the Mass and share Filipino food until the end of the day: invisible again to the Italian gaze.

### **The meanings of a “Glocal” Ritual in Urban Space**

The success of a performance depends largely on the audience. The occupation of public space is not an aim in itself; it acquires value if it is an efficient strategy connected to the

specific local context and if it is understandable by the local Italian public so as to obtain recognition.

The *Santacruzán* procession has fulfilled several scopes but left behind some others.

### *Diasporic re-territorialisation*

In diaspora religious rituals have the scope to reconcile multiple belongings. Filipino community is organised around a triangular space: the territories of origin, the country of settlement and the multiplicity of places where Filipino people become established.

Diasporas are chaotic orders, reminds Werbner (2004), without centralised command structures; they are both ethnic-parochial and global-cosmopolitan. Each diaspora is unique but all have to face the multiple collective identifications and loyalties. That's why "creating a sacred geography" (*ibidem*) through the same devotion and ritual allows to put some order in diasporic space linking together the members of the dispersed Filipino communities and, at the same time, inscribing them in an universalistic and global Christian identity.

The ritual has the function to connect the village devotion, the regional and national identity, to the new diaspora towns. This 'glocal' performance allows bringing back "home" and re-territorialise it in the streets of Padua. Walking in procession is "claiming a space for God and themselves in a new home" (Tondo 2010:219). *Santacruzán* is a way to appropriate and sacralise the symbolic geographies of the countries of residence.

### *Exhibiting unity and subverting stereotypes through the performance*

During the *Santacruzán* parade Filipino migrants exhibit unity. As seen before, the complex puzzle of ethnic, religious and lay affiliations is all there, but what is set on stage is the strength of a unique culture, proud of its traditions (*Santacruzán* being a symbol of Filipino roots), bounded by piety and a common belonging. It is a powerful mise-en-scène of community's identity: a mix of religiosity and culture. As says clearly by a Filipino intercultural go-between: " this event serves to show to Italians that we are united and very religious [...] that we have all an exceptional attachment towards the Madonna [...] we are showing that our tradition is still lively even if we are here and that we can share it with them if they want to participate"

These few words state the determination to subvert social stereotypes and stigma. Considered mainly as executive workers and rarely present as entrepreneurs in the market labour, compared to other Asiatic populations as Vietnamese or Chinese, the organisation of the procession is also an opportunity to show how Filipino can be organised, efficient and autonomous. Organisational skills, financial competences and ability to accomplish

'time management' juggling through social and family schedules (above all women) and domestic work are the visible proof of their unexpected talents. "How else could we stage such a complicated production? We aren't just a bunch of uneducated workers!" (Nagy 2008: 82). When asked why is it important to perform in the streets, several Filipino have answered "it's a unique occasion, opportunity to show how we feel deeply inside [...] what we are doing for our common Christianity [...] we are very proud of this fiesta, to demonstrate all this in one day!".

The performance is a means to reinforce the Filipino community but the anticipated gaze of the Italian public also influences it. As reminds Nagy in her analysis of the beauty pageant organised by the Filipino club in Bahrain (2008: 99), "challenging the stereotype was rarely stated as an explicit objective of the contestants or the organisers." However expectations are high, as underlines one of the pioneer of the *Santacruzán* ritual: "If people does not come to see us what is the purpose? It would mean that we did not succeed to demonstrate who we are to nobody [...] a procession where we are alone, only Filipinos is not good, what is beautiful is make Italians see us".

The *Santacruzán* representation of Filipino identity to the Italian audience is unquestionably social empowerment through a performative embodied practice. "Once people have marched openly in a place, they have crossed an ontological barrier. They have shown that they are willing to expose themselves and their bodies to possible outside ridicule for the sake of their rituals" (Werbner 1996, 332). Sufi Muslims marching through Manchester immigrant neighbourhoods, Senegalese in parade in Harlem, New York (Abdullah 2009), Peruvian in global metropolis in the Footsteps of The Lord of Miracle (Paerregaard 2008), Cuban immigrants in their pilgrimage to the shrine of 'Our Lady of Charity' in Miami (Tweed 1997), all express that they are not afraid to show their pride in their religion openly and publicly (Werbner *ibidem*).

Body is the means to inscribe a religious act in public space. Filipinos 'parade' sacredness in a secular space instead of letting religiosity only confined in worship places or homes' privacy (Knott 2005). As observes a local priest: "today our local catholic-Christian devotees would be ashamed to participate to such a public procession. When they come they prefer to stay shyly at the border of the streets to look".

*Folk Christianity: the porous boundaries between sacred and profane.*

*Santacruzán* is also a way to recall back to faith the wider Filipino community who is present as spectator without marching through the streets. Tondo (*ibidem*: 240) reminds that this type of celebration "remains connected to the Church and nation in terms of

historical remembrance and replication, but neither Church or nation dictates their form or practice". In our fieldwork we noticed some tensions between the lay and religious Filipino organisers given the mixed content of the ritual, expression of popular devotion and national culture.

However the parade, being mostly an assertion of faith and devotion, constitutes also a message addressed to the local Italian society. Filipino migrants, especially women, seem to seek comfort and refuge in personal and collective worship. Migration appears as a spiritual journey that reminds strongly the Senegalese Sufi experience where religiosity transforms "the migration process as a meaningful and virtuous moral career" (Liebelt 2010:19). Transforming for some hours Padua's streets in their sacred space, Filipino people transcend their daily life of subordinated workers in an experience of self reconstruction as exemplary Christians, bringing back here the missionary evangelisation linked to their historic experiences of double colonialism (Oosterbaan 2010:301). It's well known that African and Asian migrants fill up to day the empty churches of Europe.

Suffering, pity and compassion are central in Filipino notions of Christianity and in their religious practices. (Liebelt 2008:112). It is the story of Christ's suffering (the *pasyon*) which is enacted publicly, dramatised and displayed every Holy Friday in front of Italian parishioners of the Church of the Nativity in Padua. The chaplain reminds that "the Italian public has found the live-narration astounding and was really amazed by the Filipino performance, prepared months in advance"; but he adds "I have let them do it, even if our bishop was a bit perplex and preoccupied about the fact that all this dancing and drama may not be understood and accepted by our local catholic community!"

Popular devotion and affective relationship with the icons are common practices in the city of Saint Anthony where millions of pilgrims (including the local citizens) visit and queue to touch the sepulchre of the Holy Patron. This is tolerated by the Church but not really included in the liturgy or rites. In some way, Filipino "Folk Christianity" (Tondo 2010:223), the enthusiastic fervour and spontaneity of their ritual, still look suspicious to official catholic practice. It has to be said that the institutional hierarchy is much more understanding than the local believers, whom some priests tend to describe sometimes as strict and puritan. A critical and judging gaze scrutinizes the exposed deep neckline and bare backs of the young *Sagalas* during the *Santacruzán*, considering them simply shocking and indecent. This porosity between sacred and profane dimensions exposed in the public space is not easily accepted.

For Filipino people instead, dancing, singing, performing faith, are both body expression of a festive moment and deep religiosity. The research of beauty through fashion and

dressing are as well experience of God presence and spiritual practices. Inside beauty and moral integrity are brought out and reflected through the beauty of the faces, the bodies, the dresses and the young's attitudes.

Gaze, diversity, visibility and recognition are here interwoven. They are linked to the porosity of social spaces (Benjamin 1985; Stavridis 2007). Through the ritual, the Filipino community intends to provide a positive representation of its religious and cultural values. However *Santacruzán* appears less as a performance for others than an interpretation, a narration and renegotiation of Filipino identity and values under the gaze of local outsiders (Nagy 2008:100). According to the Lefebvre's spatial triad (1974), this public performance is a lived space that connect the conceived space and the perceived space .

The streets are the most visible urban environment, a symbolic place to parade and to march, to transgress and to protest. "The street represents an essential testing point for publicness" (Brighenti 2010:137). The performance comes out as a successful celebration. But has this temporary appropriation of urban space succeeded in opening a gap into the Italian lack of interest and recognition?

## **Conclusion**

*Santacruzán* provides an exemplary case of the new religious landscapes in European cities. The public performance opens spaces and opportunities of interactions through urban territories. As Brighenti underlines (2010:58) territories are a convergence of actors who interact to manage reciprocal visibilities and invisibilities.

The parade is set against the background of the increasing cultural, ethnic and religious pluralisation of Italian society. Despite all the mediation efforts carried out by the local Church, by lay and religious associations, and by some municipalities, a portion of Italian society does not seem yet ready to face "the coming question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the capacity to live with difference" (Hall 1993: 361). A paradigmatic case is the town of Treviso, distant 50 km from Padua, which still does not have a mosque to service its many Muslim residents (Saint-Blancat and Schmidt di Friedberg 2005). This context explains the ambivalent outcome of the *Santacruzán* procession even after 15 years of bringing Virgin Mary to the streets of Padua.

Specifically, the parade results in a mix of successful and missed opportunities.

The ritual gives voice and space to Filipino migrants' emotions and collective religious practices. By the same token the *Santacruzán* fosters social empowerment beyond the workplace to which Filipinos are usually confined and assigned.

Performing together in the streets strengthens every year the 'glocal' Filipino community beyond its internal religious and regional differences in front of Padua citizens. The ritual publicly confirms the recognition and inclusion of Filipinos believers in the Christian community. Conversely Muslim presence is not equally welcomed in public space and still remains subjected to a different regime of visibility (Staehele *et al.* 2009). The procession inscribes Filipinos as exemplary devotees in the strategy of multicultural inclusion chosen by the official Church through the Pastoral care of migrants. The Catholic Church is giving increasing visibility to the growing flows of Central and Eastern Europeans, Asiatic and African migrants which are changing radically the symbolic geographies of contemporary Christianity (Mary 2008). In the same logic, by proudly parading their culture and traditions, Filipinos claim citizenship to different urban landscapes (Conzen 2010).

Filipinos, once a year, deny their tendency to remain withdrawn into their own community trying to use space to subvert the meanings of everyday imposed identities. But the lack of efficient communication from the Filipino community combined with the local society and media's persistent indifference results in a missed opportunity. Having successfully negotiated a place for themselves on the urban stage does not mean that Filipino people have found the way to efficiently communicate with the general public. The observation of the interactions between Filipino performers and the Italian public highlights the gap between the Filipino high capacity to develop networks, gain credibility and respect among the local civil and religious society and their difficulty in finding the right style of communication with the Italians (Saint-Blancat 2008). Filipinos show skills in organizing and communicating. But this competence is mainly used inside the community. Filipinos do not dedicate the same amount of work by maintaining contacts with the local press and television, which, incidentally, ignores them by granting every year only a few or no words to the parade. They do not think of producing flyers to inform the Italian population or to make propaganda at schools through Filipino teenagers among their Italian peers. The general tendency has been until now towards giving visibility to the community, strengthening its own internal cohesion rather than turning Filipinos into actors involved in the Italian public space. The young generation will probably become the dynamic fringe of a new strategy of interaction.

At the same time, a great portion of Italian society misses another opportunity. These kind of public rituals could be an occasion of mediation and negotiation with Filipino migrants and, more in general, with new minorities. While Italian local society does not perceive the growing globalisation of socio-cultural landscapes and miss the socio-political potential of interaction in public space, Filipino *Santacruzán* is increasingly glocalised in diaspora and on the web. If you click on You Tube you get the same images, icons, sounds, colours, pride and devotion in Padua, Berlin, New Orleans, Laguna in the Philippines, and Sydney. Urban space becomes the area where pluralism is concretely experienced and tested (Cancellieri 2010; Cancellieri and Scandurra 2011). But the interactional potential of public space is not deterministic. In the case of Filipino public the *Santacruzán* performance is a growing success. In the case of the Italian public instead this ritual is more a lost opportunity.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Padua is the city of Saint Anthony, place of one of the most popular Catholic pilgrimage. Every year millions of pilgrims visit the Basilica and Saint Anthony's sepulchre. The Saint is a global icon, particularly worshiped in Asia. Every first Sunday of May, Sinhalese believers meet here bringing flowers to Saint Anthony, praying and queuing in front of the tomb. Filipinos, as well as Sinhalese, take part as a distinctive community in the annual procession of the Saint Anthony held in the local streets every 13th June.

<sup>ii</sup> The *Pastoral Council* is the Chaplaincy's council engaged in religious activities; *Filipino Community of Padova* is the oldest and most important Filipino association present in the city.

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