

Gender, Migration and intercultural Interaction
in South-East Europe
(www.gemic.eu)

Country Report Italy (WP6)

Ge.M.I.C.

Renata Pepicelli
University of Bologna, Italy



Grant Agreement no. 216065

Table of Contents

1. Goal of the research.....	3
2. Research Methods.....	4
3. Site of investigation: Centocelle, a neighborhood of migrants.....	5
4. Places of worships: the Baptist Church and the Mosque.....	7
5. Basic premises and concepts.....	9
6. Basic questions.....	10
7. Results of the work carried out.....	10
7.1 The Repositioning of Religion in Women's Lives....	10
7.2 Religion in Diaspora: sens of belonging, comfort in suffering and loneliness, new identity....	12
7.3 Women and places of worship.....	13
7.4 Veils and Bodily Performances.....	16
7.5 The Emergence of 'Islam of Italy'....	18
8. Conclusion.....	18
9. Main results.....	19
10. Potential impact and use of the research.....	20
11. Bibliography.....	20

1. Goal of the Research

The aim of this research is to explore the Islamic and Christian revivalism among Sunni Muslims¹ and Christian Baptist² Romanian women in Rome, specifically in its south-east suburb called Centocelle. Capital of a country that in the last 20 years has become home to many immigrants, Rome is already an important center for migration flows. In 2007, immigrants made up 9,6% of the population in Rome (Dossier Caritas, 2008). In that same year, immigrants were 10,6% of the population of Centocelle, of which half were women.

According to Dossier Caritas, in 2008 Muslims in Italy are 1.293.704 and Islam is the second religion in the country. Muslims represent a multi-ethnic mosaic, coming from various Islamic countries. The Romanians are a quarter of the immigrant population in Italy: the most recent estimates show that this community now has 1.165.000 people (Caritas Italiana, Confederatia Caritas România, 2010). This is the first migrant community in Italy. Baptists are a religious minority among Romanians.

In well settled immigrant communities the religious issue has become a central point of concern for both the immigrant community and the host country itself, which is reflected in the ongoing European and Italian debate on the compatibility of Islam with western values, as well as the idea of human rights and, in particular, women's rights.

By focusing on everyday religious practices, this study addresses the issue of the repositioning of religion in the public and private sectors while paying particular attention to the role women play throughout this process. This research aims to explore the possibilities of women's emancipation and empowerment through religion and the renegotiation of gender roles in public and religious contexts. By extending the work of Saba Mahmood *The Politics of piety: the Islamic revival and the feminist subject* (2004), this research has looked at the complex ways in which pious Muslim and Baptist Romanian women in Italy construct their subjectivities, their notions of empowerment, their aspirations to participate in the public sphere and resistance to patriarchal traditions; but at the same time their desire to perform religious duties, submission or obedience to a transcendent will being seen as the ultimate agent. Instead of reading these seemingly contradictory elements as a sign of a still unachieved emancipation process for women torn between 'progress' and 'tradition', this research proposes to read them as the specific articulations of pious individuals who strive to exist as devout women in specific modern european contexts. Such a reading challenges some of the basic assumptions of liberal western modernity as well as its dichotomous worldview of modernity versus tradition.

Moreover, the comparative study on Muslim and Baptist women carried out challenges the idea of the exceptional view of Islam as the only religion that poses a challenge to a supposed secular Italy.

This kind of study is quite new in the Italian context. In fact, while for many years scholars have paid attention to the effects of religion on women's status, less attention has been

¹ Sunni Islam is the largest branch of Islam. Sunnism splits from Shi'ism on the question of succession and the appropriate method of choosing a leader. Sunnism has four legal schools of thought: Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali.

² Baptists are a group of Christian denominations, churches, and individuals who subscribe to a theology of believer's baptism (as opposed to infant baptism), salvation through faith alone, Scripture alone as the rule of faith and practice, and the autonomy of the local church. They are generally characterized by the practice of immersion (as opposed to affusion or sprinkling) and a disavowal of authoritative creeds. Baptist churches are regarded as falling within the family of Protestantism, and some churches or individuals further identify with evangelicalism or fundamentalism. Diverse from their beginning, those identifying as Baptists today differ widely from one another in what they believe, how they worship, their attitudes toward other Christians, and their understanding of what is important in Christian discipleship.

devoted to women's roles in performing religious rituals, particularly in the context of immigration. It has only been since the beginning of the 21st century that scholars have started to investigate the religiousness of immigrant women outside of their countries of origin. With the exception of interesting and increasing studies being carried out in European countries such as France, Belgium and Germany, there yet remains a big need in Italy to follow suit. Thus, the general aim of the present research is to contribute the research by filling the gap by way of analyzing how women are reconfiguring the interrelationships between religion, freedom and agency in contemporary Italy. Finally, this research aims to redefine the public debate on secularism in this country, women's rights in a religious framework, particularly on the Islamic side and proposes to help redefine the terms of the debate.

2. Research Methods

The present study is based on qualitative rather than quantitative research in traditional religious arenas such as a mosque/Islamic cultural center (on the definition of mosque see paragraph 4), Baptist church, and public spaces such as schools, streets and squares located in Centocelle, a neighborhood in Rome. It is a neighborhood where the migration history (immigration and emigration) is particularly interesting (see paragraph 3) and today the immigrant presence makes up to 10% of the population. In this context, places of worship such as the mosque and the Baptist Church are important religious and social networks for immigrant communities who live inside and outside the neighborhood. It is worth noting that the mosque al-Huda is the second biggest mosque in Rome, and the number of female mosque-goers is increasing; on some Saturdays up to 60-70 women attend. The Romanian Baptist church is hosted by the Baptist Church in Centocelle which lends hospitality to different national churches - congregations. The Romanian parish being one of the biggest congregations with around 100 devotees, among them, half are women.

This study is mostly based on an examination of the theoretical analysis of the state of Muslim women and religious minorities in Italy and Europe, and on an empirical level, consisted of participant observation, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations involving around 40 Muslim and Baptist Romanian women living in Rome. The fieldwork and, in particular, the participant observation was conducted among Muslim Sunni women from different Islamic countries (particularly Tunisia, Palestine, Egypt, Albania) in the mosque of Centocelle; and among Baptist women from Romania who attend the Baptist Church of Centocelle. The point of view of male representatives of these religious institutions also was taken into consideration.

Participant observation, the main part of the data collection, took place during prayers, discussion groups, demonstrations, community lunches and dinners. For the most part, participant observation among the Muslim community of the mosque of Centocelle took place on Saturday evenings. Every Saturday evening at least 40-50 women of different age, social class, and nationality meet there. They pray, study the Koran and in a nearby secondary school they attend Italian language course, Arabic language course and Islamic studies classes. In the same school their children attend Arabic classes on Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings. Participant observation also took place during specific religious festivities such as Ramadan month or extraordinary activities organized by the mosque (conferences, solidarity dinners ...). In addition, the present study has analyzed how women engage in classic areas of civil society expression, such as demonstrations and associations which was particularly observed by their involvement in certain activities (demonstrations, solidarity dinners...) supporting the Palestinian cause.

In the Romanian Baptists' case, participant observation took place on Sunday afternoons in the church where they pray and on Sunday mornings in a square in the north-west periphery of Rome called Anagnina, where the Romanian community in Rome usually meet and the

evangelical churches (Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals) organize an open and shared prayer. Anagnina is a major transportation hub as well as a metropolitan station that also serves as a bus terminal to more than 15 bus lines. Crossed every day by thousands of people and a high percentage of immigrants, it is a central meeting point for the Romanian community in Rome. On Sundays there is a small market with stalls carrying Romanian products, including food. There, in the open public, a collective prayer is held in a square above the subway station. Normally they sing, talk and pray. In this context, the process of proselytism is very intense and conversions often took place right in the middle of the square. After the conversion or the expression of intending to do so, the neo-faithful start attending the church in Centocelle if he/she decided to convert to Baptism, otherwise he/she follows the activities of the evangelical church chosen.

Besides participant observation, the fieldwork included 17 semi-standardized in-depth interviews with 16 women and one man. Interviews were conducted in the mosque, in the church and in the square of Anagnina.

In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-standardized questionnaire concerning respondent's religious beliefs and practices, gender relations, women's roles according to the religion. It was mainly investigated the public sphere and the religious contexts, rather the private sphere. The issue of dressing customs was also analyzed broadly during the interviews.

The analytical scope of the questions focused on the investigation of the role of religion in negotiating gender identities, gender relations in migration and in the development of women's empowerment/disempowerment.

During the participant observation segment, informal interviews and discussions on gender roles within Islam and the Baptists regarding women's rights took place. Participant observation seemed to be an appropriate method in order to gain understanding concerning women's roles in the religious context and in the public sphere going beyond the image of 'the pious woman' drawn by the respondents through interviews.

Finally, it was interesting to note how well the respondents accepted being involved in the research and readily allowed us to perform participant observation. One consistent motivation that led respondents of both groups to participate in this study was the opportunity that many saw for dispelling what they thought to be a distorted image of women in Islam on the one hand, and Romanian people on the other. During the interviews quite a few specified that they wanted to correct these images. In Italy, discrimination and racism affect relations with the Muslim population (Massari, 2006) and the Romanian community (Caritas Italiana, Confederatia Caritas România, 2010) as well. While the first is often perceived as contrary to or the enemy of Christianity, of western values such as democracy and women's rights and as being 'a bunch of terrorists'; the latter is perceived at length as criminal. Quite commonly, Romanian men are considered alcoholics, criminals and rapists, while the women are often associated with street prostitution. Further still, broadly spread racism against roma serves only to exacerbate the problems faced by the Romanian population. Significant numbers of the roma population in Italy in fact come from Romania.

However it should be noticed that the answers by the respondents could be effected by the fact that in current time, migrants (in particular Muslims), feel under a high pressure and a strict judgement from the public opinion. This general situation could led repondents avoid description of problems and, on the contrary, emphasize only the positive aspects of their community and faith.

3. Site of investigation: Centocelle, a neighborhood of migrants

Situated in east Rome (see table 1), bounded by four major roads, Prenestina, Casilina, Palmiro Togliatti and Primavera, Centocelle, with a surface area of 208,16 ha and 57.000 inhabitants and a relevant presence of immigrants (10% of the population) provides a very

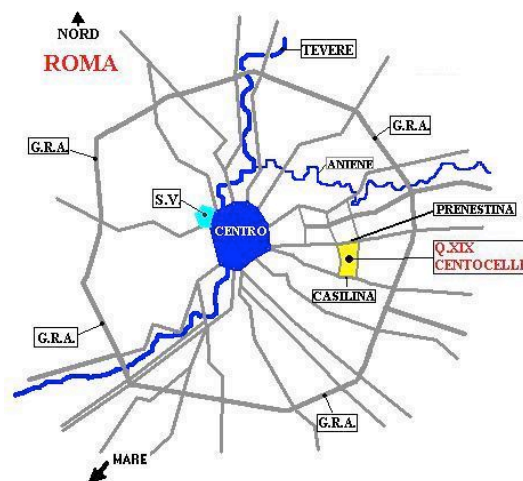
interesting case study in which to understand the migration process in Italy. In fact, between the '50s and the '70s of the last century it was populated by a massive internal migration from southern and central regions of Italy; since the nineties it has seen a new migration wave increasingly from foreign countries from Eastern Europe, North Africa, and Asia (see table 2).

In 1921 there were only 29 resident families in Centocelle (De Angelis, Calvosa, 2006, pp. 27-28), which used to be a rural area as the topography shows (Chestnut trees street, Walnuts street, Myrtles Square...). It started developing at the beginning of the 1900's due to the construction of the first Italian airport (Centocelle airport). After the Second World War, and in particular between the 1950s and the 1970s, the arrival of many emigrants from Southern Italy redefined Centocelle as a poor outskirts of Rome. During this period the number of dwellings sextupled, and next to the two-three storey buildings with small gardens typical of the area, new tall buildings have reshaped the skyline of Centocelle without any planning scheme. The main social result of these movements of populations was a socially and culturally diversified district, one that reinterpreted identities, memories, dialects and traditions from all over Italy (Portelli, 2007). However, after 1971 the population increase stopped, but since the '90s the population has started to increase again due to the arrival of many immigrants and the neighborhood has been confronted with new transformations, new stratifications and new hybrids. While in 1991, only 1% of inhabitants were represented by a foreign resident, on 31st December 2003 foreigners were 6,4% of the population and between 1996 and 2003 the number of immigrants had more than doubled.

In 2007, immigrants were 10,6% of the population in Centocelle, half of it being women, while in the same year in Rome the immigrant population was 9,6%. Therefore, Centocelle is a place of long-standing migration and steady root-making, which is proved by the massive influx of foreign families.

The presence of immigrants noticeably affects the area with "ethnic" stores, call centers, local associations and places of worship. Besides several Catholic churches that are also attended by migrants, there is a mosque and a Baptist church³ which become very crowded on holydays. By means of these sites of worship, religion is being re-positioned at the center of the public sphere of the neighborhood.

(Table 1)



³ The Baptist church is not situated well in the neighborhood, though just a few meters away. However, it is considered part of the neighborhood and in fact it is known as the Baptist church of Centocelle.

Foreigner population in Centocelle at 31st December 2007			
Nationality	Women	Men	Total
Romania	478	466	944
Bangladesh	209	367	576
Egitto	201	364	565
Filippine	250	178	428
Cina	178	194	372
Perù	186	132	318
Polonia	157	80	237
Marocco	89	126	215
Albania	81	107	188
Ecuador	82	57	139
Etiopia	87	46	133
Tunisia	49	66	115
Ucraina	77	20	97
India	45	47	92
Nigeria	53	37	90
Colombia	54	32	86
Moldova	59	26	85
Grecia	17	60	77
Senegal	16	56	72
Pakistan	24	47	71
Sri Lanka (Ceylon)	26	44	70
Eritrea	39	20	59

(Table 2)

4. Places of worship: the Baptist church and the Mosque

The decision to focus on women who attend places of worship draws heavily from the fact that in Italy there is a growing immigrant population that is demanding new rights and visibility, including the right to experience their religiousness openly. According to recent statistics Italy follows only Germany and Spain among European nations in terms of most foreign residents, with 7,2% of the Italian population coming from abroad (Dossier Caritas, 2009). Deep rooted migration is already a reality and a second immigrant generation is well settled in the country. Immigrants and children of immigrants are emerging in the public sphere in Italy, taking with them their cultures and their religions. Consequently, the large immigrant presence and their sophisticated level of organization, together with the awareness of living for a long time, or in some cases, their whole life in Italy, make migrants and their descendents negotiate with local and national governments for the right to practice their religion in public. Places of worship are a good barometer of the level of organization of the various ethnic and religious communities that are settled in a country. For immigrant communities, they are often the only or the main form of association in a community. Thus

they represent a way for minority religions, and in particular, for Islam, to exit the private sphere and to officially enter the public arena; it therefore becomes qualified as an interlocutor with society and institutions (Allievi, 2009, p. 18). For these reasons the decision has been made to study religious revivalism among immigrant women in Rome in specific contexts, such as places of worship: the mosque and the Baptist church in Centocelle.

The Christian Baptist Church in Centocelle is a huge structure with a main prayer room, and several other rooms for praying and socializing. There are also several apartments in the area and an elderly center. It gives hospitality to several national, "ethnic" churches (the Philippines church, the Korean church, the Romanian church, the Latin-American church....); congregations which all use the church rooms in rotation on Sunday and during the week. One of the more important features of the Baptist Churches is their development in 'national' churches that enjoy a great amount of autonomy. Thus, in the Centocelle church we find very different positions among the national church leaders: if the Italian church is led by a very feminist and progressive female pastor, the Romanian church, on the other hand, is very conservative and doesn't allow female pastors.

The Romanian community meets each Sunday afternoon at 4pm and usually stays there until 7-8pm. The prayer lasts at least one hour and half to two hours. There is a choir composed of men and women mostly between 20 and 30 years old that sing during the prayer. Men sit on the left side of the aisle and women on the right side. During the prayer there is a Bible course for around 15 children. It is considered important to let children grow up with religious knowledge and Baptist values.

The mosque in Centocelle, called al-Huda is not a proper mosque: it is a prayer room set in the basement of a building which has, in addition to the function of place of worship, a number of social and cultural functions through various forms of gatherings (a Koranic school; courses and meeting opportunities for adults, women and converts, conferences and other educational and cultural activities). Nevertheless, due to the high number of faithful and the narrow spaces, most of these activities are hosted by nearby schools. It is worth taking note that in Italy, as in the rest of Europe, within the category of mosque, a number of differences are discernible. In this country there are about 660 prayer halls, mostly located in industrial buildings, warehouses, former shops and apartments. Of these, only three are mosques in the truest sense of the word: that of Catania, the oldest one (1980), now no longer in use and managed 'privately' by a Sicilian citizen; that of Milan Segrate, built in 1988, which is one of the most influential in the organization of Italian Islam; and the large Italian Islamic Cultural Centre in Rome in the neighborhood of Parioli (Viale della Moschea), known as the Great Mosque (Allievi, 2009, p.17). Officially inaugurated in 1995 in the presence of heads of state and senior authorities of the Vatican, and linked (like many other Islamic centers established in European capitals) to the Saudi Muslim World League. The Great Mosque is considered one of the monuments of the city and expresses well the numerical, cultural and social importance that the Muslim community has acquired in Italy, even if many Muslims consider it a kind of "embassy", quite far from the real world of Muslim immigrant life.

The mosque al-Huda is in the center of Centocelle and is very close to the main church of the area, San Felice di Cantalice and to a shopping street. It is located in the basement of a four-storey building in what was once a gym. It has been very well adapted into a prayer hall. In the same building there are a few other rooms devoted to a school of Arabic language for men and a secretary. Built in 1994, it is the second biggest mosque in Rome, after the Great mosque. Close to the mosque there is a Palestinian association linked to the al-Huda mosque, where there are very active Palestinian faithful. The mosque is very active in organizing many religious and social activities. Faithful arrive from all over Rome along with small towns nearby. During Ramadan, on Friday, 500-800 believers pray there. Believers come mainly from North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. There are also Italian converts to Islam, such as the Islamic center al-Huda vice-president, who has been interviewed several times formally

and informally throughout this research. In the streets nearby, there are many Islamic stores such as "Stationary's Marrakesh", "pizzeria Chawarma", and food shops which sell halal and other ethnic products. The Islamic center vice-president, who is also the secretary general of UCOII (Union of Islamic Communities and Organizations in Italy), the largest Muslim organization in Italy, which was established in 1990 and nowadays governs 134 mosques, says: "When you arrive in Via dei Frassini (i.e. the street where the mosque is) it is as if you were walking on the streets of Tunis or Marrakesh..." The presence of the mosque has changed the area nearby a lot. In recent years sporadic conflicts with the neighbors have taken place, mostly because there are too many faithful for the size of the prayer room and some pray out in the street during certain holidays like Ramadan. However, the mosque has a good relationship with the municipality and the local schools. Until last year they could use several rooms of an adjacent school on Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings to teach several classes and courses for women and children. As of September 2009 they had to leave this school because it had to be renovated, therefore they are using some rooms of a school farer away, in the hopes that they can one day have their own Islamic center. Furthermore, it is very difficult to build a real mosque or to buy or rent a space large enough to dedicate to the mosque. In Italy there is a lot of animosity toward the construction of mosques in any part of the country (Allievi, 2009). The building of new mosques have been strongly opposed in Italy despite the fact that the expenses for their construction will be covered by national and international Islamic associations, countries and private backers.

5. Basic premises and concepts

Italy began experiencing the immigration phenomenon, including a noteworthy Islamic presence, only since the end of 1980s. It was largely unprepared for it in terms of legal frameworks and government policies as well as in terms of public perceptions and common practices. Moreover, strong Catholic beliefs have to be taken into account when considering national identity, which in turn leads to the Italian approach toward migrations and, more specifically, to Islam. The Church in Italy is a powerful institution with strong influence on public matters, cultural norms and politics. It should be mentioned that Catholicism has ceased to be the state religion in Italy only since 1984. However, it still enjoys privileges with respect to other faiths; in particular concerning the teaching of the Catholic religion in school, the freedom of Catholic private schools, the fiscal advantages of religious based organizations. In this sense, rather than strictly a 'secular' state, Italy would be better defined as a state where the Catholic religion is established while other religions undertake separate agreements with the State in order to be recognized (Salih, 2009). Secularism is very weak in the country, however Islam is described as the only religion that poses exceptional challenges to the supposed secular Italy. Regarding the women's rights' issue, the debate on the incompatibility of Islamic values with secularism tightens up. In fact, Islam is broadly considered contrary to women's rights, modernity, the western idea of democracy and freedom, besides its general epithet as enemy of Christian civilization. With regard to this last point it is worth noting that positions inside the Catholic church can vary greatly, starting from a dialogue, the collaboration of daily practices (in particular thanks to some grass-roots priests and some Catholic movements such as Sant'Egidio) to anti-Islamic statements and activities such as concrete stances against mosques and minarets. In the triangular dynamic of secularism, more or less supported by the state, the dominant Catholic religion and religious minorities; Islam can represent for churches, at one and the same, both an 'ally and a rival, poor yet a competitor'. Islam can become a valuable ally while remaining a rival (Allievi, 2009, p.75).

6. Basic questions

The research aims to analyze the following questions:

- The ways in which immigrant women and their offspring reconstruct religion in the public sphere.
- Whether and how religions affect the migration experience for women.

- Whether and how women (and men) engage in religious contexts (mosques, churches, religious centers) and in public spaces in general and how these spaces are gendered.
- Whether and how religion is used as a tool for simultaneously redefining and accessing citizenship.
- Whether and how religion can be a terrain for implementing and increasing women's rights.
 - Whether and how Muslims pose "exceptional" challenges to the European liberal/secular traditions or whether and how there are historical and current continuities between Islam and other minority religions in Europe.
- Whether and how the religiousness of migrant women challenges the historical configurations and the close connection between religion and national/ethnic identity in the countries of the research.

7. Results of the work carried out:

a) The Repositioning of Religion in Women's Lives

After years of marginalization, religion is once again emerging in the public sphere in the East and in the West. The repositioning of religion is a phenomenon concerning all religions and is one of the elements that most characterizes the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Contrary to widely held mass media stereotypes of women, they are not simply passive victims, but indeed are leading actors in religious realignment in Europe, as they are in their countries of origin. The cases studied in this research demonstrate just this as the following excerpts from the interviews confirm.

Mihaela, a 40 year-old wife of a pastor and mother of two children, leads a group of women at the Baptist church and says: "For us religious freedom is still something new. Living through communism was terrible, people had many awful experiences that I don't even want to remember. I was young, I was 18 years old when the revolution occurred. As a Christian I suffered a lot, I had to change schools four times because I was continually being threatened by teachers - it was a frightening time. After the fall of communism freedom was felt everywhere, even in the churches and in our daily life. People came back to the churches. My husband and I opened two churches before being sent to Italy to live among the Romanians already dwelling here. There was a lot to do and it was very difficult for us in the beginning."

According to the majority of Muslim Arab women interviewed, even though Islam had never been banned, many Muslim countries lost their religious identity in the last century. However, nowadays an increasing number of people are repositioning religion by bringing it to the forefront of the public's attention by claiming new religious freedoms. Fatima is a twenty nine year-old mother married to an Italian convert, she states: "In Tunisia we don't have the right to practice our religion. Many people don't give a lot of importance to religion and there's even a law that forbids the wearing of a veil. On the contrary, Italy has no such law. We find it easier to practice our religion here in Italy than in our own country, which is a Muslim country to begin with." Also in former communist countries, such as Albania, where religion was banned from 1967 until the end of the totalitarian regime⁴, Islam is now beginning to re-

⁴ In 1967 in Albania all religious practices were banned and the country was proclaimed officially atheist, marking an event that had never happened in world history. Albanians born

appear. Rhadia, a 28 year-old Albanian woman who arrived in Italy eight years ago to get her degree, clearly defines this phenomenon. Recently married to an Italian convert and six months pregnant, she recollects: "We had dealt with communism for almost fifty years, it was a dictatorship. Mosques and churches were closed and it was absolutely forbidden to practice any form of religion. Over there, one had to keep their religious practice hidden, it was very difficult to pass religious beliefs down to your own children. My parents grew up practically as atheists, believing in God but not being able to do anything about it, they had to live their lives without religion. Then when, thank God, they opened their borders, communism fell and democracy came in, they reopened the mosques and churches and the people returned to religion. And so, slowly but surely, thanks be to God, alhamud lillah, Islam is flourishing and many people understand what it means to be a Muslim. In the beginning people said that they had Muslim origins because three-quarters of the people in Albania are Muslim. However, only 30% practice, though that's a number that continues to grow, thanks be to God. It's something that really pleases me." It is interesting to note that in Albania, like many other nations, the youth are leading the way in terms of religious re-positioning. Many young people are in fact on the front line of this push. Rhadia adds: "We are children that speak to our parents about Islam, rather than the other way around. The first to begin talking (about Islam) was my brother whom had spoken with me, and then we talked to our mother about it. Our mother began practicing. She fasts, but she doesn't wear the hijab yet, hopefully it soon will, however, it's her choice and conscience that must tell her whether or not to hold on to her faith. (My) dad is a little bit farther away, but I hope he too moves closer to his faith."

It is a fact that nowadays second generations are increasingly turning to "inherited religion" as their primary source of identity, perceiving it, not as a call to violence, but as a channel through which to integrate themselves into the civic and political life of the country where they live (Levitt, Waters, 2006). An example of this youth activism in Italy is the association GMI - Giovani Musulmani d'Italia (Young Muslims of Italy), founded in 2001. Many youth from the mosque aged 14 to 30 years old attend the local chapter of this national organization in Rome. Female teenagers and young women are very active in promoting debates and discussions, they help work on national and international problems as well. Therefore, if on one side of the coin, the youth of GMI learn to promote the teachings of the Koran and of the Prophet, along with how to lead a pious and conscientious life of God by actively participating in Italian society, of which they feel, as they say again and again, 100% a part of; on the other side they are able make their voices felt by speaking out against the Israeli occupation. For example, at the beginning of 2009, many young women from the Roman chapter of GMI and the mosque of Centocelle took part in a protest in solidarity with the people of Palestine against the attacks on Gaza that were occurring at that time, and in the following months participated in the organization of activities and meals as a display of support for the Palestinians. On this subject, it is interesting to underscore that the protest in support of the Palestinian in 2008/2009 saw a significant presence of women from the Centocelle mosque, which, stepping aside from religious matters, had protested in public and expressed political positions.

Youth activism within organizations like GMI assumes a double significance of meanings and purposes: to Muslims it serves to guide, promote, strengthen the ethical practices of the community, and to non Muslims it serves to rectify the current negative image of Islam in the West. In both cases their function is to convey values, visions and sometimes social policies and to establish European Muslims in the public sphere.

during the regime were never taught religion, so they grew up to become either atheists or agnostics. Article 37 of the Albanian Constitution of 1976 stipulated, "The State recognizes no religion, and supports atheistic propaganda in order to implant a scientific materialistic world outlook in people."

In this general context, religion emerges for youth, but also for adults - both Muslims and Baptists -, as a very personal, free choice and all-encompassing experience. Religious principles and practices are seen not as blind impositions, but rather as a rational source of personal morality that the individual is free to follow. All the respondents, Baptists and Muslims alike, pointed out that they felt totally at ease with their faith and had freely chosen to adhere to it. An unmarried 30 year-old Romanian woman, who wishes to remain anonymous, says: "My family was orthodox, but religion didn't mean anything to me. It wasn't in my life. I only thought about work. My obsession was just to work and to get money. However, I felt like something was missing in my life. I wasn't happy. The first years here in Italy were very difficult. One day I met some people who got me thinking about God. I've been re-born since I embraced the faith". Many respondents, both Muslims and Baptists, said that they had independently explored their faith and sought additional religious knowledge from publications, associations, study groups, and religious scholars. Sajida, a 20 year-old born in Italy, reared by Palestinian parents and a university student, says: "Religion is something quite intimate between oneself and God which cannot be judged by another human being. For this reason, in Islam one prays only to God, we address ourselves only to God and to nobody else." Cathalina, a 34 year-old, Baptist girl emphasizes: "God is everything to me. It is He who gives me strength, it's thanks to Him and that which is written in the bible drives me to do good. It wasn't very simple for me in the beginning. I came here to find work, later on my siblings decided to come too, but because I seem so small nobody wanted to give me a job, they thought I was sick. I prayed a lot and my prayers were answered, therefore I talk to other people about the words of God in the hope that they too can feel His grace".

So religion is both a personal and a social matter. In particular young people experience it as a means to strengthen themselves individually and within the society. Religion becomes the key to earthly happiness, pride of self, expression of both new and multiple identities. On closer, it emerges a liberal-postmodern image of religion in which everyone is free to build their own identity in relation to religious principles and in harmony with the contemporaneity, drawing from several containers of identity. Migrants and their descendents create hybrid identities and pose new challenges to the societies in which they live, as the association *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia* shows. Infact, on one hand it challenges western stereotypes on Islam and on the other the more conservative and reactionary Islamic sectors.

b) Religion in Diaspora: sens of belonging, comfort in suffering and loneliness, new identity

The fieldwork results point out that in diaspora religion appears to be one of the ways of defining a sense of belonging, in addition to the formation of cultural identities. For many first and second generation immigrant Muslims and Baptists, religion not only serves as a means of returning toward one's own roots; for example, to a social network far from home, or to spiritual support in order to deal with the difficulties of daily life, but it is also the expression of individual and collective re-invention, a means by which one can relate with modernity while at the same time not precluding the participation of the modern self. Religion is in the present of Europe and not only in the past. In keeping with the women many interviewed, according to Muslims and to Baptists, turning to religion does not mean turning to the past, but instead living wholly in the present. In the context of the 21st century, religion provides the foundation for 'morality' and also a sense of 'unity' (Silvestri, 2008). It is a source of 'help' and 'solidarity' for the community. In talking with Romanian women, religion emerges as a fundamental experience in daily life, particularly in diaspora. For many of them, in fact, migration is a painful, lonely and difficult experience. Mihaela laments: "Circumstances for Romanian women in Italy are much different because in Romania we have family and friends, our home life is a little better. Here (deep sigh) things are much worse, in their hearts and their whispers, women are more sentimental; I think that women don't really feel 'at home',

I, for example, have left my parents, my extended family and my relatives, I came with only my eldest daughter. My husband and I didn't know anyone, I couldn't find a job, but my greatest support has always been my faith. I think that for the other women here, faith is very important too because they don't have their husbands or their kids, being apart from their families that they haven't seen for up to five or six years. It's a really tough life, especially for women who work as care-givers always stuck in a house with an old person, with only two or three hours free on Sundays when they come to church. The community is very important, it provides a strong support network for them and that's why we have started these meetings. It's a support system for them. It's very important to them that someone calls, asks how they are doing, brings little gifts on their birthday, just little things, but they are very important to them."

The suffering in diaspora is a recurrent theme, even if the respondents, especially the Muslims, have a hard time expressing and coming to address the issue in interviews. They feel much more at ease in talking about it in informal conversations. Listening their accounts we can find echoes of the "suffering of the post-colonial subject" studied by Fanon (1962) and "the double absence" analyzed by Sayad (1999). Some respondents suffered both mentally and physically due to their exile. One Muslim respondent tells of when she arrived in Italy, in Sicily, 20 years ago, she never went out, spending all her days at home because the environment throughout was perceived as adverse. Consequently, her seclusion led to her developing eating problems, and as a result, she started to suffer from a serious case of anorexia. Besides medical assistance and hospitalizations, religion became a great comfort. Similar statements regarding religion's use as a means of support is also seen from other stories of women. For many first generation immigrants the migration experience often results in vast isolation, at least during the first few years. Many of them reported not working and spending most of their time alone at home not learning Italian and without the opportunity to get in touch with the host society. In this context religion can become an important reassurance, an irreplaceable solace. Going to places of worship can become a way to get out of the house, meet people, discuss religious principles and norms. Religion can thus represent a means toward gaining access to the public domain. It allows many women leave home and encounter a new social atmosphere. An environment composed mainly of women, which can become supportive and even like a new family away from home. So, if on the one hand, religious communities spread values and well defined guidelines for personal conduct that don't permit great deviations and assert social controls, on the other, they represent an important base for social aggregation. Many immigrants find an individual and collective identity in religion.

In today's big picture, by turning to religion women of different faiths claim a voice in a fragmented and multi-vocal post-modern and post-colonial era. Religious revivalisms in Italy as across the world epitomize this new era and have come to engender new competitive demands for redefining moral projects and the idea of the common good.

c) Women and places of worship

It is a well established fact that nowadays women fill up places of worship, "feminizing" these environments. Both, the mosque al-Huda and the Baptist church of Centocelle are seeing an increase in the presence of women and have very active female groups where women meet to pray, to partake in religious studies and also to get involved in charitable work; there's a children's educational program, social activities, festivities, proselytism activity, and Italian language courses (only in the case of the mosque).

Women and the Mosque

The mosque al-Huda adheres to an absolute division of the spaces creating male and female designated areas. The large prayer hall is in fact divided into two parts by a folding screen and drapes: there is a large part reserved for men and a smaller section for women, by which one enters through a lateral doorway. Furnished with some shelves that are occupied by copies of the Koran, small couches and chairs, this area is also provided with a bathroom for ablutions.

Every Saturday afternoon at least 40-50 women of different age, social class, and nationality meet in the mosque. Among them are Arabs, Sub-Saharan Africans, Asians and Eastern Europeans with their children who chat and play about running from the female to the male side. Some of these women live in the neighborhood, or in the neighborhoods nearby, some others come from other parts of the town. Sajida says: "I go to the Centocelle mosque every Saturday because it's the closest mosque to where I live and because it's quite a bustling place. It's more like a cultural center than a mosque, we all gather together every Saturday, from young girls, women and men. We do a lot of activities: for kids there's a school on Saturdays and Sundays. For the teenage girls there are different projects, for example they can do various kinds of lessons. They have different course for adults as well. Last year I helped out as a support teacher of Italian." Rhadia adds: "I live in a small town next to Rome. I come to both this mosque (at Centocelle) and the Great Mosque, but this one is better organized. There are courses on religion as well as others. I also attend courses on learning to read and write in Arabic. It's important to know how to read the Koran in the language in which it was originally written and to be able to discuss that which is written with other women." During weekly Islamic studies classes women of different ages study and debate Islamic scriptures (Qur'an, hadith and associated exegetical literature), social and cultural practices. Led by a Palestinian woman considered to be an expert, these women study Islamic scriptures to understand the holy texts in order to go back to the Qur'an on their own so that they can understand the Islamic message. Their readings do not challenge Islamic orthodoxy and patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an as Islamic feminists, like Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas and Ziba Mir Hosseini (Pepicelli, 2010). The women of the mosque in Centocelle have conservative ideas concerning gender roles: the main duty and fulfilment of a woman is being a good wife and a good mother; her individual realization is in the family first of all, and then in the public; women have to dress modestly and wear the veil. However, they are not secluded in the home space, they participate in the public and interact with the Islamic texts in order to find their own role in the society and in the family. The effort of re-reading the Qur'an and the other sacred texts make them assert themselves in the Islamic *ummah* and claim new rights in the name of Islam.

A feminine presence in the mosque is a very new element that testifies to the big changes under way. Traditionally, women used to observe their religiousness at home, while men used to attend the mosques, but in the last few years an increasing number of women are leaving their homes in the West and in the East. Their physical presence and their weekly lessons reconfigure the gendered practice of Islamic pedagogy and the social institution of mosques (Mahmood, 2004), even if some restrictions remain. For example, women and men have to pray separately, women are not allowed to lead mixed prayers and can only guide other women. However, theological and doctrinal subjects which were, until recently, discussed only by men, "are now debated by ordinary women in the context of mosque lessons modeled to some extent on protocols of public address and modern education (rather than on the traditional Islamic schools, Kuttab)" (Mahmood, 2004, p. 55). Moreover, they are also active in proselytism (da'wa), in organizing seminars on women's issues and in volunteering. By organizing parties, community dinners, trade and book fairs, women are asserting themselves in the public life of their community and more generally of the town. Their growing activism is also confirmed by the fact that inside the association al-Huda executives, there are two women, one to represent the women's group and the other one the

youth. Furthermore, the women's group of Al-Huda mosque is a member of ADMI (Associazione Donne Musulmane d'Italia - Association of Muslim Women in Italy) which organizes seminars for the faithful and conferences for breaking stereotypes and promoting a positive image of Muslim women. Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that women are often relegated to mainly the discussion of female-based issues.

Women and the Church

In the Romanian Baptist church in Centocelle half of the faithful are women. They assemble in a very active female group led by the wife of the minister, Mihaela. She says: "As the wife of a pastor I have quite a lot of responsibility. I help out other women, we've even begun a mission called 'Messenger for Christ'. I do a little bit of everything, but I do have a few girls that help me out by making telephone calls and keeping the room where we all meet clean and organized. There's quite a lot that we do. Once a month we have a large meeting for women in which ladies from the other evangelical churches in Rome participate, we talk about themes specific to women; regarding single women, married women, abused women and women in missionaries. In 2007 I even wrote a book about our life here in diaspora, I wrote it in Romanian. It's called "In the Shadows of the Ruins of the Colosseum", I got the idea from the first Christians here who had fought so hard for their faith and now we find ourselves in the same position, in the same place, in the sense that God wants us to do the same thing that they did. I spoke about our experiences from the very beginning, about our church and about the calling between us as women - a little of everything. It was successful, may I give thanks to God because He gave me the inspiration and the money. Then I wrote a second book, although it's sold out. It's called "Meeting Eve", it's a psychological novel that speaks to the hearts of women, like Eve, the first woman, every woman has a little part of Eve inside them. It really makes you think. It's the life of a woman that has been abused in the past, then it becomes about her desire to understand and to find the Lord which leads to her life being completely changed." Mihaela describes her versatility regarding scriptures as a gift from the Lord, like something that she enjoys doing, it represents her contribution to the community like when she and her husband went preaching on the streets of Rome five years ago. Today there are more than 100 believers, of which half are women. The books by Mihaela are born out of the capacity to reawaken the conscience, to make people think, they serve to spread the word of God, they are used during the proselytism activities, a field in which women are in the frontline. Caterina states: "I had returned to live in Romania, but then I wanted to come back to Italy so that I could spread the word of the Lord. During the week I can't wait for Sunday to arrive in order to be among my brothers and sisters. Every Sunday morning we go to Anagnina. We display the Bible, the good news that Jesus Christ has saved the world. There are also other brothers who sing while we hand out some brochures. Then during the week we try to call those who might have lost our cell phone numbers, we try to get close to them, to befriend them and then we invite them to our Church so that they understand. On Sundays we have lunch together with some friends and in the afternoon come here to the Church (in Centocelle) for the gatherings."

The gatherings see a clear-cut division of the roles between men and women. The former sit on the left, the latter on the right. The pastor is at the center, a weight that in the Romanian Church can only be held by men, in contrast to what happens in other Baptist churches, like that of Italian churches. It's important to realize that the Romanian church is very conservative, with rigid degrees of separation of the genders. When questioning this aspect, Mihaela says: "God has prepared other roles for women, we can pray, sing and help the elderly and infirm. I also spread the message to my sisters, but I don't stand up in front of them like a pastor. I don't consider myself to be a female pastor, the Bible says that women can't be pastors. However, the Bible does say that women of a specific age must teach the

young ones who are the majority. Considering that I have been married for 10 years, I'm 38 years old and I've got two kids, therefore I have experience."

Religious education is another one of the areas that sees women very involved. Mihaela continues: "Right now I'm writing a book with my husband. Currently my husband and I are also conducting a course for married couples and for families. Most of them are young, under 30 years old, they came here when they were 16 or 17 years old, they got married without any education, not knowing anything about raising a family, sexuality or babies, and for the past three years we've been providing these courses; we talk about medicine, of what the Bible says about families and relationships. It's been going very well because these young people have many questions and so they (we)'ve even begun to consider the idea of writing a book on these courses. At this point we're about to finish our book, we only have the final chapter to write on the family. The title will be "Traveling as a Trio", husband, wife and God." According to Mihaela and the most part of the respondents, this triangular relation (man, woman and God) follows a hierarchical structure. She infact states: "We all must to try to respect what the Bible says that the head of husband is Jesus, the head of the wife is the husband. This is the order. If you respect this, everything is okay. It does not mean that the husband is the master. The Bible says that the wife has to listen to her husband as her husband respects and listens to God, because also Jesus, the son, listens (to) God. It is a hierarchy: God, Jesus, husband, wife and children below. Both husband and wife have authority to raise their children equally. Another thing, the Bible says that man has responsibility for the spiritual growth of his family, so must deal with the spiritual life of his wife."

Finally, it must be mentioned that for several women following religious principles, attending the church is a means toward restoring on one hand their image of respectable women, good and devoted mother even if they are far from home for years; and on the other hand male authority. Faced with an increasing crisis of masculinity, many women from Eastern European countries are infact increasingly taking on the role of the main or the only breadwinner for the whole family (men included), while their husband fall in states of depression and in alcoholism. By embracing religious models some women indeed hope that their men assume responsibility for themselves and the family, and follow more traditional gender roles in the family. On this point, it is worth to notice that in informal conversations with pious Muslim women it appears that some of them hope in a more strict observance of the islamic principles by their husbands. Similarly to the Romanians, muslim women consider religion a way to restore man's function as capable husband and father in the difficult conditions of diaspora.

d) Veils and Bodily Performances

Every woman meets at the mosque wears the veil; it is a broadly shared the idea that it is the duty of a Muslim woman, even if it cannot be imposed. Its use is strongly encouraged in informal conversations and formal talks by women and mosque leaders as well. On the contrary, the use of niqab (head and face covering veil) is discouraged. Concerning niqab, Fatima, who wears hijab (the head covering veil), which is the most common kind of veil used in the al-Huda mosque and generally in Italy, says: "It is not required by the Quran. It is a habit that comes from Gulf countries. It is not in our religion. In Islam, women must cover only the head and the hair".

All Muslim respondents expressed their discomfort with the general assumption that woman's liberty depends on how she dresses and attacked the objectification of women in a consumerist Western society. In the interviews they often expressed their criticism against stereotypes on veiled Muslim women as victims of men (fathers, husbands, brothers) stressing the fact that veiling is their own choice. This explanation is very clear in the case of Rhadia who lived by herself when she decided to veil: "I decided to cover myself two years

ago, but I've been practicing Islam for five years; by going to the mosque I started understanding Islam better and what it meant to live as a Muslim, I then realized that it was a moral obligation, my duty, a gesture of humility and devotion toward my God. I concluded that I had to cover myself, but to tell the truth, I didn't have the courage, unfortunately living in a country where there's so much discrimination against Muslims, for example if someone sees a covered woman they always put their hands up. For all these reasons I didn't have the guts to wear the veil and because I was alone without my parents I wasn't able to cover myself, but then I found the confidence, thanks to God, I said that's enough! After having made this decision everything truly became much easier. The first time that I put on the veil I was very emotional. I had decided to put on the veil during Ramadan while attending the mosque. Before Ramadan began I made a promise between myself and God, I told myself that I had to put on the veil before Ramadan was over. It happened in the last few days, we were at the mosque, it was the Night of Destiny, we call it *Lailatu al-Qadr* in Arabic. During that night lots of Muslims spend the whole night at the mosque praying, they make many appeals to God. I decided that after that night nobody would ever see me again with my hair uncovered. That night was my night and, in fact, I had told all my Muslim sisters: "today I am putting on the veil" and the following day when I left the mosque covered they were all very joyous. I was so emotional, I had no idea how people would react, and as a matter of fact I was living with other Christian girls because, being a student, we were all living in the same house. I was so full of emotion because after that I had to go to university which was a Catholic university, I was even taking four theology courses so I was afraid of how the professors might react, but instead everything went well. I went there to take my final exam and I got the highest possible grade, no one said anything to me. In the end I graduated with rather high grades. I, thank God, didn't have any problems, I found a job at a tour agency where we sell package vacations. Although I do know other girls that have had difficulties." Speaking along the same subject, Mariam, a 40 year-old convert to Islam and married to a Palestinian man, says: "They do not know that I speak Italian so I can hear their comments, "look, she seems the Madonna!" At work I do not wear the hijab, because for not experiencing any problems. Even my parents don't know that I wear a veil, when I go to see them I take it off." However, the majority of those interviewed stated that their wearing of the veil hasn't really created any problems. As Haiam, a 38 year-old mother with four children who works as a cultural mediator, puts it: "I haven't faced too many problems because of my wearing of a veil. I decided to cover myself at 15 years old as a personal choice. Back then there weren't many women who wore the veil in Egypt. Some books made an impact on me, to be exact, some written regarding the 'hijab by Zaynab al Ghazali, therefore I made my own decision, nobody had asked me to." Sajida comments: "For me it was just natural putting on the veil, it has never been a problem. There have been many questions, mostly when I'm at university, such as, why do I wear it and about my religion, but no insults. I wear a veil above all because in Islam it's a woman's duty to do so. It's a covering that protects women, her intimacy and her virginity. The foremost purpose of the veil is to limit the attracting of attention, it's also a form of modesty, and it serves as an element of equality because it conceals hierarchies. The veil is something simple which decreases the differences among women, it's something that reminds us that the rich and the poor are the same. As a symbol the veil is quite modest."

'Modesty' is a key concept in defining the roles and ideal behavior of women in Islam. It is directly in line with the idea of chastity and with the 'peaceful submission to God's will' that is implicit in the term Islam (Silvestri, 2008, p. 21). In every interview veiling is associated with 'honor', 'modesty' and 'piety' and never with political issues.

Also for Romanian Baptist women, "modesty" is a key concept in determining their roles and ideal behavior of women as well. Claudia, a 32 year-old nurse, states: "Women don't have to be provocative, they can put on whatever they want, but they shouldn't wear clothing that shows their intimate parts. A skirt shouldn't come up past the knees and clothes shouldn't be

too tight, there's no need to attract a lot of attention. Then, when one comes to church it's necessary to be even more careful regarding your dress, we have to put on a small veil, or a head band as a sign of respect to God. In some traditional churches it's even obligatory to put on a long gown. At this one, in Centocelle, it's not compulsory." In the church of Centocelle all the women wear little veils, often transparent, or a head band that leaves their hair uncovered, yet serves its purpose symbolically.

e) The Emergence of 'Islam of Italy'

Participant observation and interviews in the mosque at Centocelle, together with the analysis of the most recent literature on the subject, point out that there is an emergence and consolidation of Islam in Italy, through a gradual process of inclusion, manifested in the processes of integration (through workplaces, places of worship, social and political activities) and of generational transition. Together, these contribute to the formation of a Muslim population in Italy that continues to have a connection to their countries of origin, but which does not come from the outside, it is, instead, part of Italy (Allievi, 2009).

Rhadia, who married an Italian convert claims: "I like living in Italy. I believe I've integrated myself pretty well, at this point this is my home. Unfortunately, I rarely go back to Albania due to problems with proper documents and also because of the distance. For the past eight years I've more or less stayed here, I went back just to see my family. I guess in a certain way you could say that I feel like I'm Italian. I share many attributes with Italians, I live the way they do. Certainly, being a Muslim, I do many things that they don't do, like praying and fasting. I 'really' cover myself up, at least according to them I'm really concealed. They say to me, "ah, but if you took off your veil wouldn't it be better?" Perhaps they would see a photo of me back when I didn't wear the veil and they would say, "ah, you look normal here." So then I say, yes, now I'm 'abnormal' and we joke that I'm 'abnormal'. I have lots of Italian girlfriends and I feel very at ease with them. I can talk to them because it's not like all we talk about religion. We talk about all the different aspects of our lives, such as school, work, husbands, and shopping; since we also go shopping and etcetera, just like all the things that the average Italian person would do, we, too, are normal." If first generations still feel a strong attachment to their country of origin, in contrast, for second generations Italy is without any doubt home, as Sajida clearly states: "I'm 20 years old, I was born here, I'm Italian with Palestinian heritage. I go to university and I would say that I live like a Muslim girl whose rather well integrated. I've been able to live my life as a Muslim smoothly, I haven't had any problems. I've always had friends of different faiths, not just Muslims, but also Christians, attending state schools. I, being born here, view this as my native country. Once you're in this world, one finds oneself in a place and thinks to himself that this is all for me. He has everything. And this is how I feel it's been for me."

Islam of Europe stands for being not the importation of an original model, but the product of new recomposed identities. We do not face to models of Islam that reproduce those of countries of origins of migrants; we face the disappearance of the cultures of origin in favor of a westernization that promote a new kind of Islam. Its main feature is the idea of universality of Islam that allows overcoming the divisions among the different cultures that look losers in front of the outcome of the history and the strength of West. In this way globalization becomes a great opportunity to rebuild the *umma*, the universal community of believers.

8) Conclusion

In Italy the debate on the incompatibility, or the presumed incompatibility, between women's rights, Italian identity/culture and Islamic values obscures other themes regarding immigrant women and religion. This comparative study attempted to redefine the terms of debate by observing similarities and differences in the process of the public transformation of minorities'

religions, and to challenge the idea that Islam is more "public", more "challenging" than other religions. Even though mass media and a part of academic research, in particular after September 11th, focus on Islam as if it were the only religion repositioning itself in the public sphere in Italy, there are also other religions, minority religions like Baptist, and majority ones such as Catholicism that are involved in this process. Despite apparent differences we can observe that the repositioning of religion in the weak secular context of Italian society is not only performed by minority religions, but also by Catholicism. In fact, it has never ceased to play an open role in the public and political spheres and continues to inform people's political culture (Salih, 2009). It is well known that nowadays the Vatican is particularly active in influencing people's daily behavior and political parties agendas manifesting itself as a strong opposition to abortion, reproductive technologies and civil unions.

Given this situation, the fieldwork results point out that immigrant women are not necessarily passive victims in the process of the repositioning of religion in the public sphere, but they can be active players. By embracing religion and taking part in the life of a religious community women (Muslim and Romanian Baptists) empower themselves (rather than emancipate) and redefine gender roles mainly in the public domain. The present study actually focused on the relation between women and religion in the public sphere rather than in the private. Nevertheless, according to many interviews with respondents from both groups, we could already assume that in the family the relationships between men and women are characterized by gender role division and they follow more traditional hierarchies, but this point should be better investigated by new research. Particularly at this point of the research it could be very interesting and useful to investigate the consequence of women empowerment in public on family and private sphere. By the way it should be very important addressing the following questions: could the process of empowerment into the public meaning a process of empowerment in the private too? Could it mean a change in the gender relations in the family?

At this point, by analyzing the results of present research, it only emerges that religion can make women visible and empowered in the public. For example, by going to the mosque, Muslim women occupy a traditionally male space. Historically in fact women observed their religion at home. Moreover, by attending the mosque they get out of the house and break their seclusion; increase their knowledge in Islamic studies and in the Italian language; take on roles of leadership in the community life; participate in the social and political realm (organizing social activities such as parties, dinners, conferences and taking part to political demonstrations). Thus religion can become an element that facilitates friendship and the creation of social networks, and at the same time a tool for incorporation/empowerment in community contexts and in the public sphere. By negotiating their visibility in the public arena and by affirming their minority religions, immigrant women become part of the picture of Italy developing into fully active and visible citizens.

9) Main results

1) This comparative study shows that although there are historical, social and religious differences between the Muslim community and Romanian Baptist community in Centocelle there remains several points in common with regard to women and religion in diaspora.

a) Series of common elements:

Religious revivalism

Women as active agents in the process of the repositioning of religion in private and public domains and not as passive victims

Religion in diaspora as a way to reconstruct a social community and identity

Women as active agents in the religious community and female groups

Women having direct access to sacred texts to learn straightforwardly about women's role in family and society according to religious principles
No mixed spaces in places of worships. No female cult ministers
Modesty in dress and in model of behavior

2) The fieldwork results show that religion can empower women, in particular in the public sphere.

3) The fieldwork results show that religion is not necessarily a tool of exclusion, but can be a tool toward gaining citizenship.

4) The fieldwork results show Islam does not pose exceptional challenges to the supposed secular Italian context.

5) Emergence of an "Islam of Italy" in place of an "Islam in Italy"

6) Literature analysis and field work results show that urban territories are not homogeneous and monolithic realities. The history of internal and external migrations that have characterized the history of the neighborhood in Centocelle during the last century shows that urban spaces are the product of different cultural and social reconfigurations, the result of continuous stratifications.

10) Potential impact and use of the research

The present research points to the fact that we are experiencing a process of transition from an Islam 'in' Italy/Europe, to an Islam 'of' Italy/Europe. Reading these results by means of Allievi's analysis (2009), we could presume that the result of this transitional process should be the formation of a genuine Italian/European Islam, with its own separate identity different from that of Arabic Islam or that of other countries and cultural areas from which immigrant come from. This Islam is (and even more so in the future will be seen to be) a native European movement, largely the result of a gradual and substantial process of the assimilation of Muslims residing in Europe who look forward to the prospect of implementing full civil rights and being on equal footing with other Europeans, with whom they share a common destiny (Allievi, 2009, p. 96). Therefore, it is helpful to start to refer to Muslim individuals as 'Muslims of Italy' rather than Muslims 'in' Italy; to allow to permit to build mosques and Islamic centers; to more fully involve Muslim communities in decisions regarding their welfare (for example, on issues such as banning the veil); to look at Islam without the veil of prejudice, particularly in the case of women. For this reason it seems very worthwhile to continue to examine this issue through more research and debates which involve Muslim women of Italy as well.

11) Bibliography

Ahmed, Leila, *Women and Gender in Islam. Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992.

Al Azmeh, Aziz, *Islam in Europe : diversity, identity and influence*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Allievi, Stefano (ed.), *Conflicts over Mosques in Europe. Policy Issues and Trends*. Network of European Foundations'Initiative on Religion and Democracy in Europe and Alliance Publishing Trust. In collaboration with Ethnobarometer, 2009.

Allievi, Stefano, *Islam italiano. Viaggio nella seconda religione del paese* [Italian Islam. A journey in the country second religion], Torino, Einaudi, 2003.

Allievi, Stefano, *Musulmani d'Occidente. Tendenze dell'islam europeo* [Western Muslims. Trends of Euro-Islam], Roma, Carocci, 2005.

Asad, Talal, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford, 2003.

Casanova, José, *Immigration and the new religious pluralism: A European/US comparison* in T. Banchoff (ed.) *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Casanova, José, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Caritas/Migrantes, *Immigrazione Dossier Caritas 2009*, [Immigration Dossier Caritas 2009], Antarem, Roma 2009.

Caritas/Migrantes, *Immigrazione Dossier Caritas 2008*, [Immigration Dossier Caritas 2009], Antarem, Roma 2008.

Caritas Diocesana di Roma, *Immigrati a Roma e Provincia. Luoghi di incontro e di preghiera* [Immigrants in Rome and in the district. Placet of meeting and worship], Roma, 2008.

Caritas Italiana, *Confederatia Caritas România, I rumeni in Italia tra rifiuto e accoglienza*, Edizioni Idos/Sinnos, Roma, 2010.

Cesari, Joceline, *When Islam and democracy meet : Muslims in Europe and in the United States*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Cohen, Joshua, Matthew Howard & Martha C. Nussbaum (eds), *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999.

De Angelis, Roberto, Mignella Callosa Fiammetta, *La periferia perfetta. Migrazioni, istituzioni e relazioni etniche nell'area metropolitana romana* [The perfect periphery. Migrations, institutions and ethnic relationships in the metropolitan area of Rome], Milano, Franco Angeli, 2006.

Decimo, Francesca, *Quando emigrano le donne. Percorsi e reti femminili della mobilità transnazionale* [When the Women Emigrate: Feminine Roads and Networks of Transnational Mobility], Bologna, Il Mulino, 2005.

El Guindi, Fadwa, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy & Resistance*, Oxford, Berg 1999.

Fernando, Mayanthi, *The Republic's 'Second Religion': Recognizing Islam in France* in "Middle East Report", 235 (Summer 2005), pp. 12-17.

Gole, Nilufer, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1996.

Haddad, Yvonne, *The study of women in Islam and the West: a select bibliography* in "Hawwa", 3, (2005), 1, pp. 111-157.

Harja, Alina, Melis, Guido, *Romeni, la minoranza decisiva per l'Italia di domani*, Rubbettino, 2010.

Hoodfar, Homa, *More Than Clothing: Veiling as an Adaptive Strategy*, in Alvi, Sajida, Hoodfar, Homa and McDonough, Sheila (eds), *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates*, Toronto, 2003, pp 3-40.

Jenkins, Philip, *God's continent : Christianity, Islam, and Europe's religious crisis*, Oxford; New York, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Jouili, Jeanette, *Religious Practices: Ablution, Purification, Prayer, Fasting and Piety*, Western Europe in Souad Joseph (ed) *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, Leiden, Brill, V (2007), pp. 281-284.

Levitt, Peggy, and Waters Mary, (eds), *The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation*, Russell Sage Publications, 2002.

Levitt, Peggy, *Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life*. in "Sociology of Religion", Spring 2004, Vol 35 (1), pp. 174-196.

Mahmood, Saba *The Politics of piety: the Islamic revival and the feminist subject*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004.

- Massari, Monica, *Islamofobia. La paura e l'islam*, 2006, Laterza.
- Moors, Annelies, Salih, Ruba (eds), 'Muslim women' in Europe: Secular normativities, bodily performances and multiple publics, *Social Anthropology /Anthropologie Sociale*, Volume 17 Issue 4. (November 2009)
- Naso, Paolo (a cura di), *Roma delle religioni, [Rome of religions]*, Roma, Edup, 2004.
- Pepicelli, Renata, *Femminismo islamico. Corano, diritti, riforme [Islamic feminism. Quran, rights, reforms]*, Roma, Carocci, 2010.
- Portelli, Alessandro (with Bruno Bonomo, Alice Sotgia e Ulrike Viccaro), *Città di parole. Storia orale di una periferia romana [Town of words. Oral history of a Roman periphery]*, Roma, Donzelli, 2007.
- Riesebrodt, Martin & Chong, Kelly H., 1999. Fundamentalisms and Patriarchal Gender Politics. *Journal of Women's History*, 10:4:55-77. (It draws on a study about women in Pentecostal congregations in Latin America)
- Roy, Olivier, *L'islam mondialisé*, Paris, Édition du Seuil, 2002.
- Salih, Ruba, "Muslim women, fragmented secularism and the construction of interconnected 'publics' in Italy" *Social Anthropology /Anthropologie Sociale*, Volume 17 Issue 4, 2009, pp. 409-423.
- Salih, Ruba, *Gender in transnationalism. Home, longing and belonging among Moroccan migrant women*, 2003, London, Routledge.
- Salvatore, Armando and Eickelman, Dale, *Public Islam and the Common Good*, Brill, 2004.
- Silvestri, Sara, *Europe's Muslim women: potential, aspirations and challenges*, Brussels, King Baudouin Foundation, 2008
- Viannello, Francesca Alice, "La migrazione femminile rumena in Italia: traiettorie di vita e di lavoro", in Gambino F., Sacchetto D. (a cura di), *Un arcipelago produttivo. Migranti e imprenditori tra Italia e Romania*, Carocci, Roma, 2007.