

CARIM INDIA – DEVELOPING A KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR POLICYMAKING ON INDIA-EU MIGRATION

Co-financed by the European Union

Pathways of Integration: Individual and collective strategies in northern Italy

Meenakshi Thapan

CARIM-India Research Report 2013/28

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Research Report
Thematic Report
CARIM-India RR2013/28

Pathways of Integration:
Individual and collective strategies in northern Italy

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Meenakshi Thapan, Pathways of Integration: Individual and collective strategies in northern Italy, CARIM-India RR 2013/28, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI): European University Institute, 2013.

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CARIM-India – Developing a knowledge base for policymaking on India-EU migration

This project is co-financed by the European Union and carried out by the EUI in partnership with the Indian Council of Overseas Employment, (ICOE), the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore Association, (IIMB), and Maastricht University (Faculty of Law).

The proposed action is aimed at consolidating a constructive dialogue between the EU and India on migration covering all migration-related aspects. The objectives of the proposed action are aimed at:

- Assembling high-level Indian-EU expertise in major disciplines that deal with migration (demography, economics, law, sociology and politics) with a view to building up migration studies in India. This is an inherently international exercise in which experts will use standardised concepts and instruments that allow for aggregation and comparison. These experts will belong to all major disciplines that deal with migration, ranging from demography to law and from economics to sociology and political science.
- Providing the Government of India as well as the European Union, its Member States, the academia and civil society, with:
 1. Reliable, updated and comparative information on migration
 2. In-depth analyses on India-EU highly-skilled and circular migration, but also on low-skilled and irregular migration.
- Making research serve action by connecting experts with both policy-makers and the wider public through respectively policy-oriented research, training courses, and outreach programmes.

These three objectives will be pursued with a view to developing a knowledge base addressed to policy-makers and migration stakeholders in both the EU and India.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the website of the project: <http://www.india-eu-migration.eu/>

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Introduction: Pathways of Integration

It has been argued that Italy is a ‘postracial society’ where ‘widespread racism permeates the political discourse, the societal behaviour, and popular culture, yet race is often unnamed and ultimately silenced’ (Lombardi-Diop 2012: 175).¹ This view suggests that Italy is an extremely racist society with perhaps few explicit expressions and several undertones present in policy, political rhetoric, as well as in social interactions. Italy has also been described as a deeply nationalist society especially in the last 150 years. This has no doubt resulted in what one scholar refers to as deeply rooted ‘nationalist repertoires’ that generate exclusionary practices and policies vis-à-vis migrants and others, in the public sphere (Maritano 2004: 64). There are several illustrations of such nationalism and the racism that prevails in everyday life.² This results in the view that multiculturalism has failed or that there is no real effort for the integration of immigrants in Italy and indeed in Europe. Although such a view offers a critique of government initiatives, legal outcomes and political will, I argue in this paper with the help of some illustrative material, instead to the diverse ways in which citizens and immigrants in northern Italy are engaged in the processes of integration across cultures, faiths, and linguistic barriers. The emphasis is on ‘cosmopolitan sociability’ and its construction through ‘networks of interconnection and locally based activities’ (Glick Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic 2011: 400).³ The idea of ‘sociability practices’ moves beyond multiculturalism and mere tolerance of difference to an understanding of ‘when and where people use their diverse cultural or religious backgrounds to build relationships and identities of openness’ (Ibid.: 410). In particular, I would like to emphasise the work that seeks to engage with youth whether this is through non-governmental associations (NGOs) or through strategies in high school but which, for constraints of space, is not examined in this paper which examines relations between employers and employees as indicative of efforts at integration on the ground and seeks to understand some linkages that are between local citizens, the immigrant population and religious institutions. As religion is so integral to the lives of both immigrants and local citizenry in very different ways, such connections merit our serious attention as they suggest possibilities for meaningful and lasting integration. Finally, I argue that the impetus for change is only possible through local participants. National and local policies are only formal aspects of forms of interaction that must exist on the ground. It is therefore imperative to understand individual and collective strategies of engagement as transformatory moments on the pathways of integration. The

¹ Immigrants of Indian origin around Fidenza and Parma in northern Italy were selected for this study according to location, gender, social class, age and educational background.. Those with very little formal education are employed in the agriculture sector, primarily dairy farms, slaughterhouses, and small factories in the largely rural and small towns of Emilia Romagna. They have lived in Europe for between 15-25 years depending on the trajectories for migration undertaken by them. I met and interviewed 30 men between the ages of 35-60. Interviews and focus group discussions were also conducted with 50 school going young adults (aged 15-18 years) and other youth (18-21 years). I met several women as well: some were engaged in factories, or in laundries, or working in small boutiques or shops. Most were homemakers and unemployed. I made several visits to the region of a week to two-three weeks each time, spending every day meeting a cross section of the Indian farm worker community, NGOs working with immigrant populations, immigrant associations, employers, school teachers and administrators, students of Indian origin, both boys and girls, and women at home, in the Sikh gurudwara and Hindu temples. I also interviewed a young Indian woman in Vicenza who runs the only non-formal organisation I encountered for the welfare of Indian women. In addition, I met and interviewed more than 40 Italian people including social workers, teachers, doctors, employers, trade union officials, police officials, members of local governments, church functionaries, translators, cultural mediators, NGOs of different kinds, and others. Interviews with Indian immigrants were conducted in Punjabi and Hindi and with Italians in English, using an interpreter each time. The collected material is part of Work Package 3 on Migrants and Borders in the EU FP7 EuroBroadMap project 2009-2012 funded by the European Union. I am grateful to this project and to the European Studies Programme (2010-2011), University of Delhi, funded by the European Union, that enabled me to engage in fieldwork in Europe in 2011.

² See for example Favero (2010).

³ ‘Cosmopolitan sociability’ has been defined as ‘consisting of forms of competence and communication skills that are based on the human capacity to create social relations of inclusiveness and openness to the world’ (Glick Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic 2011: 402).

outcome of such forms of engagement may not be visible immediately but they play a significant role developing dialogue and relationships across cultures.

I therefore examine the relationship between people, institutions and the efforts to build an integrated society based on individual and collective strategies of civic engagement. The people involve both migrants and their others, the Italian hosts, and several others, who are engaged in the process of 'integration', accomplish this through different kinds of activities within the legal framework of the local municipalities and governments. There are no necessarily shared or common goals or sensibilities in place in this endeavour that in fact stay alive through a multiplicity and diversity of views and practices. The initiative, drive and commitment of local citizens, immigrants and religious institutions is one reason why their efforts are successful and result in the formation of cross-cultural friendships and networks. Whether or not integration is achieved is another question and is not the focus of this paper. The point is to examine the different pathways of integration as they emerge and evolve in everyday life in social contexts that are fragmented by dichotomies between political intent and economic necessity, between national laws and local policies, between the desire to open up the possibilities for interaction and integration and the will and commitment to follow this through at the governmental level and through the work of the people involved. One way of trying to understand this process is to examine the practices of civic engagement that are an outcome of the effort by immigrants, local citizens and bodies, and religious institutions, among others, to attain their goals.

Pathways of integration as processes include forms of civic engagement that are expressed at diverse levels of everyday life. Like Caroline Brettell, I seek to understand 'immigrant agency and...diverse pathways to civic engagement' (2012: 130). In this process, I focus on the individual and collective strategies of civic engagement for forms of integration that seek to move out of 'subordinate integration' (Ambrosini 2001) to more assertive acts of engagement that promise gain, acceptance and recognition in one way or another. Brettell and Reed-Danahay use the idea of civic engagement interchangeably with the concept of 'participatory citizenship' (2012). In this process, they also distinguish between participation or civic engagement in formal processes such as the political process or informal participation in other spheres such as voluntary associations, agencies and religious institutions (Ibid.: 2).⁴ I do however also seek to understand the initiatives by local citizenry as well in the process of integration and the mutual recognition and acceptance of diversity. The motivations behind efforts at integration lie in the emotional need for the recognition of one another as equal and participatory citizens in the public sphere. It is obvious that his impetus is far more prevalent in the local citizenry than it is among the immigrant population and those who are engaged have behind them a history of activism and engagement with causes that seek to eradicate injustice, social inequalities, exclusion and marginalization. This act of working for the rights of migrants through pro-migrant mobilisation has been referred to by some scholars as 'altruistic mobilisation' (Passy 2001). By taking on the mantle of building pathways of integration with immigrants, they seek to articulate their suffering, search for their resolutions, emphasise their rights, offer assistance in different ways and seek to integrate immigrants into Italian society. Their ultimate goal is to build a just, humane society, based on the well-being of all members.⁵ These 'acts of citizenship' (Isin 2008) seek to constitute citizens not as mere subjects but as active citizens who seek transformation and change.

Immigrants themselves are engaged in processes of becoming citizens, in a social and affective sense, and make an effort to seek out engagement and involvement with others in the public sphere. Is it important therefore for young and adult women, more than men among the Indian immigrant population for example to seek out such involvement that takes them into the heart of being

⁴See Brettell and Reed-Danahay (2012) for a discussion of informal aspects of civic engagement and definitions of citizenship that go beyond the formal constructions of the same.

⁵ I am well aware that this is not necessarily true for all Italian participants and that there have been racist attacks on immigrants by local Italians across Italy. See, for example, Calavita (2005), Cole (1997), Favero (2010), Maher (1996).

participatory citizens together.⁶ The coming together of local initiatives and immigrant efforts lies at the centre of struggles for integration and therefore need to be understood in the complex and different ways in which they are played out. Religion and Left wing politics, for example, often go together in the Italian social landscape that seeks integration through multiple routes and directions. The goal is similar: the well-being and integration of the immigrant but for the local citizenry and institutions, the motivations are hugely opposed. These include faith and belief in a religious symbol or icon and building a new world through a commitment to serve the poor and to the protection of the human rights of those who are unjustly excluded and marginalised. At the same time, it is considered beneficial for the well-being and growth of Italian society if immigrants are well integrated and equal members of society. The training of officials, social workers and others who work with immigrants is also part of the local agenda and is a task undertaken by NGOs with local govt. funding and plays a significant role in the process of building integration.⁷

In an earlier paper, I have discussed the strategies by Indian women who seek out and accomplish participation in Italian society in different ways to attain their goals of integration, a kind of instrumental integration, as they are not interested in being intimately close to the Italian community, only that much that makes their position in Italy more conducive to better social interaction between the communities (Thapan 2013). This is the story of integration, from *subordinate integration*, as Ambrosini (2010) has pointed out, in the acceptance of immigrants by Italians the labour market, to a kind of *instrumental integration* by immigrants of Indian origin, to attain their goals of being accepted by Italians who consider them different, isolated and a closed community. While efforts at such forms of integration may appear to be limited insofar as they do not address a universalist picture of global citizenship, they are necessary for the survival and well-being of immigrants across societies.

Recent efforts to explain the trend of opening out towards others, in an inclusive and expansive approach, point to integration as a form of cosmopolitanism. Gerard Delanty argues that cosmopolitanism allows the possibilities of linking ‘normative critique with empirically based analysis focused on exploring new ways of seeing the world’. This consideration of social reality in terms of ‘people’s experiences, identities, solidarities and values’ provides the basis for a ‘new conception of immanent transcendence’ (Delanty 2012: 41). Citing Piet Strydom, Delanty argues that the ‘core of the cosmopolitan imagination’ is a way of viewing the social world that is concerned with the possibilities it opens up for self-transformation which can only be realized by ‘taking the cosmopolitan perspective of Other as well as global principles of justice’ (ibid.).

In contexts relevant to our discussion, cosmopolitanism therefore takes us beyond seeking to engage with the other in everyday forms of civic engagement or through understandings of one another’s cultures by forms of cultural interaction that surpass borders and barriers to such interaction. These could be first steps in understanding the other and engaging with the other in everyday life. Cultural translation would emerge as the necessary prelude to genuine mutual understanding and criticism and engagement with one another. The next step would be a recognition of the transformatory moment in everyday life contexts where strangers traverse well-worn paths of inequality, struggle, marginalisation and exclusion. Reaching that step requires an understanding of the different dimensions of interaction that take place in everyday life contexts, enabling forms of mutual engagement, understanding and interpretation as a way of incorporating the other as an indelible part of the self, bound by ties of difference as much as by sameness. These activities and engagements range from the most banal acts of finding housing, employment and schools for migrants to participation in social activities and events that hold the promise of acceptance and change for them as they do for their hosts who seek their integration in one way or another.

⁶ I have discussed this aspect of immigrant women’s engagement elsewhere. See Thapan (2013).

⁷ The work for example, of Nosotras, a NGO in Florence, in this regard with funding from the Commune of Florence is significant. I have attended a training camp for police officials organised by Nosotras in Scandicci in March 2013,

While I examine the role of the agencies of the Catholic church, other faith based institutions, non-governmental organisations and immigrant and other associations, I do not seek to emphasise any particular agency in its efforts to assist, lead or guide the process of integration of immigrants. I do not therefore single out any party or agency but none the less, the work of some institutions sets them as leaders in the field, acknowledged in the public sphere in which all these activities take place.

The Context

The history of immigration in Italy, it has been suggested, may be divided in two parts. The first phase is linked to the first development of the phenomenon, and was marked by ‘an atmosphere of emergency’ as Italy was unprepared for the inflow of people. The second part is characterized by ‘the propensity to create a stable system and by a strong need of social and political cooperation’ (EMN 2012: 16). . This aim has not yet been realised. At the same time there is an increasingly large influx of immigrants from EU and other non-EU countries into Italy: ‘The number of immigrants (both EU and third-country nationals) reached half a million in 1987. 10 years later, they were over one million. In the following years the number of immigrants continued to grow: 1.5 million in 2002, 2 million in 2004, 3.5 million in 2006, nearly 5 million in 2010’ (Ibid.). This steady influx of immigrants has meant that Italy now has to grapple with the situation and devise ways and means to dealing the ‘problems’ that immigration brings in its wake.

A study of migration to Europe from the countries under the Colombo process indicates that a significant increase took place in the last decade (2000-2009). It has in fact been suggested that three EU sub-regions have gained in prominence in their ability to attract migrants from the Asian region: Northern Europe, mainly Finland and Sweden, Mediterranean countries: Portugal, Spain and Italy and the Czech Republic and Poland as well (Platonova and Urso 2011). The authors tell us, ‘CPC nationals account for nearly two thirds of the total number of Asian migrants in the European Union (without UK) and serve as source for nearly all Asian migrants in Italy, Spain and Portugal, mostly on the account of Chinese immigration. Chinese and Indians are the most numerous migrant groups, with around one out of four migrants being Chinese, and one out of seven coming from India. Chinese nationals comprise 30 per cent of migrants from the CPC in the EU ... followed by India, the Philippines, VietNam and Pakistan accounting for around ten per cent each’ (Platonova and Urso 2011: 3-4). While such studies point to the preponderance of Asian migrants in Europe, there is a sharp distinction between the highly skilled and professional migrants and others with low skills. While the high skilled and professional migrants have been welcomed in the developing countries of the west and Australia, it is in the Gulf region and in Malaysia and other countries in eastern Asia that migrants with low skills have been accepted with considerable ease and regularity in the 1980s and 1990s.

As citizens of the European Union (EU) freely move about the EU in search of economic opportunities, the playing field in the labour market sends out different messages to citizens from outside the EU. There are limited mobility opportunities for them and they ‘may enter on the basis of economic migration (managed migration), family reunion and on humanitarian grounds’ (Biffi 2012:1). However, highly skilled migrants are actively sought out from these countries to fulfil the ‘needs of an increasingly knowledge driven economy’ but at the same time, restrictive policy measures are in place to control and even stop immigration from third countries because of ‘concerns about integration costs in the face of rising budgetary restrictions’ (Ibid.). Costs of integration include such special measures for integration as in schools, the labour market (for example, education and training), and in already pressurised areas such as housing, health care and welfare services (Ibid.). Such concerns are in addition to the existing negative attitudes and stereotypes prevalent among native populations towards third country nationals that do not allow easy routes towards integration. As a consequence of such policies, and the over emphasis on high skilled immigration, most low skilled migrants seek to enter the informal economy through insertion into the lowest segments of the economy.

It is argued that low skilled migration has a ‘long tradition’ in Europe going back to the guest-worker migration of the 1960s and 1970s, followed by chain migration and family reunion. In the 1980s and 1990s, large numbers of refugees, with low educational levels, followed (OECD 2008 as cited by Biffi 2012:6). It is significant that the countries of southern Europe, late destinations for migrants, have the largest share of unskilled migrants: 70 per cent of Portugal’s workforce is unskilled, followed by Spain at 48.5 per cent, Italy at 45.7 per cent and Greece at 38.8 per cent (Biffi 2012:6). Migration policy in these countries has therefore tended to be more open to this category of migrants due to the demand for them in sectors of the economy that are hard pressed for native workers. It has in fact been pointed out that since the 1980s, the principle of the ‘economic legitimization of immigration’ which views immigrants primarily as ‘economic factors, with relatively little regard for social and humanitarian considerations’ has been followed in Italy (Caponio and Graziano 2011: 106). According to CARITAS 2008, the employment rate for foreign immigrants in Italy is 67.1 per cent whereas it is 58.1 per cent for Italians. At the same time, the unemployment rate is 5.9 per cent for Italians with 8.3 per cent for foreign citizens (Ibid.: 105). Immigrants in Italy are currently unemployed at 12.1 per cent, four points higher than Italian citizens (Dossier Caritas 2012). A careful study of where immigrants work reveals that 50 per cent of immigrants are employed in companies with less than 10 employees. This has implications for the impact of employment protection policies as these are mainly aimed at large companies and great sections of the employed immigrant population would therefore lie outside their ambit. The opportunities provided by social protection would be far worse for irregular immigrants as they cannot access employment-related social benefits (Caponio and Graziano 2011: 106). Such exclusionary practices with severe consequences for immigrants would no doubt have deep implications for the integration of immigrants across the board.

In Italy, although the entry of labour migrants has largely been unauthorised in most cases, they fill in job shortages in large numbers. It is an undisputed fact that immigrants are essential to the survival of the Italian economy primarily due to the low birth rates and the apprehensions about meeting the social security demands of meeting a rapidly ageing population (Calavita 2005: 48). As a result, Italy has sought immigration in the past and there are now 5.3 million immigrants, including more than 500,000 foreign residents who are in an irregular position (Fondazione ISMU 2011, as cited by Ambrosini 2012: 4). Most immigrants to Italy are concentrated in the northern and central regions of the country with the majority of the immigrant population coming from outside the European Union especially Africa, followed by eastern and central Europe

The second largest Asian communities in EU are in Italy with the Indians (145, 164) and Pakistani (90, 185) (EMN 2012).

There is thus an enormous presence of migrants in Italy, who are viewed by the local population as both being essential in certain sectors of the labour market, such as agriculture, but also as causing grave ‘security’ risks through their infringement on the welfare benefits such as housing, health care and education. These aspects of the migrants’ presence in their midst are fuelled by politicians and their agents who seek to maximise their political gains through a focus on ‘security’ issues which are fictions created for public consumption. For example, the Northern League, the right wing political party active in northern Italy, has from the beginning articulated defence against the surging immigration presence in its political agenda (Ambrosini 2012).⁸ As a consequence of efforts to control the inflow of immigration, the Bossi-Fini Law was promulgated in 2002. It is a severely anti-immigrant law that seeks to police and control immigration, with a very negative view of most

⁸ For a recent review of the Northern League and the anti-immigrant xenophobia it supports and advocates, see Avanza (2010).

immigrants (especially irregular immigrants) as criminals and an unnecessary part of Italian society.⁹ In addition, Italians appear to be haunted by fears of losing ‘Italianness’ as a result of the efforts of the media, demographers and politicians who all emphasise for example the nation’s low birth rate record. (Stanley 2008: 43). The repeated emphasis in the popular media serves to increase these fears that the Italian ‘race’ itself is under threat and, along with European culture, may soon be overcome by large and increasing numbers of migrants in Italy and indeed in Europe as a whole (Ibid:44). King and Mai (2012) have referred to the ‘Albanophobia’ that has been the result of a view that a particular community is associated with certain criminal, violent and dangerous activities and is therefore to be avoided at all costs. It has also been suggested that ‘regionalism’ is still a factor concerning relations among Italians and is based on both small and large issues ranging from cuisine and dialects to *Legge Nord* claiming a separate geographical and economic status for itself from the rest of Italy (Stanley 2008: 46). Viewing the links between religion and ostracism in Italy, Bertolani and Perocco (2013) point to the work of some intellectuals who have asserted that ‘Islamic religion constitutes an insuperable obstacle to social inclusion’. As a result of several such outcomes, ‘a policy of exclusion and of segregation of the immigrants’ has been developed that is ‘designed to keep them from taking social roots or rising above subordinate status’ (Bertolani and Perocco 2013, emphasis in the original).¹⁰ All the resultant antagonism in society is particularly directed at the non-European immigrant who is increasingly visible in the labour market, in social spaces such as educational institutions, and towards whom the energy and work time of the social service and other welfare officers appears to be directed. The social rejection of migrants, as a consequence of political and media efforts, results in the creation and sustenance of feelings of insecurity, suspicion and distrust of migrants among the Italian people which has consequences for the integration of migrants. At the same time, due to economic necessity, there have been several regularization programmes, six in twenty-two years with the most recent one in 2009 (Ambrosini 2012: 4). There is no doubt a conflict between the political aims of some political parties and the economic needs of the labour market that appears to have resilience and adaptation in the absorption of immigrants especially at the lower ends. This dual approach to immigrants does not augur well for immigrants who are both considered useful in certain slots of the labour market and at the same, are not welcome in the social and collective spaces that are inhabited by migrants and others in urban and rural territories.

At the same time, there is no homogeneous outlook towards immigrants in Italy and there are differences in the reception of immigrants in northern and southern Italy. While the south has traditionally been considered somewhat ‘peasant-like’ and ‘backward’ compared to the more politically progressive and economically vibrant north, sharp differences have been noted in the response of people towards immigrants. Cole suggests that although anti-immigrant violence occurs throughout the country, ‘brutality takes the form of intimidating foreign workers in the south and exemplary beatings by neo-nazis and skinheads in the north’ (Cole 1997: 101).¹¹ It is also significant that all the work supportive of immigrants, their initial reception, and their rights associated with work, health and security benefits, and their integration into Italian society has been addressed by individuals and organisations more in the north than in the southern parts of Italy. Italian churches, with a very vocal and active Catholic church, its wing Caritas, local associations, immigrants associations, as well as politicians have been much more supportive in the traditionally left-wing northern regions of the country than in the south. It has been observed that ‘the vigor of the pro-immigrant movement in the north derives from strong traditions of political activity that privilege the notion of solidarity, often communist and socialist in character but also involving the Church’ (Cole

⁹ Calavita notes that ‘hundreds of priests mobilised against Bossi-Fini which they said “violates the principles of solidarity and human rights”’ and creates “problems of conscience”. Significantly, they asked the Catholic church to engage in ‘civil disobedience’ (2005:36).

¹⁰ See also Garau (2010) for a critique of the position of the Catholic church on national identity and citizenship.

¹¹ Cole is specifically referring to the anti-immigrant violence in Florence in the 1990s. See Cole (1997: 100ff).

1997: 102).¹² The Church along with other organisations has therefore been critical in the work of the integration of immigrants in northern Italy. No doubt the socialist traditions of northern Italy, especially of the Emilia Romagna region, have no doubt a role to play in this supportive and enabling attitude towards immigrants, but the culture of charity, pastoral care, expressions of solidarity and volunteering, associated with the church cannot be undermined. It is also noteworthy that all these different associations are working together, across individual ideological and faith commitments, for a cause that is viewed as common.

Relations between employers and immigrant employees

Work is at the heart of the immigrant's quest for a new life and is therefore critical to his or her experience of integration. Among the community under study, it is the men who are engaged in work in the agriculture sector mainly while women tend to stay at home although there are a few working women. I have therefore focussed on immigrant men from India. There is a 'paternalistic' attitude towards migrants among sections of the Italian population who consider some immigrants, including those from India, as being quiet, good farm workers, unobtrusive, undemanding and responsible. This attitude is a somewhat 'superior attitude' that reeks of a consideration of the Indians at a lower level of 'social evolution' (Bertolani and Perocco 2013).¹³ The kind of work that Indians do is clearly 'subordinate and segregated', limited to certain kinds of functions in the dairy farm sector and in the restricted sections of the tanning industry; thus, it is work that is valued precisely because it is subordinate (Ibid.). Most Indian immigrant employees choose to be quiet instead of answering back, are respectful, obedient and subservient to their employers, in order to avoid losing their jobs. At the same time, there is a resentment against the employer who discriminates among them, favouring the Italian or Romanian over the Indian, or who exploits their labour in different way. They do not, however, seek to redress the situation and continue to work with mixed emotions of simmering discontent ('I experience exploitation and there is nothing I can do about it') mixed with contentment ('At least I have a job') for the well-being of their family and the future of their children. Italian employers vary with most appreciating the Indian community or being quiet, good workers who make little trouble for them and are therefore the best workers for them to hire and the seek them out through kin and community networks. There are other Italian employers who seek to engage with their employees in vastly different ways thus forging links that go beyond an instrumental relationship. It is important to emphasise that these employers have a higher educational background from the others and belong to the upper social class of Italian society.

Fabio is an educated, well-read and politically aware dairy farmer near Fidenza. The farm has been in the family for generations. In 1997, he decided to hire Sunil, an Indian worker from Rajasthan, a state in north-western India, who was already in Italy but had no skills in working with animals. Soon, Sunil brought his wife over to live with him and their children joined them only a few years ago. Fabio taught him all the work from scratch and is appreciative that Sunil now works very well and with great precision: 'he has a mind oriented towards precision, he respects schedule, the hours, the process he has to control. In all aspects of his life, he is precise.' The employer is also very happy with other aspects of Sunil's personality, that he 'respects others' and thinks he is different from other workers who are from the Punjab. He concludes, 'he is a very special person'. Although Fabio insists he has no personal relationship with him, he is completely involved with Sunil and his family. He helped to

¹² See also Calavita (2005: 75 ff).

¹³ It is also possible that a similar attitude prevails in high schools against immigrant students. A cultural organisation that works especially with youth identified the 'subtle racism' present among teachers in high school in Reggio Emilia. Such teachers send immigrant students on for vocational training even though the students themselves want to go for engineering. There is a view among teachers that their cognitive abilities are not at par with the Italians and they are therefore fit only to pursue vocational training. The students have to appeal to higher authorities and even ask outside organisations to intervene in order to help them realise their goals.

obtain the necessary documents for Sunil's children and to get them admission into a school. Whenever Sunil has a medical problem, Fabio takes him to the doctor or the hospital; he observes that Sunil and his sons are model Italian citizens because they respect administrative rules and Italian law and says with admiration, 'he is the best!'. The economic project of the migrant is so essential to his survival, Fabio asserts, that Sunil seeks not to have any 'human feelings' and is focussed only on earning money, following all the rules, and he is certain that when Sunil's economic project is over, he will leave Italy. Sunil's wife, Rajni, is a cheerful woman and is well liked by Fabio's wife who invites her for tea to their home. She would like a more engaging relationship with Rajni who she thinks is reserved and keeps her distance from her husband's employers. On her part, Rajni is deeply appreciative of Fabio and his wife, Maria, an activist and volunteer in an intercultural organisation, and their joint efforts to help them integrate into Italian society and achieve their goals. She particularly values their efforts in helping her sons to gain admission to good schools and other activities in Fidenza. Although she tells me she has been invited to their home several times, she is a little embarrassed by their efforts to treat them as equals and is awkward while making conversation in their living room, drinking tea with her hosts as an equal.¹⁴ Fabio's engagement with Sunil, his economic project which Fabio acknowledges is closely linked to his own, and in turn deeply connects the two men, is rare and rests on Fabio's world view which is open and seeks to encompass the other to whom he is connected through work, which they often do together, into his own life and project. At the same time, Fabio is clear that due to Sunil's lack of engagement with his surroundings, with the world around them, he and his family can never attain an Italian identity. Sunil and his family are a closed unit, not only with Italians, but with other Indians as well. This restricts their abilities to be truly integrated as their project is an economic project, not one of integration, and once that ceases, they will return to India.¹⁵ Fabio's relationship with the immigrant as an employee, based on equality and trust, is perhaps unique but nonetheless as an individual strategy, opens up a pathway of integration for the ways in which employers seek to engage with their employees.

An Italian cheese maker who hires six Indian men (out of his total work force of ten) says, 'Indians work well, they adapt to the work necessity which sometimes is seven days a week. In the beginning, they were ready to do over time. Now, they have stabilised and do only the hours...They are very docile, work properly...are punctual, precise, responsible and adaptable to the necessity of the job. This is not like a normal factory job. It needs more attention and they have the patience to do that. They help each other a lot and have good integration with Italian workers'. The fact that docility, submissiveness and adaptability are so well appreciated is indicative of the high value that is placed on keeping the worker in his or her place, outside the realm of critical engagement or any further involvement with workers as citizens. Unlike Fabio, this employer is not interested in the personal life of his employees and seeks their maximum output although he makes sure he follows all the legal requirements. This is a form of instrumental integration, for the employer, and restricts the world of the immigrant who is viewed purely in terms of his performance and production.

In general, there is a deep satisfaction with Indian workers whose only problem, according to Stefano, the owner of a slaughterhouse, is that they go to India for two months or more on vacation and sometimes do not even return! Stefano exclaims, 'We are waiting for them to return!' He finds them ready to do all kinds of work and work for eight or nine hours in a day, 'The most difficult work, which Italian workers refuse to do, is done by them. Earlier (about ten years ago), Italians used to come looking for work here in their summer holidays. But now they don't come here, they work in an office. This is hard work, not clean, there is the blood; you have to cut the meat. So, ten years ago, we

¹⁴ This is partly an outcome of the class distinctions that are so well ingrained in Indian society and incorporated in to the habitus of all Indians.

¹⁵ Two years later, Sunil did leave Fabio's employment to return to his village where he has built a house for himself. With Fabio's help, he obtained pension from the Italian government and his sons now live and work in Italy but Sunil and his wife have retired to India. After his relationship and experience with Sunil whom he values a great deal, Fabio could not bring himself to hire another Indian and has two Egyptian workers now.

started hiring European persons from Albania, Romania, Eastern Europe. After that, we noticed that the contractor hired for cleaning the slaughter house, brings Indian people just for cleaning. So we became interested in these people because we see “good” persons, they are quiet, they come with family so they work better, they don’t speak a lot, have a good education, they don’t drink’. In fact, there are several stereotypes in this judgement about Indians in the slaughterhouse but their work merits deep praise from the owner.

Stefano has given the task of looking after the premises at night to an Indian worker and invited him to move into the premises with his family. In this way, he feels he has a very reliable worker taking care of his premises. He is at pains to emphasise that he seeks out only Indian workers for employment as they are such good workers and wants to give them more and more responsibility. He concludes, ‘I trust in them and in their honesty. In the future, when they will learn the Italian language, they can be partners in the work, not merely workers’. While Stefano displays an open confidence and trust in Indians, the CGIL informs me that work at the slaughterhouse is the most difficult and results in most Indians turning to alcohol addiction and depression. Indian workers are reticent about their work but other Italian workers inform me that they integrate well with other workers, develop good ‘joking relationships’ with them and make an effort to be fluent in the Italian language.

Not all employers facilitate the development and integration of the immigrant with forms of multiple engagement that seek to fulfil the immigrant’s goals as much as their own. The most significant resistance against employers and agents that directly affect the working lives of poor immigrants in this country are the struggles to attain liberation from the *caporali* and end their exploitation. Scholars such as Federico Oliveri have asserted that migrants in Italy are now engaged in active processes of developing new forms of class consciousness and seeking to develop ‘global citizenship from below’ (Oliveri 2012, Oliveri forthcoming). In work that focuses on the strikes by migrant farm workers in Rosarno in the southern region of Calabria, in 2010 and in Nardo, a small town in Apulia in southern Italy, in 2011, Oliveri argues that realising their oppression by the gangmasters or the *caporali* who control their recruitment and their wages, migrants are on a warpath to make change. One important outcome is a change in the law recognising gangmastering not merely as an ‘administrative violation’ but now as a ‘penal crime’ punishable with up to 12 years in prison and with a fine of 1000 to 2000 euros per illegally hired worker (Oliveri forthcoming: 6). This in itself has achieved a semblance of order in the organisation and recruitment of migrant farm workers but what is of concern here is the impact of such protests, agitations and forms of protest by migrant collectives for understanding forms of civic engagement in society. Such forms of protest, an outcome of routine forms of exploitation by gangmasters from within the community as well as from outside, has resulted in establishing new forms of political mobilisation, still in the nascent stage, among migrants and indicates new forms of engagement with the society in which they are located. Migrants are primarily dependent on these agents for their employment and cannot risk dissent at this stage to save their position in the labour market and their precarious social position in Italian society. They are caught in a bind and therefore rather seek safety and security within their community, the celebrations, festivals and rituals of collective life, rather than seek out acceptance and greater security in the workplace or into Italian society. In any case, they have access to trade union organisations in the country such as the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL) /the Italian General Confederation for Labour which is one the leading unions to which Indians and other immigrants are affiliated.

Although Indian immigrants complain of exploitation not only by Italian employers but also increasingly by members of their own community, and this has been emphasised by the CGIL trade union in Fidenza as well, they do not seek to organise and make collective protests.

The CGIL in Fidenza has 75,000 workers on its rolls that includes Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Filipino, Sri lankan, Indian and a few Chinese. For the agriculture or food industry including the slaughter industry, there is another organisation: FLAI *Federazione Lavoratori AgroIndustria* (federation for agro-industry workers) and most Indians (300-400) are members of this organisation in

Parma and the surrounding regions. Illegal workers should in fact denounce their employers but they do not do this because they can be deported. According to the CGIL administration, there are very few illegal Indian workers as they are ‘very good workers’, well-liked by the Italians who ask them to work on the dairy farms with the animals and help in their regularisation. About ninety per cent of workers in the agriculture sector are legal and enjoy the same benefits and rights as Italian workers. In this way, the interventions of employers with the regularisation process by providing the necessary documents etc., helps in the employment and continuity of the immigrant in the workplace. At the same time, this becomes the means through which employers are in control of immigrants and their working lives in one way or another and gives them authority and enormous power over the lives of immigrants. As one CGIL official said, ‘immigrants are slaves to employers’ as he cannot displease him in any way or he will lose his job and thereby, his permit for staying in Italy. Italian employers in the agriculture sector are quite rude to the employees, the CGIL asserts, as they are not very well educated themselves and Indian employees in particular tend to remain silent for fear of losing employment. They do not, however, hesitate to go to the CGIL and complain that they are being paid only for eight hours when they actually work for ten hours and that their salary is not commensurate with their work. Or seek out their assistance for unemployment and family benefits. In this way, the CGIL works as much for the immigrant as much as for the Italian worker. The Indian workers who are members of CGIL do not, however, show their ‘real face’ to the union workers. They are secretive. ‘What you see is only a small part of their lives, they are closed and do not reveal everything. You never know what they are thinking’. Their desperation makes them wary of revealing their intentions and they seek to manipulate the system to their advantage as much as they can in any given situation. Taking a different view from that of the employer, CGIL officials say that the Indian workers in the slaughterhouse are in particular trouble as the work is very hard and difficult. Superiors are often rude to them and while Italian workers answer back, they cannot. They are in depression and as a result, they turn to alcohol and are addicted to it. This understanding of the Indian immigrants and their context by the CGIL, who remain their main links to understanding their rights and accessing the benefits due to them, points to the inherent complexities in seeking engagement across social and cultural differences.

Relationships between employers and employees and with trade unions remain fraught and yet point to the possibilities opened up for integration through the efforts of CGIL officials to address the migrants’ problems or in the efforts of employers to work together with migrant employees on their joint economic projects. Such pathways perhaps exist all across the country and are the resources through which integration is possible. However, the restrictions imposed by the community itself which seeks to hide behind its apparent ignorance or shield itself from exploitation or oppression by the employer is a constraining factor which limits the extent to which integration is actually possible under the circumstances.

Building cosmopolitan sociability through religious institutions

Religious institutions and their inter-relationships have been the focus of study across the world especially in the context of the reproduction of traditional forms of belonging and of cultural values embedded in religion among migrants. This is, however, only one aspect of the role of the religious institution in the migrant’s life. While this may appear to be the institution’s main purpose in diasporic contexts, it also serves to connect migrants to the municipality, the local government and citizenry and over time, may acquire some kind of status in the host community, as it has in some places in the UK.¹⁶ It may also develop what Ester Gallo refers to as a ‘new geography of belonging’ connecting displaced immigrants with the lost homeland and the new community (Gallo 2012). One aspect of focussing on religious institutions and their role as a pathway of integration is by seeking to

¹⁶ See for example Knott’s discussion, among many others, of the links between the Hindu temple and the host society in Leeds (Knott 2009).

understand the informal aspects of civic engagement as they emerge through immigrants' religious institutions and cultural associations that also focus on religious content to a large extent. This is essential to our understanding of informal aspects of civic engagement. Considering religious institutions as spaces for civic engagement, this section focuses on participatory citizenship that is informal, and is grounded in the domain of affect, belief and commitment to a particular faith that transcends legalese if necessary.

In the transnational context, spaces for religious worship such as temples and *gurdwaras* are places for the development of civic ideals and skills among immigrants and their children. Brettell and Reed-Danahay argue that 'the identities and moral values associated with particular forms of ethnoreligious expression shape both formal and informal citizenship practices''(2012: 78). This interaction and the building of such practices take place in the everyday life of institutions where immigrants and their children not only gather together for purposes of worship and faith, but to reproduce conventional and new ways of belonging to a community and service to others. This, however, is not the only way we may view these institutions that also take on different avatars to build civic networks and establish meaningful connections with the local government and people.

Near Fidenza, the local Hindu temple was inaugurated as recently as on 21 July 2007 when they received space from the municipality to have their own association. Fourteen local community members set about meeting and interacting with one another in each other's homes but now they meet in the temple every Sunday. On any particular evening, every single member of the congregation takes turns to perform the *aarti* (ritual worship). It is a temple dedicated to a mother goddess (*mata ka mandir*); they worship the goddess and seek her protection. The leader, not a *pujari* (priest) but a local Indian does a lot of cleaning, serving the food, the *langar* (serving of free food) and the *prasad* (ritual food). The temple was established only recently, before that they used to meet in each other's homes. As one grandmother told me, 'I wait for Sunday and keep thinking when will it come, so that I can meet everyone again'. And she said it feels good to come to the temple every Sunday as she has status and respect from others who seek her blessing as an elder in the community. It brings together generations and families in a common return to the homeland through daily and weekly ritual worship. At the same time, it serves as a space for the socialisation of children and youth into cultural values and traditions and simultaneously establishes links with members of the host society who often visit the temple as curious citizens or as seekers of new religions.

The temple was started as the community felt it is important for the children to be in touch with their culture and community: 'they should know where they come from'. This may be the ostensibly legitimate reason to reproduce their culture among the next generation but another reason, tied to their emotions, is that of maintaining links and ties with the larger community of India represented through religion and its ritualistic practice in an alien setting. So singing, ringing bells, lighting lamps, and vigorously playing the drums takes on an added value of belonging through ritualistic practice. The reverberations of the loud music, singing and bells amplified through microphones, brings to a crescendo the emotions of double loss, of the nation they have left behind, represented though that which is innermost, religion, and of the family, the larger family, that has stayed behind. The devotional songs have also been written in Italian so that children who read only Italian are not at a disadvantage. In this way, the temple seeks to recreate and reproduce culture and religion in the second generation. A young girl tells me that she used to go regularly to the temple in the early years when it started but now has very little time to go there. It was created for young people but very few regularly take part in its activities which are mostly religious with singing and musical worship being the strongest components. The youth feel disconnected as it is largely a recreation of another world which they have left behind or do not know much about. At the same time, they like to participate in the *langar* or community kitchen, where they imbibe civic values of service, preparing food and serving others, cleaning spaces, interacting with large numbers of people, arranging events, and other such activities. The cooking and serving of food has a very special relationship to the life of the temple. Men, women, and youth participate in this process, talking to one other, sharing problems,

discussing their future, hopes, ambitions, desires. It is a sharing of more than food, of affect through the ritual sharing of common goals, a territorial space and a shared task linked to service to the community. The feeling of 'doing good' to others, for others, is built into this idea of service and is also absorbed by young people through such work. The community therefore may not have realized its primary goal of the socialization of the young through ritual music and worship but the community kitchen has achieved both community and outside-community links through its very concept and the work entailed. Another significant part of activities in the temple is the presence of Italians who either visit voluntarily or with Indian friends. Most go out of curiosity for another culture but one elderly Italian man stayed in the temple for several days before he went to India to take part in a religious festival. In this way, there are forms of interaction between cultures and within a culture that enable transitions and spaces for liminality in migrants' search for belonging through multiple ties to different locations and ways of being.

The Sikh temple (*gurdwara*) has been the subject of study in different European regional contexts such as the U.K., Finland, Sweden, Poland, and increasingly in northern Italy as well.¹⁷ Apart from the recitation of the holy book and the music (*kirtan*) associated with the Sikh temple, an important part of its culture is linked to the development of the notion of service (*sewa*) among the congregation. In Britain, as a result of the close links between the Labour Party and minority ethnic religious institutions, *gurdwaras* have gained access to public services, benefits and political patronage (Singh 2006: 158). This has resulted in a great diversity in the services they now offer, 'and they now act as advice and learning centres, provide care for the

elderly, serve as 'one stop shops' for local agencies, and are centres of community development' (Ibid.). Community development is linked to the idea of *sewa* (service) and has always been a critical component of the *gurdwara* culture. It is a well-known fact that in India Sikhs will do anything to propagate this culture among not just the congregation but especially the novitiate, youth, and members of the general public. It is therefore not surprising that the Sikh community in the region has tied up with the local health dept. for conducting a training camp within the *gurdwara* at Novellara near Reggio Emilia for mutual benefit.

The regional health service of Emilia Romagna conducted training around health and hygiene issues for migrants and their employers in the premises of the *gurdwara*. Entitled 'To protect health and security in work place', the local Department of Public Health organized a two-day event in December 2011 in where the focus was on the lack of hygiene and training of workers at the workplace (primarily the dairy farms) where most of the Indians are employed. The incidence of tuberculosis and scabies is very high among the Indian and Pakistani community in the region and the work of this department has included the continued monitoring and medication of members of the community over periods of time. Due to the inability of immigrant to access health care as a result of 'structural reasons such as ... health regulations in access of persons not legally present in a national territory, poor or inadequate information services, prejudice or hostility from the staff of the services;' linguistic differences and psychological factors such as 'the lack of confidence in the services or...difficulty in social interaction', the Dept. of Public Health felt the need to organize such events in the region. As there is a large Asian immigrant population in the region, there is no doubt that the safety and health of the Italian people was also an important consideration for this intervention but the fact that it took place with the cooperation of the immigrant community within its own religious institution is indicative of the strength of the linkages between the communities. It also points to the adaptability of the community to extend its religious space for social activities that are as important for them as they are for the Italian health dept. The Director of the Health dept. who conducted this training emphasized how they felt completely welcome and included in the life of the temple. The meeting was organized 'in collaboration with the Indian people, the leaders of the Indian community

¹⁷ See for example the work of Singh (2006), Singh and Tatla (2006), Jacobsen (2012), Jacobsen and Myrvold (2011) . Bertolani and Singh (2012) and Gallo (2012) are the pioneers in the developing this field in Italian studies.

in Novellara and Indian cultural mediators'. The women of the community cooked lunch for everyone and was served, as it normally is, to all health dept. personnel and community members sitting on the floor together. The pragmatic use of the Sikh temple for training purposes may appear as another form of *instrumental integration* but it has not resulted in the exoticisation of either the temple or the faith and is perceived as useful to the immigrant community for its integration into the local community including the municipality.¹⁸ Religious and social activities become essential to the life of the institution over time especially in diasporic contexts. It is also noteworthy that the public health dept. took a decision to conduct the training within the *gurdwara*, moving into a space considered so far perhaps an alien community space, viewed as different as much by its ethnicised connections as by its immigrant inhabitants. Such movements that cross faith barriers albeit for practical considerations of mutual benefit serve nonetheless to open up possibilities for integration in a larger sense.¹⁹

I now turn to brief understanding of the role of the Catholic church in Italy in interacting with and building an interactive relationship with immigrants through informal ways of civic engagement in everyday life. In a splendid lecture entitled *The Church and the Kingdom* that Giorgio Agamben delivered inside the Notre Dame in Paris in March 2009, he exhorts the church, 'to live in the time of the messiah means to read the signs of his presence in history "the signature of the economy of salvation"' (2012: 34). He further argues that if we refer to the origin of time as a force which we may call 'Law or State', it is dedicated to the 'indefinite – and indeed infinite - governance of the world'. The second force, he continues, is the 'messiah, or the Church; its economy is the economy of salvation...[and] the only way that a community can form and last is if these poles are present and a dialectical tension between them prevails' (Ibid.: 35). Agamben ofcourse is prevailing upon the Church to recover itself and seek to fulfil its role as a true messianic force in a time when there is 'legalistic excess' and 'disaster menacing every government and institution on earth' (Ibid.: 41). The church plays diverse roles in different societies around the world and it is not the task of this paper to take up the onerous task of examining these or their outcomes. Against this background, this paper only attempts to consider the role of CARITAS in northern Italy, vis-a-vis immigrants and others in contemporary times. In particular, I would like to emphasise that I am well aware of the position of the Church vis-a-vis Islam which it has in the past sought to distance itself from.²⁰ At the same time, I seek to understand that aspect of the work of Caritas that is directed to the well-being of all immigrants, regardless of their religion, ethnic backgrounds or socio-economic status.

In 1967, Pope Paul VI wrote a letter to all his bishops, priests, the religious and the faithful in the whole Catholic world and included also 'all men of good will' among his addressees.²¹ This this is known as the *Populorum Progressio* (the progressive development of peoples) and it sets out to examine the role of the Church in the context of global dilemmas such as 'of those peoples who are trying to escape the ravages of hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance; of those who are seeking a larger share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human

¹⁸ Gallo (2012) points to the one-way dialogue between the Catholic church and the Sikh temple in Terni where Catholic representatives are invited to the *gurdwara* as well as the acceptance of the Sikh community for their children to be given a Catholic education in Italian schools, but there is a complete lack of a similar interest among Catholic representatives to learn more about Sikhism or its faith community.

¹⁹ It is possible that such movement across faiths may be possible much more with some religions over others. For example, Hinduism and Sikhism are generally perceived as more tolerant and welcoming than some other religions.

²⁰ See Garau (2010) and Bertolani and Perocco (2013).

²¹ There was an important meeting known as the Concilio Vaticano II held between 1962-1965 of Bishops from all over the Catholic world. This meeting/conclave was very important for changing the mentality of believing in the church and in the church in front of other religions. The emphasis now was to be on non-competitive spirit, non-hostility, non-proselytising, and instead dialogue, discussion, peace building, brotherhood, helping others. For example, earlier the Mass used to be only in Latin. After this important meeting, the Mass can now be in the language of the place where it is being conducted, this makes the church more accessible to the common people who can now participate more readily in the activities of the church. This meeting changed the role of the church. After some time, all the Popes continued this policy and it became the basic foundation of the Catholic church.

qualities; of those who are consciously striving for fuller growth' (source: www.vatican.va). In this elaborate document, the Pope draws our attention to the global phenomena of suffering and argues for the need for a 'new humanism' that will address some of the concerns and complex problems that plague society. There was now a shift from the heavy handedness of the church and unquestioned traditions to a more open spirit that encouraged 'individual conscience and agency'. Although Vatican II therefore was an effort to respond to the challenges of contemporary times and to renew the church in many ways, it has been critiqued on the grounds that it seeks to build a new kind of Catholicism through middle class values in the forms of religious practices advocated (Pratt 1996).

An interview with the Bishop of Fidenza reveals that the work of Caritas rests on the vision/inspiration they receive from the Bible (in formal terms) and from the document, Vatican II. The bishop argues that one important characteristic of the Catholic people is to receive foreign people, to be in human touch, not in an official, bureaucratic sense: 'All people are human, all are brothers in God. The second point is that the human is not in Christ himself but in the human family: all people are one brotherhood. All people are my brother'. This wisdom is derived directly through the document *Populorum Progressio* and from Vatican II.

According to the Bishop, 'the motto is: *Ogni uomo e mio fratello* (each man is my brother). It was like a principle: this is from the Old Testament. Now, the immigrant phenomenon is a new thing, so the church must play a role in the new phenomenon. Everyone who comes from everywhere must be welcome. Before this, the church was working with the poor, unemployed, etc. In the end of the 18th century, Italians started emigrating from Italy, so the church formed an organisation for taking care of the immigrants who were going out. It was the UCEI *Ufficio Catholico Emigrazione Italiano* run by the national Catholic church which has offices in different places. It was for the Italian emigrants.' In present times, the work is now with immigrants coming into Italy. Every local church has been made a local centre for receiving immigrants and a religious centre by themselves. The Bishop adds, 'The work of the local church includes receiving immigrants, answering their questions about housing, food, clothes, all that is required for survival, teach the Italian language and culture, Italian law, traditions, customs, lifestyle, help in the search for jobs and occupation and to enable a kind of "tentative integration". To meet, to know the difference'. The Bishop is very emphatic, "We must accept the difference. We must recognise the difference between me and the other people but we must meet one another. Identity must be very clear, my identity and the other person's identity. We must meet. Respect is real only if I know that you are different and I accept this diversity. We don't become one. There is no fusion (i.e. no imposition of identity). We must accept diversity and live in the same place together with our diversity, respecting one another'.

A few significant points stand out in this narrative: the emphasis on the efforts of the church to inculcate a *humanistic approach* to the problems that beset contemporary society, the fact that earlier the church took care of its own fold in other cultures but now, the church has resolved *to take care of others* within its fold, not religious, but territorial fold, as it were, and finally, in enabling a kind of *tentative integration*, as the Bishop put it. To further this effort, the Bishop, who arrived in Fidenza in 2010 initiated the *Festa dei Poppoli* (the coming together of different communities, different nationalities). The festival is organized by the Govt. of Fidenza and several other associations. It first started four years ago and is the last step in work that goes on throughout the year such as the workshops about different kinds of food, Italian, African, south American, about art, dance; 'everyone can do something for expressing themselves'. In 2011, the theme of the festival was "hope". It is the first time there was a theme. A volunteer elaborates: 'In the earlier years, the theme was merely the meeting of different countries, acknowledging other countries; the workshop on art is dedicated to an expression of hope. There are sessions on body massage and karate. Workshops are held in many places in the town. No expert or any teacher is present in the workshop which is made up of the people who are participating in it. The teachers, (such as the cook) so to speak, are not paid. The spirit is "doing something together and meeting other people doing something". The perspective is a "project of the community of the people"'.

What is the impact on the Italian people? Some Italians, social workers in Fidenza, assert that while the church no doubt plays a very significant role in the integration of immigrants in Italy, its interventions in this space is a way ‘to establish its own power in the lives of Italian people’.²² They argue that the church seeks to establish itself as a do-gooder and therefore to inculcate religious ideas in more and more people. In this manner, the authority of the church increases and the people become more and more encompassed in this web of faith based initiatives that seek to inculcate the faith as much as the social and pastoral practices they undertake. “Absolutely not”, asserted the Bishop, in some surprise and dismay. The church is not engaged in conversion of any kind. The work of Caritas in fact appears to be located at a social level and is not viewed as a religious activity, as pointed out by several young people working as volunteers at the *fiesta* as well as for example, by people in a position of governmental authority, such as the Mayor of Busetto. The local Minister for Immigration and Social Services in Fidenza is emphatic that the church is reaching out to people, both the natives and the immigrants, and therefore has a very important role in society. It is ‘fundamental’ because of the services it provides for the immigrants but also for cultural purposes. Through its parish priests, it enters into the lives of every family in the parish. In Busetto, I observed that the Indian Catholic priest was visiting non-Christian Hindu and Sikh families as well who invited him to their homes, sought his help for intervening with the Mayor to establish a temple in the region, and visited the church to express their solidarity with him and his religion. All these modalities of interaction suggest ways of engagement that are present at multiple levels, that of formal participation as Christian members of a community seeking to help others, of non-denominational members seeking to relate to one another, intermingling in an expression of solidarity.²³ This culminates in the *fiesta de popoli* in which people participate regardless of their religion, nationalities or cultural differences.

The curious presence of the Bishop at all events in the heart of a right wing local government is prefaced by the Minister stating in a very matter-of-fact way, ‘the Bishop is very important in local civil society, he is always invited to all events and public meetings including those of the municipality’. It is this close link with the government at local levels that makes the work of Caritas much more effective and results in its vast outreach. This culture of service does not rest here but extends itself to the well-being of poor, unemployed, and the homeless. There are Indians and several others, all of whom unemployed and homeless, who eat regularly at the *mensa* (food kitchen) and sleep at the shelter every night.

The Bishop points to the difficult task of Caritas to seek integration as they are up not only against some Italian people, a minority, who are racist and against immigrants. ‘Only 15 per cent of the population come to the church on Sundays but the influence of the church is more than that. People who go to the church are generally receptive. They are well disposed towards immigrants. Church has influence over people but even political parties like *Lega Nord* also have influence over those who come to church. The fact is that *Lega Nord* is in the govt. even if it only 3 per cent in the country, it has influence. The reason for this influence is that people are afraid about the influx of immigrants and *Lega Nord* provides some kind of security. The media doesn’t tell the truth. They are afraid of foreign people. People think that foreign people come to take away the welfare benefits’.

Volunteers working for different associations assert that the bishop is not the same thing as the church, he is open, concerned about change. The govt. of the town is concerned about the economic emergency, poverty is increasing, unemployment and general economic crisis; “families are no longer a solid point in our society. Society is more fluid now, family is not strong among both Italians and the

²² The bishop of course refutes this by saying, ‘There is a negative view of church by some people but the church helps, every person is my brother, man comes before the law. So if anyone needs anything, the church answers. In one text, Christ said, what you do for one person, you have done for me. For Christian people, in every man, woman or child, there is Christ inside. The level of religious motivation is in the New Testament, this belief that Christ is everywhere’.

²³ This kind of close interaction across faiths is markedly visible in small towns in Emilia Romagna where I conducted fieldwork and may very well not be the case even in other bigger towns in Emilia Romagna and in the rest of the country.

immigrant population”. There is not much money with the local govt., how to deal with the poverty or alcoholism, etc. The focus of citizens’ organisations seeking to deal with the well-being of immigrants through a holistic approach contrasts sharply with the government’s efforts to handle issues in a piecemeal manner. There is greater effort to understand issues and resolve them through a larger perspective that has the well-being of generations in mind. ‘But there is no concern (in the govt.) with developing a new culture. The pathology in society is a consequence of bad relations; we need to create an inclusive society by focusing on relationships. Some problems are in the symptoms but the cure lies not only in facing the problem but also to make an intervention in society. For example, there is a problem about drug addiction among youth. The govt. acts by taking care of people who have this addiction but we think we must put the problem in the larger context which is relationship. This is not easy to understand. The govt. tries to face a single problem. We are trying to make them understand that this problem is the symptom of a larger problem. So we work with community care. It is important, fundamental so the action is individual in the purpose of caring. So, a community that says, ‘I care’. We are trying to build a culture where at the centre there is a person who is a satisfied citizen but we are trying to forge one who is active and participates in the community’s life. The Govt. of the town is cooperating although it is the Bishop’s idea through a project. One of the sponsors of the festival is the govt. so there is an approval by the govt. of dealing with this problem. We have created some relationship with the foreign people, some relationship. Participation in the festival by citizens of Fidenza was very low in the first years but in 2011, many more citizens have participated. The participation of the local community is there. We need time to accomplish this. We must respect histories of the people, involving them. The process is slow but we have started through the festival. Many festivals are organized by local organisations. We, however, create this event with the people. It is not an imposed event. In the first year, about 600 people participated, and there were 2000 in the second year. So people are seeing more happening. Festival gives a message and we gain a visibility in the town. The govt. of the region is Left wing traditionally but the govt. in the town now is right wing, since 2009. They know however who we are. They have great esteem for us because we are working for the community and they need us’. This narrative by a young volunteer at the *festa* once again highlights the linkages between citizens’ associations, the local government and its initiatives and the people themselves. It is not always possible that all these will work together but even if they come together for instrumental purposes, it results in create better conditions for immigrants and fosters inclusive integration.

There is a sense when such informal aspects of civic engagement that are primarily to educate one another about working together and performing various activities and tasks together fails to incorporate all faiths and all cultures. A volunteer tells me, “People from Ecuador, Maroc, Senegal, Argentina, Colombia, Ethopia, Moldavia, Romania, are participants in the festival. But not the Indians or the Chinese, they do not participate at all.” These communities remain closed and isolated and do not seek to engage in the activities that seek to cross borders of faith, culture and social differences and their isolation is commented upon by several social workers, volunteers and activists at the venue.

The festival is only aspect of the work of the church in the community in Fidenza. Caritas runs health clinics, shelters, food kitchens, and other activities with the help of volunteers. The range of activities depicts the engagement with activities that cater to the well being of the immigrant apart from the pastoral care and efforts at integration. In Reggio Emilia, the municipality runs a health centre, a Family health centre (*centro salute famiglia*) that is solely a facility for irregular immigrants. It provides basic care but for consultation with medical specialists, it collaborates with Caritas who has a full-fledged health centre at its premises in Reggio Emilia. The administrative head of the family centre asserts that this is a unique partnership as normally public institutions such as this work independently from other non-government institutions. In this case, the collaboration is crucial for their success. At the same time, this may be seen as a partnership for mutual benefit between the municipality and Caritas that does not really have the interests of the illegal immigrant at the centre but a mere practical division of labour. The truth is that whatever the motivations, such partnerships serve to foster the well-being, health and overall welfare of the immigrants. These well-established

networks facilitate and enable the positive integration of immigrants who may otherwise lack access to health care, cross cultural interaction, and so on.

It is significant that such collaboration does not end with public – private partnerships alone. The linkage between faith organisations of different kinds is a new development in the social landscape where the church has been critical of Islam. The most important request for association with Caritas has come from an Islamic immigrant organisation in Fidenza that has sought to make a donation to Caritas. This is the first time such a connection has been established. This organisation administers a mosque in Fidenza and organised free food and shelter for its community but members of the community prefer to eat at the Mensa in Caritas instead where in relative anonymity they are also provided with free shelter, furniture, and sometimes money. Caritas has accepted the offer and has asked for donation of particular kinds of food items which they are unable to access themselves. The role of Muslim youth in this process of participation by the Islamic community cannot be overstated as they constitute large members of the community and seek to participate in the local community in diverse ways. This form of engagement with the wider society has come from youth who have no doubt been socialised through religion and yet seek engagement across religious barriers, previously unknown.

The connections between public institutions, non-governmental agencies, Caritas, immigrant associations and faith organisations points to the development of new forms of civic engagement in the public sphere, those that cross different kinds of borders. There is also willingness and openness among the agents of the church to connect to hugely different faith based organisations in order to achieve their aims and realise their goals of service to the people through the culture of charity, solidarity and volunteering that prevails within it.

Concluding comments

While my focus in an earlier paper (Thapan 2013) on Indian migrants in northern Italy has emphasised their lived experience through the lens of exclusion, marginalisation and silence in the face of racism, this paper has sought to look at the possibilities for integration as these are opened up through practices of cosmopolitan sociability among people belonging to different cultures, faiths and linguistic backgrounds.²⁴ The pathways of integration opened up by such interventions prevail at different levels of individual and collective strategies that are evolved by different groups, collectives, and organisations of people. The church and its agencies welcome immigrants through their reception and listening centres, shelters, food kitchens, health care, counselling and even monetary loans or donations for specific needs. The labour unions and other labour associations provide information and services related to the immigrants' rights in the context of employment, wages, and benefits. Cultural and immigrant associations help in organising workshops and annual events for the benefit of the social integration of immigrants. Their efforts are based on their commitment to solidarity but their views also reflect the differences that may exist for example between union officials and the workers on the ground.

Italian employers seek to engage in joint economic projects with their Indian employees whose work ethics and practices they value and extoll. There is however a somewhat patronising attitude in the expression of seeking joint economic projects with good but nonetheless quiet workers who may not themselves be interested in such common projects. Immigrant workers, especially from India, are rather circumspect precisely because they want to quietly do their work, earn some money, send it home, stay out of trouble without getting too involved or engaged in anything else. All Indian immigrants asserted this as their only goal in Europe, a goal that has been well internalised by the second generation, especially young men, who choose also not to speak out against the racism they

²⁴ Only some aspects of such interaction have been examined here and the work of organisations that work for youth and children in school is the subject of another paper.

may encounter for fear of 'spoiling their chances' for higher education or employment in Italy. There are ambiguities and uncertainties therefore in these strategies which seek an openness towards but are not without their share of pitfalls and complexities especially in how the other is defined and constructed. Building cosmopolitan sociability is therefore crucial to the process of integration but, at the same time, engenders ambivalent outcomes.

There is no doubt that certain elements of difference prevail even in the efforts by immigrants and local citizenry to bridge gaps and cross barriers. In fact, there is a combination of ethnically shared perspectives and religious affiliations and an openness towards others. It is not always possible therefore to have completely similar perspectives, representations or religious identifications. These are the limitations to developing a cosmopolitan perspective in transnational societies. In addition, there is a power dimension in such forms of cosmopolitan sociability that is shaped by gender, religion, race and ethnicity, as well as legal status, and these need to be fully understood when we examine cosmopolitanism and forms of engagement. Indian immigrant women forge their own individual strategies out of domestic spaces into which they are locked and isolated. Young girls and boys in high school seek to build connections and frame subjectivities in different ways from the dual worlds of exclusion they are encapsulated in.²⁵ Men seek to forge working relationships that protect their self-interests and simultaneously engage them in other worlds in a hugely unequal and complex world. What emerges from these complex behavioural, social and affective conditions is that migrants and their others remain committed to a joint project that serves to bring them together for different purposes. Their acts of engaging with each other with full knowledge and intent, and directed towards fruitful engagement and change, indicate their commitment to the project of integration and therefore constitute 'acts of citizenship'. At the same time, their embeddedness in the field of power urges us to pose further questions in seeking to understand such acts. Perhaps the ideal of cosmopolitanism as one of 'immanent self-transcendence' is not yet realised and we need to explore pathways of integration as the first step towards transcending difference and finding mutually constructive means of individual and collective participation in the public sphere.

²⁵ See Thapan (forthcoming) for further details about this aspect of young peoples' immigrant lives in Italy.

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