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This is the author's manuscript

Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1793273 since 2021-07-07T14:05:18Z

Published version:

DOI:10.1080/21622671.2019.1702894

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10 August 2022

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND INTER-FAITH COMPETITION: THE POLITICS OF CAMOUFLAGE IN ITALIAN CITIES

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Manuscript; final version published as:

Giorda M. and Vanolo A. (2021) "Religious diversity and inter-faith competition: the politics of camouflage in Italian cities", *Territory, Politics, Governance*, v. 9, n. 2, pp. 222-240.

DOI: 10.1080/21622671.2019.1702894

https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/E74J3A76SCPQNCD7IR7V/full?target=10.1080/21622671.2019.1702894

Abstract

Religions play a significant role in Italian cities and, more generally, in the social, cultural and political lives of Italians. Since 1948, the Italian state has formally been secular, and it guarantees religious freedoms beyond Christianity. However, the reality is much more complex, as the hegemonic position of Catholicism is still evident, and religious minorities often deal with various forms of marginalization, stigmatization and lack of resources. This phenomenon is visible in Italian cities, particularly by looking at the evolving role of Catholic spaces such as parishes, and the parallel struggles for legitimation, visibility and resources of religious minorities. In this scenario, Italy seems to be increasingly characterized by various and uneven forms of inter-faith competition, which also imply rivalry in the spheres of charity, voluntarism and the provision of social services. This paper analyses the relations between religious groups and the Italian state, proposing the idea of a 'politics of camouflage' shaping inter-faith competition for resources and legitimation.

Keywords

religious diversity; Italy; religious spaces; inter-faith competition; churches; 8x1000; urban planning; camouflage

1. Introduction

It is well known that religion is a powerful force in the production and organization of urban space, and investigations into the politics, cultures and spatialities of faith have not been rare in the social sciences, particularly over the last decade (e.g., Becci, Burchardt, & Casanova, 2013; Holloway & Valins, 2002; Hopkins, Long, & Olson, 2013; Kong, 2010; Yorgason & della Dora, 2009). In this field, many scholars have emphasized how religion is becoming an 'urban way of life' and the complex coexistence of gods, religions and beliefs in the city (Coleman & Maier, 2013; Dwyer, 2016; Dwyer, Gilbert, & Shah, 2013; Garbin, 2012; Orsi, 1999). Ideas of cities as *post-secular* were suggested (Beaumont, 2018; Beaumont & Baker, 2011; Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr, & Middell, 2015; Cloke & Beaumont, 2013; Tse, 2014) and, in the frame of multiple secularities following Vertovec (2010), the concept of 'religious super-diversity' was employed as a way of accounting for the plethora of religious innovations in cities (Becci, Burchardt, & Giorda, 2017).

The role of religion in shaping cities is quite evident in the case of Italy, where the presence of Catholicism is palpable, not only in the materiality of the built environment but also in its rituals, traditions, cultural habits and social structures (Ventura, 2013). There are no official (census) statistics about the diffusion of religions in Italy, but, according to recent investigations, about 80% of the population declares itself to be Catholic, and half of the population actually practises rituals on a regular basis.[1] People belonging to non-Catholic religious communities constitute between 7.0% and 10.5% of the population; the most numerous groups are Muslims, Orthodox, Protestants and Buddhists (Table 1).

Table 1. Estimated sizes of the main religious minorities in Italy

	Italian citizens	Migrants without Italian citizenship	Quota of Italian population (citizens and non-citizens)
Muslim	405,300	1,682,600	3,46 %
Orthodox	306,700	1,523,300	3,03 %
Protestant	466,400	224,400	1,14 %
(of which: Waldesian)	*30,000*	*Not available*	*0,05 %*
Jehovah's Witnesses	425,000	*Not available*	0,70 %
Buddhist	186,600	117,200	0,50 %
Hinduist	45,200	152,500	0,33 %
Sikh	20,000	50,000	0,12%
Jewish	36,500	4,600	0,07 %
Mormon	27,500	*Not available*	0,05 %

Note: No accurate surveys on the distribution of religions exist in Italy, as the Italian census does not survey individual creeds. Data are indirect and obtained by considering the distribution of a certain religion in the countries of origin of migrants. As a consequence, they refer to people from Islamic countries, or from countries where there is a significant presence of Muslims. For a full discussion on the limits of data and sources, see Chiodelli (2015).
Sources: https://cesnur.com; www.dossierimmigrazione.it; www.chiesavaldese.org; www.ismu.org (last accessed 7 June 2019).

[1] The study entitled 'LAST' and published in June 2018 is available at http://www.communitymediaresearch.it (last accessed 7 June 2019). The practice of 'regular' religious rituals corresponds to attending a church mass at least once per month.

This paper explores one particular aspect of the coexistence of different religions in Italian cities, that is, their strategies for legitimating and reproducing their presence by using space, providing services and attracting resources. It argues that religious institutions develop different strategies in order to attract private and public funds, for example, by branding and advertising their philanthropic and charity activities to local populations. The uneven distribution of resources and powers among religious communities ultimately produces a hierarchical structure, where Catholic religion maintains a hegemonic role both in terms of its presence in Italian cities, particularly in the provision and regulation of welfare services, and in terms of charity activities, both formally and informally. Specifically, the paper suggests that strategies develop in the framework of a 'politics of camouflage': the representation of religious institutions as key actors in the provision of welfare services and in the promotion of social cohesion conceals the entrepreneurial and competitive dimensions of a scenario characterized by the coexistence of religious groups struggling for their reproduction in cities.

The mobilization of the concept of camouflage has been inspired by the work of Leach (2006), who proposes a theory of camouflage in order to explore the roles of aesthetics, representations and simulations in society, with a focus on architecture. In his work, camouflage is not intended within the narrow conventional sense of avoiding detection, as in the case of military camouflage, but with a broad sense of representation and self-representation that is always at work within culture. For example, in the case of military camouflage, it is meaningful that the fashion industry appropriated camouflage combat clothing. Camouflage is intended as a form of masquerade and a mode of representation that operates through several forms, including art, architecture, politics and even urban planning. It is considered to be a mechanism for inscribing an object, a subject or a phenomenon in a given cultural setting, and to connect it with other cultural elements. Hence, camouflage is not just about concealment against a given background; it refers to both revealing and concealing and delineates a spectrum of degrees of definition of the self against a cultural 'background'. It may respond to both a strategy of 'becoming part' of, or rather a 'distinction' from a background, and in this sense the politics of camouflage also has to do with the aesthetic of belonging to a postor multi-secular society where traditional structures of belonging and citizenship, such as nationalism and religious devotion, seem to break down more and more (e.g., Baubock, 2003; Bauman, 2000; Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr, & Middell, 2015; Purcell, 2003; Secor, 2003; Staeheli, 2003).

The idea of exploring the relationships taking form in the interplay between religious identities, urban spaces, aesthetics, economy and politics is not new in urban studies. For example, Gale (2008) mobilized the case of Manchester in order to explore intersections between urban planning, architecture and religious diversity; Ruez (2012) explored the aesthetic regimes and spatial coordinates that animated public debate about the Park 51 Islamic community centre in Manhattan; through a series of ethnographic works, Kuppinger (2014) analysed the production of Islamic topographies and cityscapes in German cities; Bugg (2012) focused on religious minorities and the production of space in marginal areas of Sydney; while Klingorová and Gökarıksel (2018) discussed how bodies and everyday performances may produce sacred space and spatial regimes that govern daily life in Czech cities. Overall, this rich body of literature emphasizes the crucial role of urban space in the production, experience and performance of religion (and secularity) on different geographical scales, from the body to the national and the global. Issues of visibility and aesthetics play crucial roles in shaping conflicts and strategies in cities, and planning operates in this delicate terrain. Camouflage is intended here as a potential outcome and strategy in the relationship between religion and the city: by shaping the boundaries between visibility and invisibility (what Rancière, 2000, famously named 'the partition of the sensible'; see also Brighenti, 2010), and by moulding perceived presences and

absences of subjects, groups, spaces, problems, resources, struggles and moralities, religious groups enact different strategies for 'being' in the city.

By focusing on Catholicism and three Italian religious minority groups, this paper argues that inter-faith competition (and exclusion from competition for some groups) in the access to resources (space, power, money, visibility, credibility and legitimation) develops through forms of camouflage, concealing conflicts, rivalry, exclusion, antagonism and opposition between religious communities, in order to celebrate positive dimensions regarding morality, social activism, care and inclusivity in contemporary Italian cities. With this aim in mind, the paper also contributes to the existing literature by tracing the boundaries of the relationships between religions and politics in Italy. This is a complex, conflictual and evolving relationship, particularly in the framework of growing diversity characterizing Italian cities (Allievi, 2014; Schmoll & Semi, 2013).

The analysis is based on a mixture of different sources. First, Italian official documents have been consulted in order to trace the historical evolution of the state's regulation of religious communities: these include the Agreements (*Intese*) regulating relationships between the Italian state and religious groups, as well as specific laws. Second, the literature on religions, space and planning in Italy has been explored: articles written since 1990 (the year of the reform of the system for financing religious groups, which will be discussed here) have been collected through keyword searches in Google Scholar.[2] The literature is mostly in Italian,[3] and it has been published mainly in journals in the spheres of legal studies (first of all, the rich depository of the international journal Stato e Chiese) and religious studies (*Religioni e Società, Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni*, and the website *Cesnur*[4]). Third, data and statistics have been collected from both official Italian sources (i.e., Istat) and key organizations of the third sector (particularly Caritas). Fourth, promotional websites proposed by the religious groups were explored in November 2018, and promotional images were collected when available. Finally, the paper took advantage of fieldwork exploration, including a vast number of interviews and informal discussions with religious actors, obtained through years of relations, within and beyond the academy, of one of the authors. It has to be stressed that both authors – formally, a male geographer and a female historian of religions working in Turin and Rome, respectively – are white, Italian academics without any formal association to any religious groups (we both consider ourselves atheists). Thanks to long-term relationships based on trust and mutual knowledge, it has been possible to discuss, gather information and explore research questions with Italian religious leaders through unstructured interviews, discussions and email exchanges which developed from May to November 2018. Specifically, we have had specific discussions – about the positions of religious minorities in Italian society, their problems and struggles, and their relations with other religious groups – with local and national leaders of two communities (Waldensian and Romanian Orthodox) with whom we have had contacts already due to our previous researches, which have permitted a solid and mutual connection with the Interfaith Committee based in Turin since 2006.[5] As far as the Islamic community is concerned, we have been taking part in the Italian Islam Forum since 2016, and we have had several informal talks with the imam and the leaders of mosques in both Turin and Rome.

[2] We have used the keywords 'pianificazione', 'finanziamento', 'religione', 'città' and 'urbanistica' (i.e., planning, financing, religion, city and urban studies)

[3] There are, of course, meaningful exceptions: meaningful contributions in the English language include, for example, those of Pollard (2008), Chiodelli (2015) and Garelli (2016).

[4] See http://cesnur.org (last accessed 7 June 2019).

[5] See http://www.interculturatorino.it/wp-content/uploads/Testo-della-carta-dei-valori.pdf (last accessed 7 June 2019).

In order to develop our argument, the paper is organized as follows. The next section describes the evolving relationship between religious groups and urban policies in Italy, particularly by focusing on the regulation of religious spaces and the distribution of public resources. The paper then focuses on Catholic religious spaces as providers of social and personal services, particularly by proposing the example of oratories. The following section explores religious spaces of minority religions, their struggles for visibility and resources, and their ambiguous position in the social, cultural and political spheres. The core argument is then developed by exploring the politics of camouflage in inter-faith urban relations; while the concluding section summarizes the core ideas proposed and suggests the idea that competition (and exclusion from competition) between religions in Italian cities takes its form through a kind of uneven camouflage.

2. Regulating religious diversity

As anticipated, according to various scholars, Italy has been historically characterized by religious diversity, which further increased in recent years due to immigration and cultural globalization (Naso & Salvarani, 2012; Ventura, 2014). Catholicism is widely perceived as a core element of Italy's collective identity. For example, politics and public discourses often mirror Catholic beliefs and ethics, and it is not rare that political decision-makers manifest themselves to be influenced by their religious commitments (Giorgi, 2018; Pace, 2013).

From a juridical point of view, the legal status of Catholicism is fully regulated by a series of agreements between the Catholic Church and Italian Kingdom, which are called the Lateran Pacts. The agreements were introduced in 1929 and they recognized the Vatican City as an independent state, and the Italian state agreed to give the Roman Catholic Church financial compensation for the loss of the Papal States, settling the so-called 'Roman question'. The pacts were composed of two parts: a political treaty recognizing the full sovereignty of the Holy See in the State of Vatican City; and a Concordat regulating relations between the Catholic Church and Italy.

Although the Italian Constitution of 1948 declares that relations between the Italian state and the Catholic Church are regulated by the Lateran Pacts, it no longer mentions Catholicism as the state religion, as it was in the past. Therefore, the Churches and the state have to be considered as distinct. domains. Still, the Catholic Church maintained a privileged relationship with the state. One of the most evident points of this privilege is the fact that the Catholic Church was economically supported by Italian public money up to 1985. In the framework of a review of the Concordat, the Italian state introduced modifications and technical clarifications in 1984, explicitly stressing that the Catholic Church's position as the only state-supported religion in Italy was to be ended. With this purpose in mind, the Italian state replaced the state financing with a personal income tax called the 'otto per mille' (8x1000) to which other religious groups have access; this will be further analysed in this paper.

Concerning 'other' religions, Art. no. 8 of the Italian Constitution mentions the possibility of developing specific agreements, named *Intese*, between the state and a group of 34 religions classified as 'allowed cults' (*culti ammessi*, a formula used in the Lateran Pacts).[6] Currently, the

[6] For the complete list, see http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/enti-culto-diversi-dalcattolico-dotati-personalita-giuridica-disciplinati-dalla-legge-11591929 (last accessed 7 June 2019). The number of cults has increased with time and will probably keep growing in future.

Italian state formally recognizes via Intesa 12 religions.[7] The other religions and spiritual practices which are not formally recognized by the state do not have a juridical status, and they can only be technically considered as *cultural associations* (Ventura, 2013). This is the case of well-known religions such as Islam: Islam is not legally considered a religion in Italy as Islam does not have a specific agreement (*Intesa*) with the Italian state; only the Centro Islamico Culturale d'Italia (the Mosque of Rome) is recognized as a 'culto ammesso' (allowed cult), having a juridical personality. In relation to this phenomenon, there are no formal mosques in the country, and several Muslim cultural associations are hosted in a variety of buildings with different formal functions, such as warehouses, often named 'prayer halls'. However, in this paper, in the interest of simplicity, we will just use the term 'mosque' to indicate Islamic places of worship in general. There are currently about 850 informal mosques in the country, which is a small number, in absolute terms, when compared with the approximately 65,000 Christian churches throughout the country (Angelucci, Bombardieri, & Tacchini, 2014).[8] A further layer of complexity is added by the fact that many rules, for example, those concerning permissions for building and running places of worship, are defined by regional and local governments, producing heterogeneous situations. In the case of Catholic buildings, it also has to be mentioned that most Italian churches are owned by different institutions belonging to the Italian Catholic Church (formally known as CEI, which is the acronym for *Conferenza Episcopale Italiana*), but in some cases they belong to the Italian state and are managed by religious institutions. In the case of other religions, they belong to a variety of different subjects and institutions, including private subjects.

The uneven legal status of religions is mirrored by the unequal presence, visibility and distribution of religious spaces. In the case of Catholic buildings, distinct spatial patterns for cities and rural spaces were formed over the last century. Churches (*parrocchie*) are regularly distributed in cities, forming a dense, multipolar network of institutions and activities. Outside cities, churches are marginal elements, as convents and monasteries have been – and still are – the main spaces for religious aggregation and religious practices. They are spatially dispersed, without specific patterns and without regular connections between them.[9]

The regular distribution of churches in Italian cities was defined by law: according to a 1964 rule, 'religious spaces' have to be considered as urban infrastructures, and they have to be located evenly in order to serve an average population of 5000–10,000 inhabitants.[10] The law mentions *religious* spaces, but de facto it has been applied uniquely with reference to Catholic buildings. Specific regional and local laws regulated further details for the distribution and management of religious spaces and services, such as the running of a limited number of Catholic cemeteries.

Today, the distribution of religious spaces is challenged by a variety of 'other' churches and religious places which are becoming more present in Italian cities. The rules that were originally written for Catholics have been progressively extended to other religious and permitted cults,

[7] For the full list, with legal details, see www.governo.it/Presidenza/USRI/confessioni/intese_indice.html#2 (last accessed 7 June 2019).

[8] This is an approximate number as there are no official statistics; other authors, such as Chiodelli (2015), mention the presence of about 1000 mosques. Moreover, the number is not so high in relative terms, that is, when compared with the presence of the Islamic population in Italy: as a rough calculation (to be intended just as a proxy of the visibility of religious spaces), there is on average one mosque for every 2450 Islamic people and one church for every 738 Catholics. However, as suggested by Angelucci et al. (2014), the problem of Italian mosques is mostly related to the low quality of the buildings rather than to the mere quantity.

[9] Monasteries have been often imagined as autonomous 'islands' of spirituality insulated from the rest of the world; of course, in reality they interact meaningfully with local populations (Giorda & Hejazi, 2014).

[10] Law n. 847, 29 September 1964, and Ministerial Decree n. 1444, 1968. An average size of 2 m2 per inhabitant has to be destined for various kinds of religious, social and cultural infrastructure.

hence camouflaging inequality, but the reality is far from even or clear, as testified by the abundance of informal religious spaces which develop out of rules and formal recognition by the state (Chiodelli & Moroni, 2017; Marchei, 2014).

Concerning taxes and fiscal regulation, the Italian constitution, Art. no. 20, following the indications of the 1929 Pacts, allows preferential treatment for religious institutions, as well as charity and philanthropic institutions more in general. In other words, religions explicitly and juridically recognized by the Italian state have a special treatment in order to organize and provide services related to social assistance, medical activities, charity, education, sports, arts and cultural activities. The main tool is a financing system popularly known as 'otto per mille' (8x1000), which was originally defined by Italian Law 222/1985 and was then introduced in 1990. As mentioned, before the introduction of this system, the Italian state directly transferred money to the Christian Catholic Church, and not to other religious institutions. According to the new system, part of the money collected through taxes (technically 0.8%, or 8x1000, of the income of every Italian taxpayer through the taxation system called IRPEF) is destined for religious institutions. Every year, each Italian taxpayer may choose the religious institution that will receive the quota: the distribution for 2018 is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 - *Distribution of 8x1000 funds in 2018*

Recipient	Number of expressed preferences	Share of preferences over the total number of Italian tax-payers (%)	Share of preferences over the total amount of expressed preferences (%)	Money transferred under the 8x1000 programme (thousand euro)	Money transferred under the 8x1000 programme (%)
Italian State (*)	2,493,431	6.12	14.03	175,632	14.28
Catholic Church	14,437,694	35.46	81.21	1,005,390	81.09
Adventist Christian	23,711	0.06	0.13	1,609	0.13
Assemblies of God in Italy	40,496	0.1	0.23	1,254	0.1
Waldesians	469,071	1.15	2.64	32,684	2.66
Lutherans	64,882	0.16	0.36	4,457	0.36
Jews	56,937	0.14	0.32	3,962	0.32
Evangelical Christian Baptists	14,166	0.03	0.08	990	0.08
Apostolic Church	8,991	0.02	0.05	273	0.02
Orthodox	25,475	0.06	0.14	1,733	0.14
Buddhist	125,786	0.31	0.71	8,790	0.71
Hinduist	16,981	0.04	0.1	1,238	0.1
Total	17,777,621	44%(**)	100%	1,230,348	100%

Notes: (*) Taxpayers may choose not to destiny their 8x1000 to any religious institution, but to the Italian state. Further details are provided later in the paper. (**) This means that just 44% of taxpayers indicated a destination for 8x1000. Most people simply do not indicate anything, and hence they quotas are distributed according to expressed preferences.
Source: Italian Ministry of Finances,
https://www1.finanze.gov.it/finanze3/stat_8xMilleSerie/index.php?&req_classe=01 (last accessed 7 June 2019).

Although Mormons are eligible to receive money through the 8x1000 system – as they are formally recognized by the Italian state through a specific *Intesa* – they explicitly refused to receive money, and hence they do not appear in Table 2. As the Mormon's Head of Communications explained (interview, 23 April 2019), they refused in order to maintain their independence, since economic subsistence has been very important through the history of Mormons, and members contribute to it with a regular offer which is considered sufficient for the activities of the Church.

Religions that have not been formally recognized by the Italian state may adopt a similar system, smaller in size, called the 5x1000, which is open to every 'socially relevant' association in Italy, including, for example, non-profit cultural associations. While only 12 religious groups may benefit from 8x1000 funds, thousands of associations and organizations may potentially receive 5x1000 funds. It has also to be mentioned that, while 8x1000 is basically the main way to transfer money from the Italian state to religious groups, in the case of the Catholic Church a large amount of money is transferred every year by paying Catholic religion teachers in public schools (Crupi, 2003).

The mechanism for accessing 8x1000 and 5x1000 resources is clearly competitive, as it is a zero-sum game. Money flowing to a religious group will simply not flow to others. Advertising campaigns target taxpayers in order to convince them to opt for one religious group rather than another. As shown in Table 2, the Catholic Church receives a huge share of funds. In 2018, about half of the Italian population did not indicate any preferential destination for their 8x1000 (they did not choose any specific religion), while 81% of the rest of the population assigned their funds to the Catholic Church.[11] The quota of citizens who do not indicate a preferential religion is distributed according to the shares of expressed preferences and, in this way, more than 80% of the total amount of money flows every year to the Catholic Church, which means about €1 million per year. Local funds, provided by city halls to religious institutions in order to maintain religious buildings, are assigned on a discretionary basis, often mirroring 8x1000 distributions. These technical mechanisms are crucial in defining a politics of religious camouflage: the Catholic Church receives a disproportionate amount of money if compared with other groups (ultimately contributing to the perception of Italy as a de facto Christian Catholic country), while non-Catholic religions widely complain about the lack of resources and the impossibility of maintaining their buildings or running activities (Botti, 2014).

In this framework, running social activities is crucial for obtaining money. Basically, it is reasonable to think that taxpayers commit their 8x1000 and 5x1000 taxes to the religious group to which they belong, regardless of any advertising or any consideration of the way money will be used by a religious group. However, it is also reasonable to think that people may opt for a religious group that proves to be socially active in offering services to disadvantaged subjects, such as the poor, ill, unemployed, homeless or impaired; this is the case of the Waldesian Church which – as it will be discussed below – is small in size but able to attract a limited but meaningful share of funds (i.e., 2.66%, as shown in Table 2). In this scenario, the main discursive strategy enacted by Italian religious groups is to 'secularize' their representation of the way 8x1000 and 5x1000 money will be used. As it will be further argued, this means supporting a narrative that suggests that money will not be used for religious or spiritual activities, or to pay members of the clergy but, rather, it will be used to help people by providing social and personal services in a charitable way.

[11] For the official data, see http://www1.finanze.gov.it/finanze3/stat_8xMille (last accessed 7 June 2019).

This is the core of the politics of camouflage operated by Italian religious groups at the basis of access to public money. The more a religion proves to be entrepreneurial, supportive and socially active, the more it is likely to access economic resources. In this sense, the provision of urban services by religious groups and the visibility of religious-based social activities in the urban space become a strategic asset in the urban politics of religious groups. It also has to be stressed that, in a framework of shrinking public money, the Italian state is trying to 'free' and 'support' the resources and energies of the civic society, or third sector, as much as possible. This has been recently done with a 2017 law (*decreto legislativo* 3/7/2017) that simplifies the rules for the provision of services – free and paid, but not run for profit – aimed at addressing social or personal situations of need and difficulty, including professional social services; these include interventions for social, personal and family emergencies, home care, and residential structures for socially marginalized subjects. Religious groups are subjected to these rules.

3. Christian catholic provision of urban services

Over the years, the Catholic doctrine has come closer to social issues: the expression 'social doctrine' was introduced explicitly by Pope Pius XII in 1941, in reference to man, labour and state, and it was further elaborated and linked to the idea of subsidiarity by John Paul II in the 1991 *Encyclical Centesimus Annus*. Finally, the 2009 Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, by Benedict XVI (2009), sustained the principle of the common good, intended as the good of all human beings in relation to the three spheres of materiality, sociality and spirituality.

The Christian Catholic doctrine takes form through the provision of secondary welfare activities (i.e., welfare beyond the state). These include running hospitals and health services (ambulances, blood banks, rehabilitation centres); hospices for elderly people; residences for people suffering from nervous disorders, abusing drugs or for minors; shelters for the poor; soup kitchens; dormitories; services for the distribution of primary goods, such as clothes; day centres for the disabled or for helping minors with homework.[12] Those services are mostly run by local parishes, but they are also managed by other subjects, including various religious organizations such as monastic communities (*Frati francescani*), lay congregations, Catholic social and cultural associations.

To give an example, there are 102 Catholic hospitals in Italy, with 17,099 beds; 132 rehabilitation facilities, with 6057 beds; about 1500 structures assisting the elderly, with 78,000 beds, and about 23 hospices for cancer patients, with 346 beds. About 70,000 health workers are employed on a regular basis, including about 8000 doctors. Figures are constantly growing: in the case of charity workers, as they were just 4000 in 1980 and 11,000 in 2000.[13]

The services managed by Catholic institutions are not for the exclusive use of Catholics; they are open to everyone, precisely because they are conceived as directed to the common good of every human being. A good example of transversal and pluralistic service may be offered by

[12] Data presented in this section are extracted from the 4th National Census of Social Welfare Services and the 1st Census of Catholic Health Structures, published in 2011; see http://www.caritasitaliana.it/materiali/40/poverieopere_07102011/giordano_07102011.pdf (last accessed 7 June 2019) (see also Attolino, 2012).

[13] See https://salute.chiesacattolica.it and https://www.lastampa.it/2015/12/20/vaticaninsider/sanit-cattolicameno-cliniche-pi-ospedali-da-campo-D2A46ymMwLbg69Tp56rzqK/pagina.html (last accessed 7 June 2019).

Catholic oratories. We use the term 'oratory'[14] as a shorthand translation of the Italian word 'oratorio'. These are places for gathering and amusement, for children and teenagers: here they can spend time in an educative environment where, for example, they can sing, practise sports, organize theatre performances, play and study (Milani, 2015).

There are currently about 8000 oratories in the country. Most are located next to churches and are formally managed by local parishes (more than 90%, according to a recent survey: Pagnoncelli, 2017); however, there are also examples of oratories organized in secular places, particularly in the southern part of the country; some well-known examples are the Oratorio di San Filippo Neri, Salesiani di don Bosco, Figli della carità, Giuseppini del Murialdo and Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (Ramello, 2009).

Originally, oratories were established as sacred places for divine public worship. There have been various examples of private oratories in the past, erected in private homes for only one family or a private individual; however, currently most oratories are public, being open on a regular basis to different kinds of users, particularly due to the influence of San Giovanni Bosco, a 19th-century priest working in Turin, who intended the oratory to be a social gathering place for young people, especially young workers (Caimi, 2006; Gambini, 2002; Mori, 2011). According to Italian law,[15] oratories are associations for social activities, requiring formal registration and the acceptance of common rules by all their members. Members receive an association card, which they are supposed to carry with them in order to access the oratory.

The oratory is a non-profit structure and most activities are free, in order to achieve social inclusion; any money required for taking part in social activities is intended as a basic contribution in order to cover costs, without generating any financial profit. Most work performed in oratories is provided on a voluntary and free basis. Users are economically heterogeneous as oratories are populated by children from wealthy families as well as from middle-class or poor households, ultimately producing a certain level of social integration among the little ones (Gambini, 2002). Users are also heterogeneous in terms of spiritual attitudes: some young people actively take part in Catholic religious rituals (Sunday Mass, sacraments), but most people do not (Garelli, 2016; Pagnoncelli, 2017). Some of the children take part in the religious activities proposed by the oratories because their parents believe that the parish and the oratory are healthy educational environments. Many children are brought to oratories by their parents simply for organizational needs, beyond any religious or spiritual preference, for example, because both parents work and there are no relatives who can take care of the children during the afternoons or in summertime (Mori, 2011).

As a result, participation is not strictly confessional, but open to everybody. Formally, the games, discussions and activities proposed in oratories are supposed to be formative from a human point of view, beyond religious affiliation. However, this does not mean that oratories are secular spaces. In the words of a Catholic priest (interview, 1 October 2018), 'by its nature, the oratory is a place of welcome and gathering, founded on values of civil coexistence and mutual respect going beyond religious values. Oratories today are explicitly open to *foreigners*'. The term 'foreigner' is used here in an ambiguous way in order to indicate those not belonging to an ethical and cultural Italian ideal type, an idea which basically essentializes the vision of

[14] For canon law, "it is a place for the convenience of some community or group of the faithful […], who assemble there, but to which other members of the faithful may have access with the consent of the competent superior (Codice di Diritto Canonico, Can. 1223).

[15] Two state legislative decrees place the oratories within the integrated system of social interventions and services (Laws 328/2000 and 206/2003). Oratories are also regulated by regional laws that distinguish structure and purpose on a local basis.

Catholicism as the 'natural' religious affiliation for Italians, acting as a camouflage for processes of racialization for religious groups connected with international migrations (Sayad, 1999), as, for example, in the case of Muslims, which is discussed below. It is also meaningful to consider that data regarding the size of religious groups in Italy, as presented in Table 1, are often estimated on the basis of data pertaining to migration flows. The words of the priest above are therefore not surprising. Oratories organize sport, recreational and educational activities, and non-Catholic children and youngsters are free to skip religious activities. Still, oratories surely contribute to the proliferation and visibility of Catholicism in Italian daily life.

The example of oratories is also useful to emphasize the undisputed and hegemonic role played by the Catholic Church in the field of social care, and the unclear boundaries between secular and spiritual activities suggested by the Church (Boni, 2006; Folliero, 2010). Oratories are legally and socially at the crossroads between, on the one hand, processes of construction of a civil economy, the principle of subsidiarity, community welfare and, on the other, camouflaged dynamics of discrimination, privileges and uneven competition among the religious institutions in Italy, for – as it will be argued – it is hard to detect analogous structures managed by non-Catholic institutions (Zamagni & Bruni, 2015).

4. Religious minorities and their social activities

The activities of religious minorities are fairly differentiated, and they have diverse positions and strategies in the framework of competition for social entrepreneurialism. In order to draw a schematic picture of the situation, this short section will focus on three religious groups: Waldensians, Muslims and Orthodox Romanians. The three groups have been selected for different reasons: the Waldesians are the richest non-Catholic group in terms of funding (Table 2); the Orthodox Romanians are the more numerous non-Catholic group lacking a specific agreement (*Intesa*); the Muslims are the biggest non-Christian community (both Catholics and Orthodox Romanians are Christians), which means the third religious community in Italy (Ciocca, 2018). As discussed, Muslims also lack a specific Intesa with the Italian state.

The Waldensian Church is fairly limited in size, with about 30,000 members. They were a pre-Protestant denomination founded by Peter Waldo in the 12th century, until adhering to Calvinist theology and merging with the Methodist Evangelical Church to form the Union of Methodist and Waldensian Churches in 1975. They are members of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy. As mentioned above, the Waldesians' Church is the second largest beneficiary of the 8x1000 funds, and it organizes a wide network of services in Italy and abroad, financed by both 8x1000 and private resources. The Synod of the Waldensian and Methodist churches established in 1993 that the funds received should be used entirely for welfare, social and cultural projects, and not at all for religious purposes, such as to finance religious and spiritual activities of the Church, to construct places of worship or to pay shepherds. Every year the Waldensian Table, the executive organ of the Synod, publishes a detailed report of the projects that have been financed.[16] Among the main services, it is worth mentioning the *diaconia*. This was originally an establishment built next to a church for the care of the poor and the distribution of charity in medieval Italy; however, *diaconia* currently proposes a vast array of social services beyond charity, and they are not always located next to churches. The services proposed by the Waldesian *diaconia* include nursing homes, centres for the assistance of young and disabled

[16] See http://www.ottopermillevaldese.org (last accessed 7 June 2019).

people, libraries, etc. Also, in this case, services are open to everyone, beyond their religious affiliation, but, relatively speaking, they are limited in size when compared with Catholic social services. In 2017, only 12% of the activities proposed by diaconia were supported financially by the Italian state through the 8x1000 system.[17] A minor part of the money comes from entrepreneurial activities, such as the profits of a network of hotels and guesthouses given the name 'Waldensian House', but profits are limited in size, being around €400,000 per year. Most of the money for the running of social services comes from private donations and the economic status of the Waldensian community, which is mostly located in the economically flourishing valleys of the Piedmont region,[18] mirrors the current economic status of the Waldensian Church, which is relatively affluent, given the limited size of the community.

The situation is quite different in the case of Muslims. Mosques (including cultural associations, prayer halls and various religious sites, as previously discussed) are quite dispersed over the Italian territory, and disconnected from one another. The main social services provided by mosques in Italian cities relate to educational activities and integration in Muslim communities. Although these services are formally open to everybody, in fact they mostly address Muslim families and contribute to the dissemination of Islamic values and communities (Russo, 2018; interview with Imam B, Turin, 3 April 2018). The mosque often becomes a place of mediation between different urban realities and different senses of belonging: it is a space where support is offered to families living in between their own Muslim traditions, and the 'Western' way of life dominating Italian cities (Allievi, 2014). Mosques organize reading groups, school visits, trips for young people, lectures on the Italian constitution and citizenship, assistance for women, economic support for marginalized families, and the redistribution of food surpluses from restaurants. Non-Muslim users are rare, and the visibility of these social services to the Italian population is low, according to a recent ethnographic analysis (Bossi, 2019; Griera, Fabretti, & Giorda, 2018). The money used to run these social services comes in a minor part from the Italian state. Most of it comes from the Muslim community because of the *zakat*, a form of alms-giving, which is seen in Islam as a religious obligation. *Zakat* works as a kind of taxation system, allowing the redistribution of wealth within the Muslim community and the financing of collective services for local communities. Finally, a large amount of money comes in the form of donations on behalf of foreign Muslim countries such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia (cf. Zannotti, 2014).

In the case of Romanian Orthodoxy, the distribution of resources is, to a large degree, centrally planned. The Romanian Diocese of Italy collects funds coming mainly from private donors, and then it distributes the resources to the 270 parishes, give or take, located all over Italy. Also, in the case of the Romanian Orthodox Church, most of the social services target members of the same religious group. Services include the first reception of Romanian immigrants, support for families in their search for home, work, linguistic mediation, economic support initiatives for poor students, distance adoption of Romanian children, visits to prisoners and to patients in hospitals, as well as economic and psychological assistance to mothers in difficulty, spiritual and psychological support activities, and bureaucratic–administrative assistance (Episcopia Ortodoxă Română Italiei, 2016). In 2012, an institution was founded for hosting 'health tourists', meaning poor people coming from Romania in order to be treated in Italian hospitals, together with various social and philanthropic projects to help children from Romanian and Moldovan families. During the Christmas period, donations are collected in order to help poor people in

[17] See https://www.diaconiavaldese.org (last accessed 7 June 2019).

[18] It has to be stressed that the valleys have not always been affluent. This is particularly the case of Val Germanasca, one of the main areas for the Waldesian community, which was in the past a mining and working-class area. In other words, the valleys hosting the Waldesian community were marginalized areas, hosting a marginalized (minoritarian) religious group. For a history of Waldesians, see Vinay (1974).

Romania. As in the case of Muslims, the social activities proposed by the Romanian Orthodox address people sharing the same religious affiliation, with a transnational attitude. Italian resources are supposed to help not only local subjects but also their Romanian and Moldovan 'brothers' and 'sisters'. Also in this case, activities are offered to marginalized subjects belonging to different cultures and religions. However, the services proposed by the Romanian Orthodox Church address a rather homogeneous, transnational group of people.

It has to be noted that the condition of Muslims and Romanian Orthodox Church in Italy has to be framed in relation to migration phenomena. Actually, these communities are mostly made up of immigrants who moved to Italy in recent decades. As a result, these communities present the needs and problems typically associated with weak, minority groups: access to local institutions, support for integration and inclusion in communities allowing the reproduction of traditional values, beliefs and knowledge, in a framework of very limited economic resources and huge differences between urban policies (cf. Hoekstra, 2018). The case is different for the Waldensian Church, since their believers are Italians in legal and cultural terms, as this religious group developed in northern Italian regions over centuries. Although Waldensians are limited in numbers, they are not marginalized subjects in terms of wealth and social integration. This allows a focus on self-protection and self-reproduction of religious values and religious communities characterizing other minority groups to be bypassed, as in the case of the Italian Muslims and Romanian Orthodox. As a side effect, Waldensian social services are quite popular among the Italian population and they receive a large share of 8x1000 funds. The 'soft power' of the Waldensians, that is, their social legitimation and credibility, is relatively high in Italy. In contrast, other minority religious groups struggle for legitimation, funds and visibility in Italian cities.

5. Religions in action: inter-faith competition in Italian cities

The situation described so far highlights the huge gap separating Catholicism from other groups in the access to resources and visibility, and in the concrete possibilities for organizing and running urban services for the population. In fact, 8x1000 – as well as 5x1000 for religious groups which are not formally recognized by the state – is a litmus test to measure the hierarchical relationships between religions, but also to reveal the blurred lines between the formality and the informality of the use of economic resources. In the case of the Christian Catholic Church, it is well known that taxpayers' money is widely used in order to finance a wide religious apparatus of 'worship needs' including catechesis, ecclesiastical courts, the construction of new churches, the maintenance of religious buildings and, for about one-third of the total amount, for the sustenance of the clergy. More precisely, the money assigned to the Catholic Church in 2018 has been destined as follows: €355 million for the various abovementioned 'worship needs', €368 million for sustaining the clergy and just €275 million for charity initiatives, both in Italy and abroad.[19] Using a large amount of public money for non-charitable activities is somehow unpopular, but the hegemonic position of the Catholic Church in Italian society makes it possible to keep on receiving more than 80% of the money destined for religious groups. Other religions have similar needs, but they have much lower access to public resources. One strategy for them may be to enact a kind of selective camouflage in funding competition by branding themselves as meaningful social and cultural actors, beyond their spiritual dimension, that is, to emphasize

[19] See https://www.8xmille.it/rendiconto (last accessed 7 June 2019).

the idea that money will be used for social purposes and for the public good, and not for exclusively religious needs.

This may be easily perceived by looking at the advertising campaigns developed by the various religious groups, which, for the aims of this analysis, have been collected by exploring their websites. In the ads, there is no mention of the use of public funds for paying priests or for restoring churches (also in the case of Christian Catholic advertising), while there is a strong emphasis on their social activities targeting the poor and homeless and other marginalized people. Putting it differently, religious groups accessing the 8x1000 system mostly represent themselves as secondary welfare providers in order to justify their use of public resources (Figure 1).[20] For example, the website of the Seventh Day Adventists proposes the slogan '100% projects, 0% cult expenses' in order to stress that the entire amount of money received by Italian citizens will be used for social services.[21]

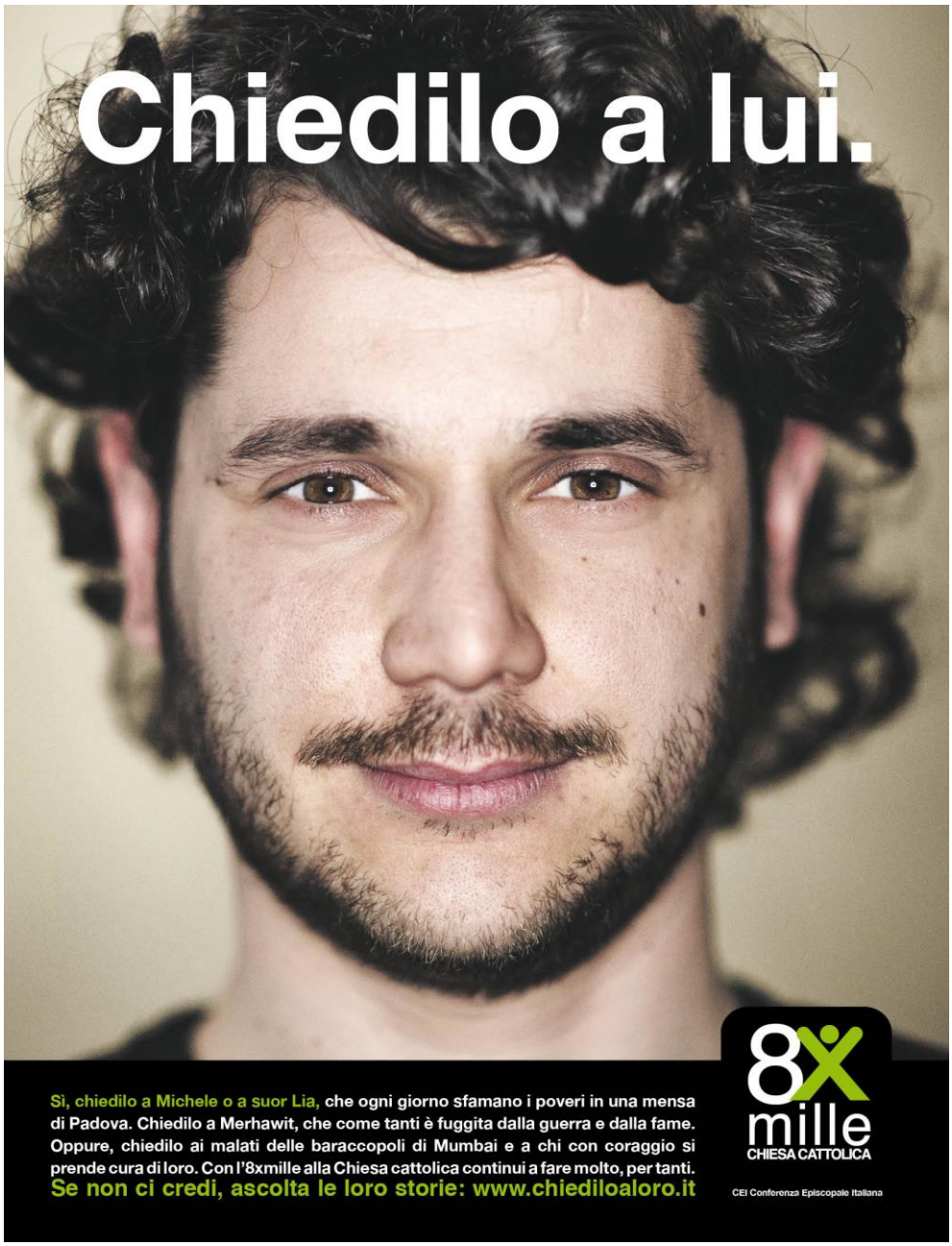
Figure 1 – *An 8x1000 promotional ad by the Italian Buddhist Union*

Note: The sentence reads '[Y]ou are not signing for us, but for them … people'
Source: http://www.buddhismo.it/8x1000/ (last accessed 7 November 2019)

[20] The images presented here have to be considered as anecdotical examples, because promotional materials have not been systematically collected and analysed in this research. For a specific analysis of 8×1000 promotional materials, see Viganò (2011).
[21] See https://www.ottopermilleavventisti.it/8permille (last accessed 7 June 2019).

The 2018 Christian Catholic 8x1000 campaign mobilizes the slogan 'Ask them' (*Chiedilo a loro*), presenting different stories concerning marginalized individuals who have had better lives and real-life improvements thanks to the services they offered (Figure 2).[22]

Figure 2 – *An 8x1000 promotional ad by the Christian Catholic Church*



Note: The title reads 'Ask him', while the text at bottom states: 'Yes, ask Michele or Nun Lia, who every day provide food in a canteen in Padua. Ask Merhawi, who like many escaped war and famine. Or ask the ill living in Mumbai slums and those of courage who are caring for them. With 8x1000 to the Christian Catholic Church, you keep on helping a lot, for many. If you do not trust us, listen to their real stories: www.chiediloaloro.it'
Source: https://www.chiediloaloro.it

[22] See https://www.8xmille.it (last accessed 7 June 2019).

In this framework, it has to be mentioned that the Waldensian Church is commonly perceived as an option: 'Waldesians attract donations from non-Waldesians because they enjoy public trust' (interview with a Waldensian *pastore*, 18 March 2019), and it provides, to a certain extent, an alternative to the hegemony of the Christian Catholic Church. Since the Christian Church has a dominant position in economic, cultural and social terms, and since it is well known that the Catholics receive by far the largest amount of public money, which is also used for cult expenses which are disconnected from social services (such as paying priests and building churches), part of the Italian population does not want its money to go to them. As a result, about 470,000 Italians decided to destine their 8x1000 quotas to the Waldesian Church in 2018, while there are only about 24,000 Waldesians in Italy (Tables 1 and 2). Another possibility for people not willing to donate money to the Christian Catholic Church is to choose to give their 8x1000 to the state for secular social activities, but anti-government feelings are also quite widespread, as the Italian government is often perceived as bureaucratic, costly and ineffective. Religious minorities, such as Buddhists, are often perceived by conservative groups as 'closed' communities, belonging to 'other' and 'alien' cultures, using public money for 'their' believers. As a result, they tend to attract limited resources from subjects who are external to their religious networks. Most of all, the entire organization of the 8x1000 system tends to disadvantage several religious minorities by excluding certain communities from the main mechanism for accessing resources, that is, 8x1000. As discussed, this is the case of both Romanian Orthodox and Muslims, since they are not fully recognized by the Italian state as religious groups, and hence they can only access 5x1000 funds.

Overall, religious groups are characterized by very different regimes of visibility and invisibility in Italian cities. Christian Catholic-related social activities, welfare services and charity institutions are simply everywhere, distributed all over the Italian territory by an impressive network of churches, oratories, schools, hospitals, etc. After all, the presence of Catholicism in Italian society has been naturalized by centuries of visibility in Italian cities (Pollard, 2008). Some minority religions strongly embedded in local territories, such as the Waldesians, also adopt a regime of local visibility, being largely accepted and 'trusted' by local populations. On the contrary, various minority religions struggle to get visibility and social legitimation and, in some cases, they may even opt for invisibility as a strategy for avoiding stigmatization and conflicts with conservative parties. This is quite evident in relation to the location of mosques, partly in relation with their ambiguous legal status and partly because of stigmatization practices, as mosques are often interpreted by conservative groups as intrusive and even dangerous places in Italian cities (Bossi, 2019; Russo, 2018; interviews with a mosque leader, Turin, 18 June 2019). As a result, mosques are often located inside buildings that are supposed to host different activities, such as warehouses, flats and abandoned factories, and in marginal urban spaces (Figure 3) (see also Chiodelli & Moroni, 2017). In a similar way, the social services proposed by mosques, as well as those proposed by other minority religious groups, are hidden from the gaze of those who do not share the same religious affiliation.

Figure 3 – *Main entrance of an informal mosque in Turin, Italy*

Note: Nothing suggests the presence of a place of worship inside the building
Source: Photo by the Authors, 2018

6. Conclusions

The position of religious groups in Italian society is definitely intricate and uneven. Since the Italian state has developed various unilateral relations with different religious groups, their positions and possibilities to access resources and visibility are highly uneven, with the Christian Catholic Church having a dominant position vis-à-vis all the other groups.

The uneven position of religious groups is evident in the access to public money through the mechanisms known as 8x1000 and 5x1000. The paper has shown that several religious groups have been partly reconfigured and re-subjectified as kinds of social entrepreneurs for the provision of social, cultural, personal and humanitarian services. Of course, there are several spiritual, ethical and moral reasons behind the active role of religious groups in supporting the weakest fringes of society, reasons that have not been explored in this paper. Rather, the paper has focused on the competitive dimension of religious groups trying to position, reposition and legitimate their role to the Italian population in order to obtain resources. In this framework, ideas of 'competition' and 'competitiveness' have to be mobilized with caution. The environment is de facto competitive because money flowing to one religious group will not flow to another. Still, it has not to be intended as a flat and even competitive field where every religious group is trying to erode the other groups' quotas: several minoritarian groups are

simply excluded from the main form of competition, that is 8x1000, with the Romanian Orthodox and Muslim community being the most evident cases. Several minoritarian groups seem to compete on different levels and with different strategies, for example, by leveraging internal resources and community networks; the most evident case in point mentioned above is that of the Mormons, who decided not to engage in the 8x1000 mechanism. In this scenario, the politics of camouflage develops at different levels. First, the race for access to financial resources does not really look like a competition: the competitive dimension is concealed and mystified in order to praise and celebrate religious groups' civic activism. The Catholic Church, from its dominant position, proposes positive discourses about religious diversity, ideals of tolerance, integration and dialogue (Griera et al., 2018).

Second, the camouflage involves racialization processes. The 'othering' of religious groups visibly overlaps with the 'othering' of ethnic groups in many popular discourses and mainstream political narratives. For example, migrants from certain countries in Africa are commonly supposed to be Muslims, and Muslims are intended as those subjects coming from a certain list of countries, while, for example, Romanian Orthodoxy is supposed to be the proper religion for subjects coming from Eastern Europe. Identities are essentialized, and the way data are collected (i.e., presuming figures on the basis of immigrants' country of origin, as discussed in note 2) reinforces this cultural construction which ultimately leaves much space for conservative discourses and fundamentalist positions. In fact, many discourses, mostly proposed by right-wind parties (such as Nord, Forza Italia, Fratelli d'Italia) tend to assume that 'defending' and 'preserving' Catholic spaces become a way of defending Italian culture, and that the spread of 'other' religions has to be opposed. Therefore, all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs, and according to a local imam, in the framework of a discussion on popular stereotypes, the most widespread clichés concerning Muslim men is that 'we are sexist, violent and intolerant, while women are subjugated and held as prisoners by their families' (interview with an imam in Turin, 18 June 2019).

In this scenario, it is not a coincidence that the second largest religious group receiving money is that of the Waldesians, a relatively small religious group in terms of size, which is disconnected from (contemporary) religious flows: there is no ethnic 'othering' for Waldesians, who are ultimately assumed to be simply 'Italian'. Christian Orthodox are 'closer' than Muslims (they are assumed to be Romanians); therefore, opposition with respect to their spatial presence is weaker. This becomes evident in consideration of the other dimensions of the politics of camouflage which have been mentioned here, that is, spatial camouflage: many minoritarian religious spaces are concealed from people's gazes, being relegated to the margins of urban spaces or inside buildings with apparently other uses, such as warehouses or old factories, while Catholic buildings seem to be everywhere in Italian cities, but they often look like secular spaces, such as schools and hospitals. Spatial camouflage develops in ambiguous frameworks hybridizing presence and absence, visibility and invisibility.

Overall, the 8x1000 and 5x1000 competitive systems unfold within an aesthetic, discursive and representational regime that transforms religious competition into a form that is acceptable and tolerable. Urban space develops and reveals this camouflage: urban religion-based services produce a geography of civic–religious initiatives, which adds a meaningful layer of complexity to the forms and practices of factual citizenship and the structures of power operating in Italian cities.

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