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# The Catholic Church in the Lives of Irregular Migrant Filipinas in France: Identity Formation, Empowerment and Social Control

Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot

*Religious belongings help migrants, especially irregular ones, to confront the precariousness of their lives. France represents a peculiar case because it is a secular country where undocumented migrants have access to free medical care and their children to compulsory education. The present paper explores Filipino migrants' religious space in France by examining irregular migrant Filipinas' church involvement and shows the contrasting attitudes of these women towards religion: some find in the Church a social institution supporting their social and economic incorporation in France, whereas others stay away from religious gatherings to avoid prejudice and gossip. These attitudes point to the key roles of religion in the structuring of migrant populations, as well as of the Church as a centre of collective identity, a source of empowerment and an instrument of social control.*

*Keywords: Religious Space; Catholic Church; Filipino Migrant Women; Irregular Migration Status; Identity; Empowerment; Social Control; France*

Migration affects the individual and family lives of migrant workers. There are rich accounts in the literature of the role of churches in migrants' adaption (Hirschman 2004; Lacomba 2000; Mateo 2000), social incorporation (Kim & Hurh 1985; Yoo 2000), social empowerment (Moore 1992) and formation of ethnic identity (Lorentzen & Mira 2005; Menjivar 2003). Several studies on transnational migrations in Western Europe and in the US have demonstrated how religious institutions and practices reinforce and sustain migrants' ties with their countries of origin (Bowen 2004; Ebaugh & Chafetz 2002; Levitt 1998, 2003; Mahler & Hansing 2005; Werbner

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2003). This suggests that migrants' religious belonging allows them to confront the precariousness they experience in their receiving countries.

This is particularly true for irregular migrant domestic workers who, in many receiving countries, use their religious identity to find employment, housing and legal information (Anderson 2000; Ismail 1999; Scrinzi 2003; Silvey 2005, 2006; Yeoh & Huang 1999). The importance of churches and religion in the lives of irregular migrants<sup>1</sup> has also been observed among Filipina domestic workers in European countries such as Italy, Spain, Greece and England (Anthias & Lazaridis 2000; Hoegsholm 2007; Parreñas 2001). In France, however, the lives of irregular migrants are arguably somewhat easier—for example, undocumented migrants are entitled to free medical care (European Commission 2004) and their children receive compulsory education (Björngren Cuadra 2010). Moreover, religion does not exert much influence in French society compared with other European countries, because France strongly embraces the principle of *laïcité* or secularism (Troper 2000). Hence, one may query whether irregular migrant Filipinas in France depend as much on the Church for their everyday lives as their counterparts in other European countries.

Migrant women belong to a community of migrants: 'women are not only wage labourers and family members but community members who are involved in churches, schools, labour unions, or immigrant organizations' (Zentgraf 2002, p. 628). The present article attempts to explain irregular migrant Filipinas' religiosity by looking at their habits of church attendance. A first step is to disentangle the social relationships among these migrants by using Lefebvre's notion of 'social space' (1991, 2000). Lefebvre (1991, p. 77) defines social space as containing 'a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of material things and information. Such "objects" are thus not only things but also relations'. In Lefebvre's formulation, social space is constituted by networked social relationships and is not located in a definite geographic area: hence, for his concept to be operational in the particular case of migrant churches, one should not treat them in isolation but rather focus on their complex links with the other components of a given society (religious institutions, migrant populations, labour markets etc.). As Lefebvre (1991, p. 85) points out, 'networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it'. This is particularly important when analysing the religiosity of migrant Filipinas who transform the places they regularly frequent, like the church, through constant interactions and exchanges.

Knott (2005) applied Lefebvre's ideas regarding social space in her examination of the spatial configuration of religious relations. She argues:

Space is more than some mere container or backdrop for the antics of religions and religious people. It is the means and the outcome as well as the medium of social and cultural activity. Furthermore, in this account it provides the method for illuminating religion and people's experience of it. (Knott 2005, p. 34)

The present paper takes the same path to explore the case of irregular migrant Filipinas who are concentrated in the service sector in France. I examine their variable involvement in what these migrants call the 'Filipino Catholic Church', which comprises the church itself, the chaplaincy that runs it and the churchgoers. This implies a holistic analysis of the social behaviour of migrants, their attitude towards religion and their 'religious space'; that is, the social relationships built around the Filipino Catholic Church. This space is filled with 'representations' that are 'more mental than material' and that are 'simultaneously criticising the imposed order and providing an alternative vision of the self' (Chivallon 2001, p. 477). Indeed, the 'illegality' (De Genova 2002, 2004) of irregular migrants puts them in 'spaces of nonexistence' (Coutin 2003) characterised by social isolation and a lack of legal rights. Thus, social relationships grounded in religious activities may offer irregular migrants a space of expression in which to confront their social marginality.

The present paper is the result of empirical studies I conducted in the Filipino migrant population in the Île-de-France region, first on Filipino entrepreneurship in 2004 and subsequently on the transnational family dynamics of Filipino migrant mothers from 2006 to 2007. I undertook ethnographic observations in four sites: a Filipino-owned store, a restaurant specialising in Filipino foods, a Catholic church where Masses are celebrated in Filipino (the national language of the Philippines), and the presbytery of the Filipino priest of this church. All these sites were located in the sixteenth district of Paris, an upper-class neighbourhood that offers many employment opportunities for Filipino migrants. I also conducted semistructured interviews in Filipino with seventy-five migrants (eleven men and sixty-four women) introduced through a snowball approach. Each interview lasted between 1.5 and 3 hours and followed a standardised interview guide focusing on the migrants' sociodemographic characteristics, premigration life, present situation and future projects. Among the sixty-four women interviewed, fifteen were undocumented Catholic Filipinas and these women are the focus of the present study. These women were mostly in their forties and had lived in France for an average of 6 years. Most resided and worked as domestics in the sixteenth district. Most had college degrees, a general characteristic of the Filipino migrant population worldwide (Campani 1993; Ellis & Wright 1999; Eviota 1992; Jackson, Huang, & Yeoh, 1999; Maas 2002). Despite their higher educational background, these women work in the domestic service sector in France and thus experience what Parreñas (2001) calls a 'contradictory class mobility'; that is, a simultaneous improvement in their financial status and decline in social status. Nearly all the women interviewed were separated from their families left in the Philippines: the only exception was the case of a street vendor who was living in France with her Filipino husband and child.

Historically, Filipino migration to France developed towards the end of the 1970s. Following the civil war in Lebanon in 1975, the Iran revolution in 1979 and the Iran–Iraq war in 1980, Filipino domestic workers were brought to France by their employers fleeing these countries. Many of these Filipino migrants decided to stay after these wars ended. In the 1980s, this first group of Filipino migrants was rejoined by family

members from the Philippines, either thanks to the French Family Reunification programme or by overstaying their tourist visas. Such ‘false tourists’ have dominated the flux of Filipino migrants to France since the 1990s. Another group of Filipino migrants in France who started to arrive in the 1980s are the ‘runaways’ fleeing abusive employers: when their employers (usually from the Middle East) spent vacations in France, these migrants were able to escape with the help of other Filipino migrants they met in public places. In 2007, according to the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (2008), there were approximately 47,075 Filipino migrants in France, of whom 39,000 were classed as irregular. These irregular migrants are concentrated in urban areas, oriented towards the service sector and are largely women.

In this article, I begin by presenting an overview of the position of the Catholic Church in France regarding migration and the way irregular migrants turn to it to voice their needs. I then examine the case of Catholic irregular migrant Filipinas in the Île-de-France region by describing their lives and exploring their religious space using the ‘social space’ lens of Lefebvre.

### **The Catholic Church and Irregular Migrants in the French Context**

The Catholic Church of France began to openly express supportive gestures concerning labour migration during the massive arrival of Italian, Spanish and Portuguese Catholic migrants during the so-called ‘thirty glorious years’ (1945–75) of economic growth in the country. This attitude was influenced by a series of changes starting from the Vatican Council II (1962–5) until the end of the term of Jean-Paul II as Pope (2005). These changes included the recognition of migration as a human right and the creation of structures within the Church to directly address the needs of migrants (see Costes 1988).

The arrival of Catholic migrant workers in French cities like Paris triggered the mushrooming of migrant churches and chaplaincies. For instance, Spanish migrants began to gather in their own parish in the sixteenth district of Paris and attend Masses celebrated in their language (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot 1999; Taboada-Leonetti 1987). Portuguese migrants frequented the Sanctuary of Fatima (nineteenth district), the Parish of Notre Dame of Clignancourt (eighteenth district) and the Sacred Heart Church at Gentilly (Volovitch-Tavares 1995), whereas Polish migrants have parishes in Lens in the Pas-de-Calais region and in the Saint Joseph Church in Oignies (Ponty 1995) and assemble in the Church Notre-Dame of Assumption (first district, Paris). Such religious sites play a key role in the structuring of migrant populations and in the reinforcement of community ties, serving as places of social interactions and exchanges, notably for pioneer migrants, refugees and exiles; as such, they embody the memory and linguistic identity of these migrants.

Moreover, the Catholic Church of France founded associations to assist migrants in their social incorporation in France. This is the case with the *Service Interdiocésain pour les Travailleurs Immigrés* founded in 1964 to address the needs of both documented and undocumented migrant workers. The main activity of this association is the

publication of bilingual religious materials (Volovitch-Tavares 1995). The *Service National de la Pastorale des Migrants et des Personnes Itinérantes* was also created to welcome migrants and to provide them with information and services (religious, judicial, social, economic, cultural) useful for their daily lives. The Church participated actively in social debates concerning the rights of migrants, which influenced Christian political activists to rally for the migrant cause. The Church openly expressed its support of even non-Christian migrants in the name of human rights. For example, in 1981 a priest led a hunger strike in Lyon to protest the deportation of North African Muslim teenagers 'believed to be illegal resident aliens' (see Messina 2002). This was the first time that the Church intervened in French politics, and stood up for those accused of being 'illegal migrants'. This event had some influence on the adoption of a law on 29 October 1981 forbidding the expulsion of foreigners born in the country or arriving before the age of ten (Schor 1996). In September 1981, the socialist government of François Mitterrand granted the right of association to migrants without prior government permission, facilitating the formation of migrant associations (notably religious ones) that serve as a place for irregular migrants to socialise.

However, the first time that undocumented migrants used the Church as a symbol of their struggle was in 1996. With the support of the parish priest, irregular African migrants occupied the Saint Bernard Church in the eighteenth district of Paris for 2 months to demand their regularisation (Harris 1996; Ireland & Proulx 2001). This protest reinforced the *sans-papiers* (undocumented migrants) movement and led to stronger ties between the Church and the cause of irregular migrants. The Saint Bernard affair continues to influence migrant activism, media rhetoric and discourses, paving the way for other undocumented migrants to come out and ask for regularisation (e.g. women from North and Sub-Saharan Africa in December 2007; CIMADE 2008). The image conveyed by the media in France is that the Catholic Church is friendly towards undocumented migrants, which leads them, especially those of Catholic background, to turn to the Church to confront their precarious situation. Remarkably, however, undocumented migrant Filipinas remain absent from *sans-papier* movements. Their 'silent call' for regularisation remains confined to their employers' apartment or the Filipino Catholic church, perhaps due to their fear of being arrested by the police or to their lack of command of French. In addition, irregular migrant Filipinas have little or no involvement in French labour unions that support undocumented migrants in their claims for regularisation. This contrasts with the situation in the early 1980s when Filipino migrants, through their association *Kasandiwa*,<sup>2</sup> joined the *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail*, one of the major French labour unions, a move that facilitated the regularisation of some 600 undocumented Filipinos in 1981 and 1982 (Rousset 2007).

### **Lives of Irregular Filipino Migrant Women in France**

The lives of the undocumented Filipinas interviewed appear precarious in many ways: they earn a lower salary than their regular (legally documented) counterparts

(1000 versus 1400 Euros per month among respondents), have reduced access to social services and live in the fear of being arrested and sent back to the Philippines. These feelings are coupled with an intense homesickness, particularly for newly arrived respondents, as is commonly observed among migrants during the initial stage of their migration (Espín 1987). The women migrated to France mainly for economic reasons: to support the basic needs of their families in the Philippines, such as their children's education, and to accumulate socially valorised goods that symbolise upward social class mobility. Non-economic reasons for migration included the urge to escape conjugal problems at home<sup>3</sup> and the dream of going abroad and experiencing life in a different country.

Irregular migrants working in the domestic service sector feel that they belong to the very bottom of the social class hierarchy of Filipino migrants in France. This hierarchy is based on migration status and on income: the best-paid documented Filipinas have the highest rank, documented Filipinas who receive lower wages come second and undocumented Filipinas (whose salary is still higher than most other undocumented domestic workers in France) represent the lowest level. This hierarchical status is neither rigid nor strict, because each individual goes up or down in the hierarchy whenever there is a change in migration status (e.g. through marriage with French nationals or through regularisation) or income.

Moreover, undocumented Filipino domestic workers feel socially isolated owing to the nature of their jobs. For example, Anita,<sup>4</sup> a mother of two, has accumulated twelve part-time domestic jobs and works more than 10 hours a day, even during weekends, but has few interactions with others, including her employers:

Nine of my employers are not present in their apartments when I work. I have the keys of their apartments, so all the day I don't meet anybody with whom I can talk. I meet my employers during my first day of work, they give me the key to their apartment and then I don't see them any more. They leave my monthly salary on the table, no interaction, no contact.

Working without interpersonal interaction with their employers can give a sense of liberty to some, because nobody checks their work or tells them what to do. Nevertheless, a feeling of isolation can build up progressively and may worsen at certain times of the year. For example, Ara, a mother of four, recalls her experience of celebrating Christmas alone in the house of her employer who went abroad for a vacation: 'I only took care of her dog and her house, I didn't have a choice, it was my job. I was alone in the house with the dog, while the world around me was busy celebrating Christmas'.

To fulfil their family obligations, the migrant Filipinas interviewed sacrifice their desire to be with their loved ones and most deprive themselves of comfort by living in small and cramped apartments and spending as little as possible on food, clothes and shoes, as Josie (mother of two) recalled during her interview:

I wanted to buy a new pair of sandals for me. I had not had new ones for a long time. I was keeping a bit of money for that while waiting for the sales period, but

my family needed my help so I wasn't able to buy [them]: the money allocated for sandals went to my nephew who was suffering from a hernia. Anyway, I was happy to be able to help him.

Other Filipino migrant women interviewed also tended to overwork and accumulate many part-time domestic jobs in order to send more money to their families. For example, Aledia, a mother of four, confided that to earn between 1800 and 2000 Euros a month she had to switch between at least ten part-time domestic jobs every day. Others engage in commercial activities, such as informal small-scale businesses, generally oriented towards other Filipino migrants (Flot-Fresnoza & Pécoud 2007).

Having no papers seriously limits the spatial mobility of undocumented migrant Filipinas. They cannot visit their family in the Philippines, which paradoxically leads them to lengthen their stay in France because they know that it will be very difficult to return. Thus, many spend years without seeing their husbands and children, which has numerous negative consequences for their conjugal lives and relationships with their children (Fresnoza-Flot 2008).

### **Opportunities and Constraints: The Religious Space of Catholic Migrant Filipinas**

Every Sunday afternoon, Filipino migrants assemble at the Saint Bernadette Chapel in the sixteenth district to attend Mass and meet friends. This meeting follows the Mass of the Portuguese migrants, who celebrate in the same chapel, in the same way that Filipino migrants have followed and progressively replaced their Portuguese counterparts since the 1980s as domestic workers in the bourgeois neighbourhoods of Paris. An article published in *Panawagan*, the newspaper of the Philippine Chaplaincy in Paris, recalls that a prayer group was organised in November 1985 and progressively developed with the arrival of a Filipino priest (see Armas 1988). In September 1986, the Bishops' Conference of France and the Diocese of Paris founded the Philippine Chaplaincy (called the *Mission catholique philippine en France*) to assist Filipino migrants. Since then, six Filipino priests, including the present one, have successively come from the Philippines to manage the chaplaincy. Some Filipino nuns in France also devote part of their time to the chaplaincy. The priest and the nuns are assisted by an internal organisation composed of long-term resident Filipino migrants who fulfil specific functions, such as president, treasurer or secretary.

Since the founding of the Philippine Chaplaincy, many Filipino migrants have relied on the priest as a source of moral support, including his sermons, that contain advice useful for their daily lives. Filipino migrants find they can easily approach the priest in the church after Mass or in his presbytery and ask for his guidance in their private lives. The priest also represents Filipino migrants among French Catholics; for example, he voices their needs during his meetings with French priests and bishops. Moreover, the priest participates in many non-religious activities of the Filipino migrant population. For example, in 1992 the priest, together with the ambassador of the Philippines to France, headed the executive committee of the federation of



Filipino migrant associations, the Filipino Community Associations Assembly in France. This federation aimed to reinforce 'community ties' through various projects, one of which was the establishment of a Filipino cultural centre; however, it started to break down in 1997 when the priest and the ambassador returned to the Philippines. Succeeding Filipino priests managed the federation's bank account and, in 2005, the priest participated in a meeting with leaders of Filipino migrant associations and the ambassador concerning the possible use of the federation's funds.

From 1988 to 2000, Filipino migrants congregated in the Saint Genevieve Chapel in the sixteenth district for the celebration of Mass and other special occasions (marriage, baptisms, funerals etc.). In October 2000, because of increasing attendance, the Parish of Notre-Dame of Auteuil allowed them to use the larger Saint Bernadette Chapel in the same district. The new chapel can accommodate 700 people (De Leon 2000). Filipino Catholic migrants consider this place as their 'Church', the 'Filipino Catholic Church' in Paris. Masses are held in Filipino every Wednesday at 8 pm and every Sunday at 3 pm. Another Mass in Filipino takes place at the Philippine Chaplaincy office every Tuesday at 9 pm, but it can only accommodate a small group of fifteen to twenty people. Other Filipino migrants go to the Saint Joseph Catholic Church in the eighth district where Masses are celebrated in English, whereas a few others prefer to attend Masses in French at the Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois Church in the first district. Among these places of worship, the Saint Bernadette Chapel attracts most of the Filipino Catholic churchgoers in Paris. In Marseilles and Nice, there are Filipino Catholic churches and chaplaincies similar to the one in Paris.

Catholic Filipino migrants are not alone in congregating in specific places of worship. Other Filipino Christian migrants, such as followers of the *Iglesia ni Kristo*, Episcopalians, Born Again Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses, have their own places of worship in the Île-de-France region, whereas Muslim Filipinos unite around their association, the Filipino Muslim Community in France. These religious spaces create both harmony and divisions inside the Filipino migrant population.

### **Reinforcement of Filipino Migrants' Religious and Linguistic Identities**

Some Filipino migrants I met during an observation in front of the Saint Bernadette Chapel commented that 'this place is like a small Philippines, we don't have the feeling of being in France'. For them, this particular church is like an extension of their country of origin, a social space that allows them to affirm their religious and linguistic identities and symbolises their national belonging. Regular attendance at Mass reinforces their religious identity, which legitimises their access to the Filipino Catholic Church's services. This explains why seven of the fifteen Catholic irregular migrant women interviewed are active churchgoers. Accentuating their belonging to the Church justifies their recourse to it as a space of refuge and protection from police arrest. In fact, Filipino domestic workers who are maltreated by their employers in Paris do not usually turn to the Philippine embassy to complain about

their situation, but rather find support in some associations or in the Filipino Catholic Church (O'Dy 1995).

Participation in the groups and associations affiliated with the Chaplaincy further strengthens Filipino migrants' religious identity and this entitles them to certain privileges, such as direct access to information and help from the Church. Among the Filipino migrant community, the Chaplaincy is known for its services offered to Filipino migrants through the *Samahan ng mga Manggagawang Pilipino* (Association of Filipino Labourers). Services include French language courses, assistance to those arrested by the police, prayer meetings, home or hospital visits to migrants who are ill and counselling. Five other groups affiliated with the Chaplaincy coordinate with the priest to organise religious and humanitarian activities, including fund raising for victims of natural disasters in the Philippines.<sup>5</sup> Active involvement in church-affiliated associations has also granted greater spatial mobility to some of the irregular migrant Filipinas interviewed, because these religious associations frequently organise conventions and pilgrimages in the south of France to Lourdes or La Salette, or in Italy, to Rome and Loreto. Nelia, a regular migrant, recalls her experience with such travels when she was an illegal migrant in Paris: 'No papers? This did not impede us from travelling. For example, when our religious association organised a tour to Venice, we were able to go even though we were illegal migrants'. However, most irregular migrant Filipinas interviewed do not participate in such travels because they fear being arrested by the police and deported.

The religious identity of Catholic irregular migrant Filipinas interviewed increases their chance of finding jobs in the domestic service sector. The Filipino domestic workers are known for being Catholic and for speaking good English, which explains why they are higher up the hierarchy of foreign domestic workers (Andall 2003; Mozère 2005). A Filipino woman entrepreneur managing a placement agency for domestic workers in Paris confided: 'Filipino migrants are the most sought-after and best paid among the migrant domestic workers'. Some of the rich clients of this woman ask for well-educated domestic workers, which may represent an indirect strategy to discourage 'undesirable' candidates of unwanted national origin, religious belonging or skin colour (as described by De Rudder, Poirer and Vourc'h in their 2000 study of racist inequality).

The Sunday Mass at the Saint Bernadette Chapel is an important meeting point. Celebrating Masses and other religious ceremonies in Filipino provides migrants with an opportunity to reinforce their linguistic and collective national belonging. The church offers space for different linguistic groups (*Tagalog, Visaya, Kapampangan* etc.<sup>6</sup>) to meet and speak their language, which promotes group solidarity. Irregular migrant women interviewed explained that coming to the Filipino church gave them a feeling of belonging to the 'Filipino community' and that they found 'a space to breathe' in the church because there was no pressure there to speak in French or English. Most of these women still have difficulty speaking French and the Philippine Chaplaincy has offered French classes to facilitate their social incorporation. Subsequently, a leader of a religious association observed that some of the women

were also not very good English speakers and he planned some English classes to help them.

Thus, the church serves as a symbolic place for construction, reaffirmation and reinforcement of the religious and linguistic identities of Catholic Filipino migrants as well as a place for interethnic interactions. The permission granted to Filipino migrants to use the Saint Bernadette Chapel for their religious expression reflects the Church's intention to socially incorporate them. However, it also unintentionally reinforces the 'supposed' and 'imagined' differences between this immigrant group and the French and foreign populations in France. These 'differences' are reproduced and maintained through the constant utilisation and occupation of the Saint Bernadette Chapel by Filipino migrants. That is, the Church acts as a social space that produces a border of distinctions influencing the formation of Filipino migrant identity. It plays an important role in the reinforcement of community relations within the Filipino migrant population, which presents irregular migrant Filipinas with various forms of opportunity. In this sense, the case of Filipino migrants resembles that of their Spanish and Portuguese predecessors, who reunite in their churches and parishes and celebrate Mass in their own language. This shows how the Church imposes its authority on migrants by allotting them specific places of worship. At the same time, the Church turns out to be a place for expression of agency, where migrants can establish associations and undertake humanitarian projects (Fresnoza-Flot 2009). Such interactions between opportunities and constraints can be particularly well observed in the religious space of Catholic migrant Filipinas.

### **Economic Empowerment Through the Sacred**

Irregular migrant Filipinas come to the Saint Bernadette Chapel not only to express their religious devotion, but also to weave a network of friends and acquaintances crucial for their socioeconomic incorporation in France. The Church offers diverse services and business ideas, job opportunities and housing possibilities. It serves as a vehicle for business creation and played a key role in the initial development of Filipino entrepreneurial activities in Paris.

In 1989, a domestic worker named Lili took refuge in the Saint Genevieve Chapel after escaping from her Saudi Arabian employer. The Filipino priest at the time allowed her to sell Filipino foods in front of the church on Sundays before and after Mass in order to earn her living. Other irregular Filipino migrant women (and recently a man) imitated her and started similar businesses with the priest's permission. The owner of a Filipino dry goods store in Paris also started as a vendor of Filipino foods in front of the church before deciding to open a formal business after her migration status was regularised. These informal business activities moved to the Saint Bernadette Chapel in 2000 when it became the new Filipino church. Succeeding Filipino priests have tolerated these activities as a way of helping irregular migrants, but also because the small market encourages Filipino migrants to attend Sunday Mass regularly. According to one vendor, the

atmosphere is similar to that of the Quiapo church in Manila. Filipino products are also sold in front of Saint Joseph's Church in the eighth district. Some vendors go first to Saint Bernadette's Chapel, before the 3:30 pm Mass, and then transfer to Saint Joseph's, where Mass is celebrated at 6:30 pm. These vendors maximise profits by becoming members of religious associations, where they sell their specialties every time there is a meeting or activity. However, the possibility of selling products and services in front of the church or within the context of a religious association is limited by space and time, which explains, in part, why the accumulation of part-time domestic jobs remains the most common source of income among irregular Catholic migrant Filipinas who cannot easily engage in other forms of commerce, unlike regular migrants.

The church also acts as a place of business promotion, notably during Sunday Mass. Filipino entrepreneurs talk about their businesses and sometimes post short announcements on the bulletin board near the church door. In this religious space, a sort of job market becomes established where 'information circulates while contacts between businesspeople, customers, potential employees and partners are established' (Fresnoza-Flot & Pécoud 2007, p. 21). The church is influential in migrants' business activities through its role in facilitating social networks and in providing access to business information and job opportunities (Kim & Hurh 1985; Yoo 2000). According to the Filipino priest, some employees of French companies come to the Filipino church and distribute their business information, encouraging migrants to use their services or buy their products. One respondent told me that once a representative of a French wine company came to the church looking for Filipino migrants interested in working in his company's vineyards. Some French employers come to the church, sometimes directly to the Chaplaincy office, looking for domestic workers or nannies. The priest or other migrants relay these job offers to migrants they know. Unemployed Filipino migrants, particularly irregular migrants, also come to the church looking for jobs.

Hence, the Filipino Catholic Church and Chaplaincy function together as a social institution linking Filipino migrants to one another and to French employers. They constitute both a religious and economic space, the functions of which overlap in a harmonious way. The strong presence of irregular Filipino migrants in these places and their economic practices in the churches do not provoke tensions because their fellow migrants, other churchgoers and the priests all welcome them. The sale of Filipino products often attracts passers-by, including policemen, who warn the vendors of the illegality of their activity but do not arrest them. This particular economic activity of irregular migrants has transformed the churches into 'spaces of representation' loaded with 'images and symbols' (Lefebvre 1991) that modify and appropriate the imagination. It also represents a 'new mode' of spatial practice that goes beyond and challenges the 'norms of the prevailing (enforced) social spatialisation' (Shields 1999, p. 164). Thus, irregular migrants are empowered and their physical and social existence is supported.

### **Social Control of Women's Behaviour**

A woman in her late forties who is very active in the Chaplaincy boasts: 'since I have come to France and was separated from my husband, I have practised total sexual abstinence. Women here [in the chaplaincy] do the same thing as me, I don't know about the others.' Another woman adds, 'I chose to be active in the church in order to avoid temptations that could ruin my family'. Such discourses of Filipino migrant women, as well as of other social actors interviewed (e.g. Filipino priests, nuns and religious leaders), highlight the importance of sexual abstinence and self-sacrifice in the lives of migrant mothers separated from their families. These discourses point to another function of the Filipino Catholic Church as a social institution guiding the everyday interactions and behaviour of Filipino migrants, especially women.

This role of the Church also discourages more than half of the irregular migrant Filipinas I interviewed (eight of fifteen) from taking an active part in any religious association or attending Mass regularly. These women avoid spending time with other Filipinos because they say they do not like the gossip at gatherings. Gossip acts as an 'instrument of rejection', distancing the 'non-conformers' within a given group (Ellias & Scotson 1994). Popular topics of gossip in the Catholic Filipino migrants' religious spaces include marital infidelity, conjugal separation and juvenile delinquency. This gossip criticises those who are not able to keep their family intact or to lead what is considered a 'clean' and 'moral' life based on the teachings of the Church. As with other groups, gossip within the Catholic Filipino migrant population reflects and asserts its 'standard of public morality' (see Abrahams 1970). Generally, gossip in other places frequented by Filipino migrants, such as Filipino shops, does not exert such control on individual lives because the migrants live dispersed throughout the Île-de-France region. This contrasts, for example, with North African migrants, who live in specific neighbourhoods, which permits the permanent circulation of gossip and the control of each other's actions. However, in the associations affiliated with the Philippine Chaplaincy, members' residential dispersion does not impede the surveillance of each other's social behaviour because the organisation provides a space for regular meetings and exchange of personal information.<sup>7</sup>

After work, irregular migrant Filipinas who are not frequent churchgoers lead a different life, one that they try to keep hidden as much as possible from what they call the 'observing eyes of the Filipino community', to avoid criticism and gossip concerning their 'morality'. Instead, they spend time with friends with whom they share their personal problems and secrets, organise picnics and parties, drink alcohol, go to discos, watch films in movie theatres and even gamble. Vivian, for example, plays card games regularly with her friends and bets money, a secret she keeps hidden from her seven children in the Philippines. Ada, a mother of four, prefers to stay alone on her days off rather than to mingle with other Filipino migrants:

I don't like to be part of any Filipino association, because I don't like gossip. You know Filipino women, don't you? It's better to be alone. For example, one time during my day off, I rode a bus from one terminal to the other. Afterwards, I went

back to my apartment and slept. I also go out with friends from time to time, I choose my friends.

Extramarital affairs represent another hidden aspect of the life of some irregular migrants interviewed. Those who still have a more-or-less intimate relationship with their husband in the Philippines find themselves in a delicate situation: they need to keep their 'flings' secret from their husband. Aledia, for example, who left the Philippines to escape her domestic marital problems and who has been living for the past 14 years with her Pakistani boyfriend in Paris, is always cautious about what she tells her children. Since her departure from the Philippines, she keeps repeating to her children that they are the exclusive object of her attention and that she has no interest whatsoever in men. Irregular migrant women justify their love affairs by citing their loneliness in France. Rona, a mother of five whose relationship with her husband is about to fall apart and who is starting to go out with a French suitor, confides:

All of my friends have boyfriends here [in France] and it doesn't bother me. I understand them because they told me: 'Rona after 3 years, you'll feel sad here, you'll look for a companion'. That's true, I don't like to criticise people because I know what is sadness here. Sometimes you're alone. When you have a boyfriend, it's different.

Catholic migrant mothers like Rona whose behaviour does not conform to the Church's standard of good conduct have to fulfil their family obligations meticulously to avoid suspicion, and also need to choose well the places they frequent and the friends in whom they confide their secrets. Although this also holds true for regular migrant Filipinas engaged in extramarital affairs, the situation of irregular migrants is worse because they also need to be very careful not to be arrested by the police. As a result, they keep away from places like the religious spaces of their Catholic compatriots where they can easily be singled out as 'immoral'; as 'illegal migrants', they avoid public areas that may be under police surveillance. This cautious attitude allows them to create their own spaces—real, symbolic and imaginary—in which to express their individuality.

## **Conclusion**

The religious space of Catholic Filipino migrants in the Île-de-France region is comprised of complex relationships based mainly on these migrants' participation in the Church and in religious organisations. Within this space, there is a continued circulation and exchange of information, goods, objects and symbols that nourishes the myriad ties among the social actors involved; that is, the social space itself. This echoes Lefebvre's argument that 'every social space is the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents, signifying and non-signifying, perceived and directly experienced, practical and theoretical' (1991, p. 110). In the case of irregular migrant Filipinas, both opportunities and constraints produced during this process affect their behaviour towards religion and the Church.

On the one hand, the Filipino Catholic Church is a symbolic centre of religious and linguistic identity, as well as of interactions between subgroups from the Philippines,

reinforcing community relations, and represents a social institution supporting Filipino migrants' social and economic incorporation into France. For irregular migrant Filipinas who are active churchgoers, the church serves as a 'legitimate' or socially acceptable form of refuge that opens possibilities to them. Conversely, there are Catholic Filipinas who try to stay away from religious gatherings to avoid gossip and prejudice—so the Filipino Catholic Church and its various religious associations also act as instruments of social control, defining the acceptable behaviour to which each Catholic migrant Filipina must conform. The 'hidden' lives of some irregular migrants interviewed (such as gambling and extramarital affairs) reflect their familial and social isolation in France: the loss of reference points and habits engendered by migration prompts them to search for a space of liberty that is not necessarily synonymous with emancipation, but more certainly represents the shadow of their solitude and sadness. Their quest for a 'space to breathe' leads them away from the Filipino Catholic Church and from religious associations whose moral guidelines of social behaviour do not suit their new way of life. This contrasts with Filipino irregular migrants in other Catholic and Christian countries around Europe (e.g. Italy), who appear to rely more frequently on the Church for assistance (see Campani 1989, 1993).

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### Notes

- [1] In the present study, 'irregular migrants' is considered a synonym of 'illegal' but used preferentially as it does not convey negative connotations.
- [2] Formerly *Barkadahang Pinoy*, this first association of Filipino migrants in Paris (founded at the beginning of the 1970s) was supported by the *Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement* (a humanitarian association with a mandate from the Bishops' Conference of France and with the objectives of supporting human development projects and increasing public awareness of the situation of underdeveloped countries).
- [3] Divorce does not exist in the Philippines, only legal separation, which does not allow the persons concerned to remarry.
- [4] The names of all respondents have been changed.
- [5] These include social service groups, such as Filipino Helping Hands, Couples for Christ, Singles for Christ and Youth for Christ, and charismatic groups such as *El Shaddai*, *Mabuting Pastol* and Marian.
- [6] There are 100 ethnic groups in the Philippines speaking more than 120 different languages (McFarland 2004).

- [7] The magazine *MAD Pinoy* (2008) of the 'Filipino community' in France counted fifty-five associations of Filipino migrants in the country, of which eleven are religious associations. This number appears high for a migrant population of approximately 50,000, suggesting the existence of multiple internal divisions.

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