

God Has a Woman's Voice. Liturgical Music and Agency of Eastern European Migrant Women in Rome

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Then Judith began to sing this thanksgiving
in all Israel, and all the people sang after her
this song of praise.

(Bible, Judith 16,1)¹

Abstract: *This chapter deals with the musical role of women in the Christian services of migrant communities in Rome. As numerous other European capitals, Rome is currently a multi-ethnic city, but one of its specificities is that some of its migrant communities are mainly feminine. Such women, usually coming alone from Eastern Europe, are fully invested in the new market of care for the elderly. Whether Latin Catholic (Polish community), Greek Catholic (Ukrainian community) or Orthodox (Georgian community), the lack of men in their own communities pushes them to take on societal and musical roles which were not originally thought for them in their countries of origin. By necessity, these women have to take the leadership of the choir and the musical repertoire of their churches and, doing it, they become the voices to the Lord and, especially, of the Lord. Thus, they push back the gender constraints imposed by their religions for several centuries. In this chapter, I investigate how liturgical music can be an important place of female agency. Taking possession of the “Word of God”, both through the acoustics of the worships’ place and through their female voices, becomes an essential and indispensable element in the execution of the service. In other words, they use liturgical music to develop, in a new country and through new codes, their own agency and somehow, control the socio-religious space that surrounds them.*

Keywords: *liturgical music, Rome, Eastern Europe, agency, women.*

In this chapter I discuss how Catholicism, through its liturgical music, can be an essential element of agency for migrant women. For this, I focus on three Christian communities: the Polish (Catholic of Latin rite), the Ukrainian (Greek Catholic) and the Georgian

1 The Bible: Authorized King James Version, edited by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, Oxford University Press, 2008.

(Orthodox).² Every Sunday, I went to the churches lent by the Vatican to these migrant communities in the center of the eternal city. Beyond attending the liturgies of these churches, I was able to observe the women in their community life: their meals, their discussions, their rehearsals and other gatherings. Altogether, there are about thirty-five choristers with whom I was able to explore various religious, musical and gender-related topics.

In the first part of this chapter, I present these migrant women, examine how they are perceived by the majority of the Italian people, and, above all, what place they have in society. Then I analyze how liturgical music, by its allocution, its specialization and its transmission, can really become a way to earn agency for these women. In particular, I discuss how do my interlocutors manage, consciously or not, to use and bypass religious codes to take ownership of music that was not initially meant for them to perform.

The *badanti*: A Peculiar Social Class in Italy

Since the 1990s, female migration to Italy has been gradually increasing, with women becoming the majority of migrants fifteen years later (Dossier Statistico immigrazione 2018). During the last thirty years, migration has gone hand in hand with the aging of the Italian population and a birth rate that has constantly been decreasing since the 1960s (ISTAT). With no state support, Italian families in the south, then in the central part and finally in the north of the country had to rely on women from abroad to take care of their elders. According to the report of the *Osservatorio Nazionale DOMINA sul Lavoro Domestico* [DOMINA National Observatory on Domestic Work] (2019), domestic workers number around two million, of which over half are undeclared. According to official figures, women represent 88,4% of these two million.

These female immigrants, known as *badanti* (caregivers), work six days a week and are usually housed in their employers' homes. Moving alone, leaving their families behind, their working conditions in Italy isolate them drastically from any kind of social life. Under these circumstances, one of the main pillars of their social life is on Sundays, when, in their national churches, they can finally speak their language, sing their songs and, after the Mass, cook meals from their countries and spend time with their co-nationals. Whether they come from the Philippines, Latin America or Eastern Europe, faith and ritual often structure values in their new lives as migrants. In the Eastern European communities of Italy, because of the very limited number of men,³ women had no choice but to take responsibility for the liturgical music of their own parishes. Thus, the choirs of the three communities that I present in this chapter, the Polish, Ukrainian and Georgian ones, are entirely composed of women.

The term *badante* (pl. *badanti*) has been used since the late 1980s. It was widely disseminated in the bureaucratic and journalistic language in the second half of the 1990s. Long

2 In this chapter I present elements of my doctoral fieldwork carried out between 2016 and 2021.

3 According to ISTAT 2019 figures, women represent 74% of the Polish population living in Italy, 78% of the Ukrainian population and 81% of the Georgian one.

considered patronizing and denigrating to both the people who did the work and the people who received the care,⁴ the word resisted and eventually, the workers defined themselves as such for simplicity and clarity. Today, every Italian knows who a *badante* is and what she does: first of all, she is a woman. They are most often foreigners (from Eastern Europe or more rarely from South America, the Philippines or elsewhere) and, according to the stereotypical view, they are armed with great patience and physical strength to take care of the elderly and their homes. They wash, dress, take care of, listen to, control, look after, iron, clean, shop, cook, keep company and often also manage the household economy and the person's relationship with his or her family circle. The term *badante* (feminine noun) comes from the verb *badare* – to guard, care for, protect – but seems to take on an enriched meaning as the *badante* must also be kind, sympathetic, patient, helpful, available, modest, friendly, deferential, sincere, genuine, respectful and give affection, warmth and comfort to the people in her care. Indeed, as Italian anthropologist Francesco Vietti (2009: 37) has remarked “the verb *badare* is halfway between working and loving”. *Badanti*'s work fits perfectly into the concept of emotional labor that Arlie Russell Hochschild describes in her book, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, as “the emotional style of offering the service is part of the service itself” (Hochschild 1983: 5), and often this is compounded by the emotional task of repressing one's feelings so as not to affect the client/patient (ivi: 154).

The majority of Italians have a number of preconceived ideas about the *badanti*. First, the *badante* “embodies” the image of a poor person, far from her country, alone and lost, in search of help, who, thanks to work in homes and with the elderly, can in return, help her own family. She is a woman who can work full time, and easily works overtime in her spare time because she has nothing to do outside work. She is, therefore, a person to be welcomed and “integrated” into the society of “our country”. Finally, it is natural to help her and to look for privileged channels to obtain a residence permit for her because, in the end, she is not really an immigrant. She has nothing to do with the undocumented migrants who have often arrived by boat and who must be pushed back as far as possible. The *badante* is neither dangerous nor threatening, on the contrary, she takes care of people's relatives (Colombo 2007). Finally, apart from a few cases, for millions of Italians, the *badante* has become a “family member” in her own right (Anderson 2000). For the employer as a relative of the elderly person, accepting the *badante* as “one of the house” also means being able to reduce her/his “management” role and enjoy more affective and rewarding activities, while leaving the heavier and more unpleasant tasks to the *badante* (Colombo 2003). In this situation, the *badanti* are put in the weaker position of an asymmetrical relationship of power, class and gender. There is general agreement in the literature on domestic work that “being one of the family” perpetuates inequalities rooted in a feudal conception of domesticity, where the domestic is bound to her master for life.⁵

4 For this reason, other names were proposed such as *collaboratrice domestica* or *collaboratrice familiare* (family assistant) and *operatore socio-assistenziale* or *assistente di cura* (care work operator).

5 For this topic, see the chapter “The politics of Intimacy” in Parreñas 2001: 142–150.

To counteract preconceptions, it is important to point out that a large majority of these women are highly educated and worked in professions of great responsibility prior to their migration. Essentially, Georgian and Ukrainian's singers had some important artistic or technical training. Here we can hear about some of the Ukrainian choristers.

In this regard, Sofia's story is revealing. She told me:

I was born in 1949, I am now 69 years old. I have been in Italy since 2002. Before coming here, I have been a geography teacher for 36 years in a school near Ternopil and at the same time, for 20 years, I have also been the vice-president of the school. This was between the age of 33 and 53 (Sofia, interview, Rome, 27 May 2018).⁶

Later in the same interview, Sofia explained that she had also been a regional deputy, which had already led her to travel several times to Europe and Italy before 2002.

Halina also recounted:

I graduated as a turbine generator technician for atomic power plants and then I worked for 15 years in an atomic power plant. [...] Later, I worked in a big hydraulic analysis laboratory (Halina, interview, Rome, 26 November 2017).

Similarly, Mariya T. presented her story:

In February I'll be 69 years old. I arrived in Italy in 2001. I have a degree in mechanical engineering and I worked as a hydraulic engineer for a long time. After university I worked in the laboratory of a chemical industry for 10 years, then for a company in the Soviet Union repairing heaters. I was good at it, even though I had to learn everything on my own. I studied in Donbass, where there is a war now. I studied there, worked there, got married there, had my daughter there and then finally got separated there. I was there for 14 years from 1966 (Mariya T., interview, Rome, 12 November 2017).

These few life stories easily illustrate the pattern of Ukrainian female emigration. Like some other Ukrainian choristers, all the Georgian church singers interviewed graduated from the National Conservatory of Music or University. On the other hand, the importance of university degrees and previous professional lives in Polish migration is less obvious: Polish women usually arrive in Italy at a much younger age than the other migrants, because their country is a part of the European Union and they can travel to Italy more easily, so some/most of them just have a secondary education.

The Agency of the Subalterns

The term agency, applied to gender studies, was initially a notion conceptualized by Judith Butler in the 1990s. This term brought an interesting answer to the notion of the *total social fact* as elaborated by Marcel Mauss (1923–1924). For Butler, the agency is a way to go beyond the thought of social constructivism (Bourdieu and Foucault), which “asserts that gender is a social construction imposing itself from the outside on a subject that would

6 The author translated all quotes from fieldwork interviews from Italian into English.

therefore already exist" (Haicault 2012: 19). Agency allows the introduction of the individual's self-awareness and thus makes the individual capable of consciously choosing to conform or not to the constraints of norms and values imposed by his or her social environment (Butler 1990).

In "Can the Subaltern Speak", Gayatri Spivak (1988) takes up the term *subaltern*, theorized by Antonio Gramsci thirty years earlier.⁷ For Gramsci, revolt is the only way for the subaltern classes to make themselves heard but, in her work on gender in postcolonial contexts, Gayatri Spivak discusses the idea of subalternity by asking whether, even in times of crisis and revolt, the voices of the subordinated – in her case, Indian women – can really be taken in consideration by the dominant social group.⁸ To her, sexism is to be understood as a metaphor of colonization. The latter was considered as limited to relations between white men and men of color, and women were not concerned, reduced to the functions of objects and spectators. Therefore, women cannot express themselves precisely because they are twice put in a subaltern position: by white men and by men of their own communities.

Following Gramsci and Spivak's definitions, the *badanti* can be defined as subalterns: they are women, migrants and specifically valuable for the service of the elderly. Also, their legal status is precarious and contributes to their subaltern position: being an illegal immigrant makes them vulnerable and uncertain. According to the *Osservatorio Nazionale DOMINA sul Lavoro Domestico* (2019), 57,7 % of the two million *badanti* in Italy work illegally: without any contract, which prevents them from obtaining a residency card, social and medical care, legal protection, etc. Most of my informants obtained their residency cards after six to eight years in Italy. During this time, they could not return to their families, nor could they demand social protection. Most *badanti* are largely invisible in Italian society and voiceless or silenced – in short, without agency.

The Voice of Women vs the Voice of God

In sound studies, several works have shown why and how women work on their own voices to adapt to the political and media environment.⁹ On the internet, it is easy to find advertisements for training courses and voice coaches to make women's voices deeper,

7 In the original Gramsci's elaboration in Prison Notebooks (1948–1951), the term refers to a set of classes and individuals (slaves, proletariats and peasants) ruled by a single dominant class. For more details, see Liguori 2016.

8 The author describes the practice of Sati – a Hindu ritual that envisaged the suicide by immolation of the widow, the latter joining her dead husband on the pyre. Spivak understood this as a possibility of agency for the women who chose it, to escape the brutal Hindu laws in the hope of a better reincarnation in the next life (Spivak 1988: 302–303). British colonists abolished this sacrifice, which was never made compulsory by religious law. Spivak interprets it as an act that is at the same time colonial towards Indian men and patriarchal towards Indian women, as "white men saving brown women from brown men" (1988: 297).

9 See, in francophone scholarship, Deutsch and Giron-Panet 2016, Coulomb-Gully 2011 and 2014 and, on a larger scale, the researches proposed by LERASS : <https://www.lerass.com/axe-genre/> where mansplaining and maninterrupting are widely analyzed.

just as it is not uncommon to hear, in journalism schools, this recommendation made to women to “take octaves” – meaning lower the pitch of their voices by several tones – to make their voices “more radio-friendly”.¹⁰ The injunction is always the same: women must readapt the pitch of their voices to satisfy a social expectation normed by men.

In a ritualized environment such as Christian liturgies, singing is particularly controlled and codified – by men and for male voices. In such situations, music provides a voice that is difficult to interrupt. In this section, I examine how women, consciously or unconsciously, emancipate themselves through the prism of music in three different ways. Firstly, it is important to observe that these women’s voices express God’s Word. Secondly, the voice as a medium of communication, holds an acoustic power capable of taking possession of a given space and of asserting itself as an authority. Finally, I discuss how assuming positions within the Italian religious musical landscape beyond their respective community, Ekaterina and Halena, respectively choir masters of the Georgian choir and the Ukrainian choir, in a certain sense defy the victimizing and objectifying vision of migration shaped by institutional paternalism.

“The Word Became Flesh” (John 1:14)

According to Christian theology, God’s “Word” became flesh through the Holy Spirit who impregnated the Virgin Mary. Thus, the “Word” is as much a form-giving action, as it is an action that informs. Said otherwise, that word expresses the act of insemination, of creation, but it also refers to the act of communicating, informing other people. Communication is already a verbal translation of thoughts, of a written message. Music as a verbal translation, is audible:

Music gives voice by translation [...]. By “translation” we refer to the ways in which the words of a sacred presence are made audible and meaningful. [...] To hear sacred voice is to hear music as enchantment. (Engelhardt and Bohlman 2016: 14)

What the authors mean here is that, through musical interpretation, the members of the choir become, in a way, *messengers* of the “Word of God”.

Back at the beginning of the last century, in the encyclical *Inter pastoralis officii sollicitudines* Pope Pius X (1903) expressed very precisely the mission of sacred music and its performers:

Sacred music, as an integral part of the solemn liturgy, participates in its general purpose, which is the glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful. [...] It must be holy, and therefore exclude all profanation, not only in itself, but also in the manner in which it is proposed by the interpreters (Pius X 1903, Chapter I: Principia generalia).¹¹

By then, the liturgical choir was exclusively masculine. If need be, Pius X was very explicit on the subject:

10 See, among dozens of examples, the site <https://www.kriss-coach-vocal.fr/>.

11 This and the following translation of the encyclical are by the author.

It follows from the same principle that [male] singers have a true liturgical office in the church and that women, however, being incapable of this office, cannot be admitted to the choir or the musical chapel. If, therefore, the high voices of the sopranos and altos are to be used, they must be supported by children, according to the ancient custom of the Church (Pius X 1903, Chapter V: De cantoribus).

Undoubtedly, the situation has changed somewhat since then. Even if women's voices are now allowed in both Orthodox¹² and Catholic¹³ liturgies, this does not mean that they are promoted or particularly encouraged. On this matter, it is interesting to note how deeply the masculine imprint on the religious remains in the choristers' minds. The Ukrainian and Georgian women whom I spoke with are categorical on this point. Although they say they are happy to sing in church, most of them nevertheless believe that men's voices are "more beautiful", "more prestigious" and "more appropriate" for the liturgy. This idea is so widespread that it explains why, among other issues related to the gendered division of labor, in Georgian Orthodox churches, men's choirs are paid as professionals while women's choirs remain volunteers. In Georgia, only important churches like Cathedrals and other historical churches can afford to pay for a professional choir and none of them would have a female choir. On the other hand, the churches of the suburbs and minor cities are mainly composed of women's choirs.

Without being fully aware of it, by taking charge of liturgical music in Rome, Ukrainian, Polish and Georgian women are also taking charge of "the Word of God". In the three communities studied, the initiative to form a choir for liturgical services came from the choir directors, who are women. As such, they are entirely autonomous in selecting their respective repertoires. Thus, to take up the terms "solemnity", "purity" and "integrity", as strongly recalled in *Inter pastoralis officii sollicitudines* (Pius X 1903), it appears today that "the Word of God" passes through the voice of women, more particularly here, through the one of migrant women. Thus, without making a revolt as Gramsci advocates, it can be claimed that, even for a position close to Spivak's concept of subaltern, one can indeed have a voice and make herself heard in proclaiming "the Word". Those rendered invisible are finally heard and listened to, both by the faithful and their clergy.

The Authority of Acoustics

In terms of acoustics, in the liturgies of Saints John Chrysostom and Basil the Great – used by Ukrainian and Georgian communities – the choir has a bigger place than the

12 In the Georgian Orthodox Church, for example, historically the presence of women is not clear. I have not found any evidence either of a ban on women's choirs or the presence of women's choirs – except in convents – before the Soviet ban on religion (1921). It was only after 1991 that women's choirs appeared in liturgical soundscapes. An article on this subject is being prepared by Tamar Chkheidze and should be published soon.

13 In Latin Catholicism, it was in the encyclical letter *Musicae sacrae disciplina* (1955) by Pope Pius XII that the Church formally authorized women's and girls' choirs – usually trained inside convents – to sing liturgies outside their convents. However, it was not until 1965 that mixed choirs were officially accepted (Laguë 2002). Since a couple of centuries, in Greek Catholicism, mixed choirs are the norm, but all-women choirs are not welcome (Galadza 2010).

clerics. This is easily explained by the very nature of the Orthodox ritual: most of the time, the officiants stand behind the iconostasis, reciting their prayers in a low voice. In all the cases encountered, the female voice is all the more imposing as it comes from the gallery, overlooking from the back the faithful and the clerics: this is the case with the choir of the Ukrainian community in Rome, which is always placed in the gallery and this was also the case with the Georgian women, who for the most solemn feasts, such as Easter, stood on the balcony, until it was recently abandoned, due to its deteriorated condition. Likewise, Martyna, the Polish choirmaster, plays the organ in the gallery and, for practical reasons, the choir often stands there with her. This position of the organ, common in most Catholic churches, is not insignificant. Tanguy Mercier (Mercier et al. 2010: 27) points out that its elevation “allows for a better homogenization and distribution of the sound level in the assembly. Furthermore, the elevation allows for the promotion of radiation by offering the necessary reflections to the sound [...], thus providing a better spatialization of the sound”.

The question of the relationship between acoustics and place of worship is not new and the issue of what drives this relationship is undoubtedly fascinating. Was it the evolution of architectural technology that served as a springboard for new musical possibilities, or was it the need for musical creativity that led to the development of new architectural arrangements? Without denying the potential for a reciprocal influence between architecture and sacred music, Victor Desarnaulds (2002: 108) argues that it was religious music that adapted to the architectural and acoustic evolution of places of worship:

As Winkel has pointed out, the adaptation of music to acoustics is not only about the evolution of the reverberation of churches, but also about the spatial organization and the conditions of diffusion, which are particularly important for musical listening.

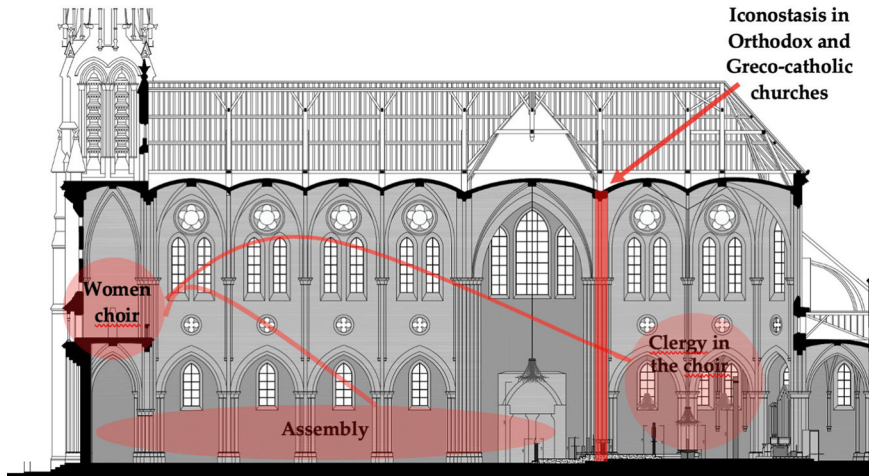
Although this thesis may seem convincing, I am not in a position to validate it. Here, my aim is to remind that two thousand years of Christian musical history are conjugated in the plural. In terms of acoustics, these histories show the supremacy of the male voice, however they were limited to that, as the many examples of daily nuns singing in Latin and Orthodox convents show. As I mentioned, if the Latin Catholic voice was represented by men's singing for a long time, the latter was increasingly accompanied, and even competed with, the voices of young boys and castrati. Nevertheless, if one observes a cross-section of any church with the location of the various protagonists in their respective places, a new model can be grasped and the image is particularly striking. We observe there the place taken by the *badanti* of Rome in the sound space of their respective liturgies:¹⁴

Here, the women – put in a subaltern position – without insurrection, dominate the entire place of worship, physically and sonically. As sound waves, the voices of these women take possession of the place, in this case a church, and thus, fill it. Through their voices, the women impose a strong authority that gives them a specific power. Again,

14 Only the Georgian women no longer sing in the gallery for reasons of safety due to the architecture, but this does not prevent them from occupying the second most important place in the church, beyond the choir: in front of the left door of the iconostasis.

without really being aware of their capacity of action, they express themselves and impose silence around them.

Figure 1: Position of the different protagonists in the church space. Scheme by François Lacoste.



Re-evangelization through Female Migrants' Voices

The Western stereotype often sees female migrants as victimized and objectified. When referring to the issue of refugees, a large number of authors¹⁵ points out the institutional paternalism exercised by humanitarian¹⁶ state and religious government discourses and practices, which places migrants, especially women, in a victimized status devoid of any agency. Similarly to Spivak's (1988) discussion of British colonialist and patriarchal interventions in India, Saba Mahmood (2005) demonstrates how US policy has created a neo-conservative rhetoric based on the need to "save" Muslim women from the clutches of Islamic fundamentalism in order to legitimize its war actions in the Middle East. Mahmood criticizes the narrow perception of Western liberal feminism (from which she comes) that cannot imagine Islam as a source of agency for Muslim women. Finally, Mahmood argues that, whether they come from a secular state or a religion, patriarchal norms are always present. The cases of Ekatarina and Halena, who participated in my fieldwork, may challenge the stereotypes, highlighted by Spivak and Mahmood, depicting women as subdued and system victims. For several years now, in addition to her role as choirmaster of the Georgian choir, Ekaterina has been working daily as a

15 See the extensive bibliography structuring Aurore Vermeylen's (2016) article.

16 Notion developed by Didier Fassin (2006). According to the author, humanitarian governments "administer populations in the name of a higher moral principle that makes the preservation of life and the relief of suffering the supreme values of action" (Fassin 2006: 16).

choir leader for the Sant'Egidio¹⁷ community. This choir, made up of men and women of different nationalities, allows Ekaterina to practice her profession outside her diasporic community circle and gives her a voice that goes beyond the “borders” of her immigrant community. In a way, this gives her the power and agency to challenge the clichés too quickly spouted by state, religious and/or humanitarian structures. The same is true in the case of Halena who, in addition to her choir director’s role in the Ukrainian choir, is the choirmaster of her Italian town’s parish and a piano teacher in a high school. None of them is remunerated for their work in the national parishes, but their Italian employers do pay them. The reality is that no one among the Italian parishioners has the necessary skills to take charge of the musical part of the liturgy and, when liturgies are sung, they are only sung by the congregation in unison. If Italian masses are no longer sung, it is clearly due to the lack of people with sufficient musical training to take on this role. So, it is thanks to their musical training and competence that Halena and Ekaterina can take on these roles of leadership in religious music, which is also expressed through an economic return.

It is interesting to note that Italian parishes need women, Ukrainian or Georgian, to take charge of this indispensable aspect of the liturgy. This phenomenon is reminiscent of another, well known to French and Italian parishes: the arrival of young priests from Africa, Asia and South America in recent decades to compensate for the crisis of religious vocations in the countries of “old Europe”. Like these modern-day male missionaries, Halena and Ekaterina were brought in to make up for lack of musical education in the Italian religious landscape. These two women, evangelized after the fall of communism, became in their turn evangelists, through music, in the very heart of the capital of Latin Christianity. This situation gives them empowerment and authority through music and puts these women in strong leadership position inside the religious practice.

Once again, these women, invisible to the society and its institutions, found a way to make themselves more visible and audible through music and, more particularly, through their voices. This reverses not only the stereotypical view of them as victims, but shows how liturgical music can be a space for *badanti*’s agency and leadership. Giving God a woman’s voice, they obtain his authority and irrevocability.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated how women acquire a voice essentially through their musical roles. These migrant women use their country’s liturgical musical tradition to develop their own agency in a new country and through new codes. They show us how migratory demographic changes lead the exile communities to conceive, revisit and readapt their own sociological, anthropological and religious practices. Ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes (1997: 23) explains how musicians are deeply involved in the gendered representation of societies:

17 Sant'Egidio is an association founded in Rome after the Second Vatican Council in 1968. Composed of lay Christians, its aim is to fight against poverty and today it works a lot with the migrants present in the local territory.

Since gender is a symbol of social and political order, and the control of gender behaviour is a means of controlling that order, gender boundaries cannot be separated from other social and political boundaries. Gender boundaries articulate the most deeply entrenched forms of domination which provide basic metaphors for others, and thus constitute the most intensely “naturalised” of all our boundary making activities.

Indeed, musically, social changes can occur through voices, vocal timbres, tessituras, transcriptions, compositions. All of them are symbols that can put in discussion the social and political boundaries of gender. In the cases that I have described, these musicians from elsewhere took the power of the musical within their respective communities and, more broadly, in Italian churches.

The female musicians from Eastern European communities in Rome control a big part of the socio-religious space around them through their liturgical musical actions and performances. Every Sunday, they “enter the stage” and take possession of the space, hence confirming their authority, the power of their new status within their respective traditions, “making” them “powerful and problematic figures for the society at large” (Stokes 1997: 24). In fact, thanks to their high level of musical training, they not only control the “voice of God” and the sound space of the sacred place, but they are also wholly in charge of the choice of the musical repertoire of their churches, the musical training of the choristers and, last but not least, the vocal and sound aesthetic of their choirs. Managing and supervising liturgical music, they gained influence and the respect of both the religious body and the faithful. In this way, they have fully assumed a leadership position.

For centuries, Christian Churches have been committed to forbidding any female involvement in ritual and liturgy, going as far as to privilege the voices of boys to the detriment of those of women and even more so. The Catholic Church has encouraged the castration of generations of young men in order to reach tessituras, to which a man could not aspire. It's ironic that in the very heart of Rome, the re-evangelization of parishes goes through women and that the renewal of musical liturgy relies essentially on women.

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