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Believing and Belonging: Religion, National Identity, and the Integration of Migrants

By Rev. Robert Dowd, CSC, Ford Program Director

Samueli is a 45-year-old practicing Catholic from Milan who believes migrants should be welcomed into his country, regardless of their race or religion. “It is our Christian duty to welcome people fleeing war and poverty,” he said. But another Catholic Milan resident, Matteo, said migrants of different religions – particularly Islam – bring problems. “Our values are different from theirs,” said the 50-year-old, who described himself as not very religiously observant.

Both men were born in Italy, but their views of migrants couldn’t be more different. To determine why, the Ford Program launched a pilot project in Milan in April 2018 to better understand the role of religion in societies affected by migration. Our research aims to identify how religious institutions can best help native-born *(cont’d)*

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citizens and migrants build a greater sense of community – a precondition for peace and integral human development. Ford Program researchers involved in the project are **Clemens Sedmak**, **Ilaria Schnyder von Wartensee**, and myself; and from other institutions, Gian Carlo Blangiardo (Universita di Milano-Bicocca), Maurizio Ambrosini (Universita degli Studi di Milano), and Beppe Follini (Universita di Trento). Notre Dame PhD student **Emma Rosenberg** and sophomore **Elsa Barron**, a Kellogg International Scholar, are assisting in the project, which incorporates mass survey research, in-depth interviews, and case studies.

Preliminary Findings

One surprising finding emerged from our preliminary research: Strong Catholic religious identity is associated with more open and optimistic attitudes to the integration of migrants of different religions, including Muslims. Less surprisingly, we found that the most powerful predictor of negative attitudes about the integration of migrants, especially Muslims, is support for anti-immigration political parties. Interestingly, most observant Catholics in our sample rejected those political parties.

Our preliminary results suggest that the phenomenon of ‘reactive religious identity,’ in which people who are not so religious use religion as a justification for excluding others, is at play. Nationalist-populist politicians promote this sentiment for their own political benefit. They seek to portray migrants, particularly Muslims, as incapable or unwilling to integrate and as invaders who will destroy local and national cultural identity. They use religion as a tool of division rather than an instrument to help people connect with God.

Reactive religious identity presents a major challenge for religious leaders and politicians who

prioritize social cohesion over short-term political interests. A vocal minority that adopts reactive religious identity can sour inter-religious relations, impede migrant integration, and weaken a diversifying society. And, once the ethnic, racial, and religious majority adopts reactive religious identity, the minority is likely to do the same. In essence, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, with those portrayed as incapable or unwilling to integrate in fact becoming incapable or unwilling to do so.

Looking to the Future

As we expand the project beyond Milan, we will seek to address important questions raised by the pilot, including: What makes people vulnerable to reactive religious identity? How can religious leaders counter attempts to culturalize their religion to exclude others? We hope this project contributes to our understanding of how religious institutions and people of faith can promote solidarity and mutual respect in societies that are rapidly diversifying.





Accompaniment and Feeling Welcome

By *Ilaria Schnyder von Wartensee*,
Ford Family Research Assistant Professor

In February 2018, I visited refugee camps in Ethiopia's Tigray and Gambela regions. It was the first time I had encountered what I can only describe as an open-sky limbo – places where people appeared to be physically safe but were struggling with the uncertainty of the future and the wounds of the past. A few days later, I met Kaleb (whose name I've changed for his protection) and his family in Addis Ababa (pictured above as they waited for their flights to Italy with others from the refugee camps). I traveled with them.

That trip was the start of my journey with the Ford Program's Humanitarian Corridor research project, which, with Ford Program Acting Director **Clemens Sedmak**, studies the effects of a government-sponsored program in Italy that provides refugees with a safe and legal path for migration. Several prominent religious organizations within the country – Caritas Italy, the Catholic Bishops Conference, and the Community of Sant'Egidio – are partnering with the government to help some of the most

vulnerable refugees make the journey. Most are from Eritrea, South Sudan, and Somalia and are living in Ethiopian camps.

The Ford Program, with the support of a major grant from the Luce Foundation, is evaluating the effects of this initiative, which practices a new system of community-based, private sponsorship called accompaniment. Caritas Italy has adopted this personalized approach, which entails working with a host community to receive a family or small group of refugees, regardless of their religious affiliation, for at least one year – like Kaleb and his family.

They were welcomed in a small town in Tuscany by a monastery of nuns, a group of volunteers, and residents. When I visited them a few months after their arrival, Kaleb took me to a garden where he was growing vegetables (pictured below). This March, he started working on a farm through a temporary contract. His wife and the nuns have begun a friendship. Their story speaks to the power of accompaniment as a major element in integration, the role of faith-based communities, and the role of faith. Kaleb's story has much to teach us. I can't wait to visit him again.



IDS Grad Studies Migrant Integration in Small-Town Italy

By Francesco Tassi '18

The tiny Italian town of Candela is dotted with for sale signs. Locals ask me if I came for the 2,000 euros gifted to new residents. I didn't – I'm here to research. Since graduating last year from the University of Notre Dame, where I majored in international economics and peace studies with a minor in International Development Studies, I've been living in 10 small Italian towns that host migrants, attempting to understand the complex challenges to integration.

My only neighbors are Richard and Amadi, migrants who came to Candela through its local System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR), Italy's premier government-funded program aiming to integrate migrants in more than a thousand Italian towns. More than 200 migrants have passed through Candela's silent streets. Richard has degrees in mechanical and petroleum engineering. Amadi has only completed primary school. Richard is told he is too qualified to find a job. Amadi picks wild artichokes by hand. "I don't know what this kind of work will do for me... but here there's nothing else," he confides.

Ten minutes by car from Candela lies Bisaccia. Though homes here sell for only one euro, Bisaccia received millions after being affected by an earthquake. Both towns lie in a sea of wind turbines, but only in Bisaccia Abdou, a Senegalese migrant, works to repair them. As he tells me with a glimmer in his eyes, "Standing on the turbines you can see for kilometers in all directions." Abdou splits the rent with Bori, a Gambian migrant who mans tractors and drives a Ford. Bori chuckles as he confides to me, "People here are hoping for the next earthquake."

Migrants can have drastically different experiences in their host nations, even in neighboring towns. I believe the compound questions of place and community are fundamental to integration. Opportunities I've had in the Ford Program – working on the Humanitarian Corridor project last summer and attending Ford's 2017 workshop in Rome – have helped shape that belief. My current research is a collaboration with the University of Milano-Bicocca and the SPRAR through a Fulbright Research Grant.

Migrants in Bisaccia's SPRAR return home from a soccer match.





AIDS Caregiver to Receive Ford Family Notre Dame Award

By Ashley Rowland

Rose Busingye (pictured above), the founder of a non-governmental organization that serves Ugandan women and children affected by AIDS and HIV, has been named the recipient of the 2018-2019 Ford Family Notre Dame Award for International Development and Solidarity.

Busingye is president of Meeting Point International (MPI), which offers health and education services in the slums of Kampala. Its work also focuses on meeting patients' social and emotional needs, including their need for a sense of belonging.

The Ford Family award recognizes substantial contributions to international human development through research, practice, public service, or philanthropy.

Known within MPI as "Aunt Rose," Busingye, a nurse and midwife, emphasizes holistic healing and each person's humanity.

Ford Program Director **Rev. Robert Dowd, CSC**, said Busingye was selected for the annual award because of her "witness to the God-given dignity of the human person."

MPI serves more than 2,000 women and 1,100 children.

New Award Honors Undergraduate Research in Poverty, Development

By Ashley Rowland

Two students – one studying blood donation in Uganda and another studying sand mining in Kenya – are the winners of an inaugural prize that recognizes outstanding undergraduate research on poverty and development.

The University of Notre Dame's **Caroline Murtagh '19** and Ernest Tan '19 from Yale-NUS College in Singapore (pictured together below, center) were awarded the Fr. Ernest J. Bartell, CSC, Prize for Undergraduate Research on Poverty and Development on February 22 at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies' Human Development Conference.

The prize carries a \$1,000 award for each recipient. Two awards will be given each year to undergrads who present their research at the conference – one to a Notre Dame student and a second to a student from another university.

The Prize was named in honor of **Rev. Ernest J. Bartell, CSC**, (pictured far right) Kellogg's founding executive director and emeritus professor of economics at Notre Dame. It was established with a donation from Kellogg Institute Distinguished Research Affiliate **Quentin Wodon** (pictured far left) and an additional donation from the Institute.

