

Somewhere Between Love and Justice: a Roman Catholic Church in Paris Responds to the European Migration Crisis

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Abstract The European migration crisis has had a transformative impact on many transit and destination localities in Europe, and in doing so it has mobilised many faith-based communities. This paper analyses the social action of Saint Bernard de La Chapelle, a Roman Catholic parish in northern Paris, which hosts a semi-formal association called *Solidarités Saint Bernard* (SSB) involved in support and relief activities for indigent migrants in the local area. Based on ethnographic research conducted within the parish and the association, I analyse how the topic of migration has become a point of exchange between the parish community and local civil society, how religious and secular discourses and motivations co-exist within SSB, and how these influences shape SSB's social action. Through this micro-scale approach, and drawing on Luc Boltanski's theoretical framework of regimes of action, my aim is to identify conceptual elements to better understand the broad convergence between religion, social action, and migration, and to better understand the relation between charity and justice within faith-based social action in the domain of migration advocacy more specifically.

Keywords Sociology of religion · Sociology of solidarity · Catholicism · Paris · Faith-based action · Migration

Introduction

Migration is an increasingly global phenomenon that connects societies and individuals on an intercontinental level and these macroscopic questions are of vital importance. However, it is also a localised phenomenon that requires attention on the micro-level. Religious faith displays a similar duality in that it addresses universal concerns whilst also rooting worshippers in a local community

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and mode of ritual. The aim of this article is to examine how a local place of worship can serve as a hub for social action in favour of newly arrived migrants, whilst also fostering better cohesion within a hyper-diverse urban locality. Through an ethnographic case study of the Parisian parish of Saint Bernard de La Chapelle, I argue that the Catholic social tradition in France offers certain assets for such a task. At the same time, this article also highlights the tensions and limitations that can arise from social action that is faith-based and seeks to draw on the commitment of a wide spectrum of actors from both within and beyond a particular faith community.

Saint Bernard de la Chapelle is a Roman Catholic parish in the hyper-diverse Goutte d'Or neighbourhood of northern Paris. Historically a hub for local migrants' rights movements, the church today is a site where disparate actors join in a collective action in response to the local effects of a global, structural phenomenon. The parish hosts a semi-formal association called *Solidarités Saint Bernard* (SSB), which counts approximately 110 volunteer members (over half of whom are not parish members) involved in support and relief activities for indigent migrants in the local area. Based on ethnographic research conducted within the parish and the association between 2014 and 2016, I analyse how the topic of migration has become a point of exchange between the parish community (the clergy affiliated with the church and self-identified Catholics who attend Mass at Saint Bernard on a regular or occasional basis) and local civil society (local residents, activists, and civil society associations), how religious and secular discourses and motivations co-exist within SSB, and how these influences shape SSB's social action. Through this micro-scale study and reliance on Boltanski's (2011) theoretical framework of regimes of action—a matrix which designates social action according to typologies of social and symbolic relations—my aim is to identify conceptual elements to better understand the broad convergence between religion, social action, and migration. With specific reference to the case of SSB, my aim is to delineate how and why the group's social action is divided between concerns of charity and concerns of justice for migrants arriving in the neighbourhood.

Methodology

This study draws on ethnographic data collected over a two-year period starting in June 2014. This research was conducted as part of a broader study on the role of French Catholics in the reception and support of newly arrived migrants, which included field sites in Paris, Calais, Toulouse, rural Normandy, and Béziers.

In the case of Saint Bernard de La Chapelle, the focus of this article, I draw on two methodological approaches. During a first phase of study, between June 2014 and November 2015, I conducted an extensive participant observation study of SSB and the parish community. Having informed the parish priest of my position, I participated on a weekly basis in the group's food and clothing distribution activities, its night shelter, and language classes. Additionally, I attended group meetings on a regular basis. In parallel, I also attended Sunday Mass on a regular basis in order to observe the manner in which the parish's social work crossed over into its worship activities (contents of sermons, attitudes of the congregation, liturgical symbolism).

During a second phase of study in 2016, I conducted a series of open-ended interviews to supplement my field observations.¹ SSB volunteers were invited to participate in individual interviews focusing on their motivations for participating in SSB, their religious identity, their

¹ Interview participants are referred to by pseudonym.

views on the Catholic affiliation of SSB, and their relationship to the local neighbourhood. Twenty-five active volunteers agreed to participate in the interviews, out of a membership of approximately 110 volunteers (the number of volunteers fluctuated during my time with SSB and some volunteers were registered but not active). I also held interviews with members of the parish community who were not active as volunteers within SSB; here, questions focused on interviewees' views on the activities of SSB, the relationship between SSB and the parish's worship activities, and about the participation of non-Catholics in SSB activities. Twenty parishioners were interviewed out of a group of 160 to 200 *messalisants* (regular churchgoers).

In addition to these two methods, I supplemented my research with two online questionnaires sent to SSB volunteers and to the parish mailing list. I received 22 responses from SSB volunteers and 59 responses from parish members (some individuals on both mailing lists may have responded to both questionnaires). Online surveys are an unreliable source of data, as they are subject to various forms of sample bias, and the results from these surveys are peripheral to the present article. However, in this instance, my aim was to complement my main research with a tool that was both anonymous and less time-consuming for respondents. I was aware during my research that respondents may have been reluctant to criticise SSB in the presence of other volunteers or even in my presence, as I was associated with the group through my own participation. I thus opted for an online survey tool to verify whether responses differed significantly in an anonymous and private setting. This was generally not the case, with the exception of three responses from parish members who expressed discomfort with SSB's pro-migrant activities. These responses are included in the analysis section of this article.

Theoretical Framework

Already a long-standing contentious issue in France, migration has further divided public opinion since 2014 when European Union (EU) member states began experiencing an unprecedented surge in the number of incoming irregular migrants. Migration is "an ever-present world-wide fact of life" and has been a historically constant phenomenon in the development and growth of humanity across the globe (Phan 2003). However, the combined factors of population growth, ongoing political and economic instability, and the availability of modern communication and transportation technologies have changed the scale and rapidity of human migration. The number of people currently displaced by conflict or persecution throughout the world is at its highest since the Second World War (Esthimer 2014). Although most migrants remain within their region of origin (UNHCR 2015), increasing numbers of people fleeing violence and poverty in the Middle East and Africa are crossing the Mediterranean in small vessels from Turkey or Libya and arriving in the EU. In 2015, over one million new migrants reached Europe (IOM 2015).

In response to this phenomenon, much debate has focused on macro-level political issues such as the viability of religious pluralism within European societies (Davies and Hervieu-Léger 1996; Banchoff 2007; Milot et al. 2010), the meaning and value of cultural integration (Joppke 2007; Castles and Davidson 2000; Favell 2003), and the evolution of national identities (Smith 1992; Cowles et al. 2001; Weil 2002; Kumar 2003). At the state and EU levels, the focus has been on administrative and governance issues such as how to create a mechanism for distributing asylum seekers amongst member states, or how to stem the flow through bilateral accords with external EU border states (such as Turkey, Morocco, Libya).

Whilst these macro-level questions are of vital importance, they should not conceal the fact that migration is primarily experienced by individuals on a local level, or where the global factors that shape migration vary according to localised historical experiences and cultural factors (Castles 2010, 2012). Thus, the macro-level trends of migration should not be dissociated from the operations and processes by which they become concrete in subjects' lives. If we are interested in shedding light on the social reality of macroscopic phenomena, or how laws, geo-political events, mass movements are realised and concretised through practices, mechanisms and institutions, then we should focus on "sites and activities where elements are aggregated, totalities assembled, collectives instituted and structures rendered tangible." (Barthe et al. 2013) The European migration crisis has had a transformative impact on the sociological, demographic and economic characteristics of many transit and destination localities in Europe. At the same time, whilst the recent flow in migration is unprecedented in scale, it follows an established historical trend that is particularly visible within many transit and destination localities; many of these new migrants are arriving in local areas with an existing history and culture of immigration, which has an impact on how the newcomers are perceived and welcomed.

In short, the sum of local actions and experiences of migration feeds into the macroscopic narrative of the European migration crisis. This study focuses on just such a site where 'micro versus macro' dichotomies are less useful for analysis; instead what is observed is the co-construction of micro and macro trends in migration through the coordination of actors and the articulation between collective and individual forms of action, and between local and national/international actions (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991).

Boltanski's Regimes of Action

The concept of regimes of action is developed by Boltanski (2011), and in collaboration with Boltanski and Thévenot 1991 and Boltanski and Chiapello (1999), in order to nuance the Bourdieusian focus on social relations as forms of domination and exploitation. Boltanski and his collaborators do not deny Bourdieu's analysis pertaining to the centrality of conflict within human relations, but seek to nuance the outlook by insisting on the centrality of human agency and arguing that actors engage in a plurality of social and symbolic relations with one another, not all of which are defined by conflict.

My discussion relies upon Boltanski's 2011 theoretical work, *L'Amour et la Justice comme compétence*. In this volume, he offers a framework to better understand the relations between these levels of action and the tensions that underpin those relations. Boltanski posits a matrix of four regimes of action that revolve around two distinctions: conflict and peace and active equivalencies and non-active equivalencies. In this framework, regimes of action are organised according to actors' relationship to each other and to their surrounding physical and institutional environment (Table 1).

The *regime of justice* describes situations in which actors are in conflict with one another but where those conflicts are tempered by a state of active equivalency between the disputing parties (primarily through the law, but also through domains of power and resources). The reference to justice supposes a conflict over the distribution of goods or rights, but it also frames how and where actors can resolve their conflict.

The *regime of violence* describes situations of conflict in the absence of equivalencies, and therefore where actors interact on the basis of power relations and dominance.

The *regime of routine* describes the quotidian state of human social interaction where relations are pacified due to constraints and conditions external to the actors themselves. Boltanski gives the example of train schedules that regulate the time at which two actors can meet; neither actor has control over the train schedule and they are both equally constrained within the schedule's mediating framework. Drawing on Latour's work (1991) on the constraints that our relation to objects place on social relations, in the regime of routine actors coordinate with each other tacitly and pacifically with reference to shared external constraints to which they are equally subject.

The *regime of love* describes a more exceptional regime of peaceful social action in which actors do not refer to external constraints in order to ensure a state of equivalency. Here, certain actors engage in free gift-giving towards others without expectation of or desire for reciprocity. Here, there is no reference to justice or equivalency precisely because there is no form of exchange or of constraint. The social interaction is free.

Boltanski also refers to the regime of love as the term regime of *agapé*. But his understanding is different from the notion of divine love that the word represents in Christian theology; there is no transcendental verticality towards the divine in Boltanski's model. However, Boltanski cites a Christian outlook as the inspiration for this category. In particular, he refers to Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* (Kierkegaard 1847). Kierkegaard's influence is most salient in terms of its existential insistence on the individual experience. Thus, in Boltanski's regime of love, actions are motivated by individual sentiment and personal intention, rather than by convention and obligation. Whilst the regimes of justice and of routine rely on social and institutional mediation between actors, the regime of love relies on one individual's actions and intentions towards another. This helps to explain why the regime of love is a state of exception that cannot be maintained on a large scale or over a long period of time. And in these ways, it is similar to the regime of violence, which is also unmediated and unsustainable.

The evanescent quality of the regime of love is also a product of its most distinctive characteristic. Boltanski argues that within the regime of love, actors manifest a preference for the present. As equivalencies are set aside, actors do not refer to the past in order to determine what debts need to be settled in order to frame their interactions within the terms of justice. Further, since actions within the regime are free, present actions are not projected as debts into the future. By definition, these actions are not intended to be paid back.

Boltanski reminds us that the regime of love is difficult to maintain over the long term, and that it is subject to sociological critiques of dissymmetry, structural inequality and domination. These caveats are pertinent to the case of *Solidarité Saint Bernard* (SSB), the actions of which are neither transparent nor unproblematic even to the volunteers themselves and who are engaged in a constant self-reflection (sometimes self-criticism) as to the nature of SSB's activities. I return to this framework further in the article in order to analyse the localised nature of SSB's activities, and I argue that SSB volunteers are situated within the regime of love, without having the means or will to focus on actions within the regime of justice. The core of this argument is that due to its Catholic affiliation and its heterogeneous membership base, SSB is not an environment conducive to developing a critical political discourse that can sustain a justice-based approach to the cause of migrants. At the same time, Boltanski's model is predicated upon individual agent's being able to switch from one regime of social action to another, as they move through different environments and periods. Whilst SSB is unlikely to become a locus for collective social action within the regime of justice, its members *qua* individual social actors are not constrained in the same way. One way they can (and in certain cases do) address the political limitations of SSB is by also participating in the actions of other

groups more naturally situated within the regime of justice. Importantly, these different regimes, and the actors that make them, are interconnected and together they form the broader network that contributes to the macro-level debate around the legitimate position and rights of migrants in French society.

Setting

La Goutte d'Or

The Roman Catholic Church of Saint Bernard de la Chapelle is located in the neighbourhood of la Goutte d'Or, in the northern 18th administrative district (*arrondissement*) of central Paris. Historically, this area of the city has been home to a large North African and subsequently sub-Saharan migrant population. Despite ongoing gentrification, the cultural presence of these populations still dominates the surrounding area; several Muslim prayer halls operate in close proximity to the Church and at least half of parishioners are immigrants or first-generation French citizens. Practicing Muslims probably outnumber Catholics in the local area; however, there is no relevant census or survey data available to verify this.

Central Paris is delimited from the wider Parisian region (Ile de France) by a 35 KM ring road. This small geographical footprint marks the municipality's administrative boundary. Since (at least) the 1980s, this boundary has also defined a widening demographic divide as the Paris municipal area has become increasingly inhabited by private-sector professionals, managers, and engineers, whilst less affluent and ethnic-minority populations have been pushed to the limits of the ring road or into the adjacent municipalities beyond the ring road (Clerval 2010; Prêteceille 2007). In parallel to this demographic shift, the economic profile of central Paris has changed, with small-scale industry, workshops, and trade also being pushed to the periphery, and heavy industry (such as automobile manufacturing) moving away from the near Paris region and towards the outer limits of the Ile de France (Gilli 2004). In turn, economic activity in central Paris is increasingly dominated by retail and services.

La Goutte d'Or, where Saint Bernard is located, has not been immune to these evolutions. However, it is one of the Paris neighbourhoods where gentrification has been slowest to take hold. Originally planned in the XIXth century as a residential district for a working-class population, La Goutte d'Or became defined in the XXth century by densification, pauperisation and immigration (Bacqué 2006). Despite an increase in the number of higher-income residents since the 1990s, these phenomena remain relevant today.

La Goutte d'Or remains a densely populated area, with 23,498 inhabitants within an area of 27 ha (INSEE 2006). The area is also defined by entrenched illicit activities: petty theft, vandalism, narcotics trafficking, contraband cigarette vendors, and prostitution. The population is relatively poorer and less educated in comparison with the rest of Paris (see Table 2). Administratively, it is designated as a *quartier prioritaire de la politique de la ville* (city policy priority zones) due to a concentration of weak socio-economic indicators. The concentration of migrants and foreign residents in the neighbourhood also remains strong: 37% of residents of La Goutte d'Or are immigrants who have obtained French nationality by naturalisation (Paris: 20%) and 35% are foreigners (Paris: 15%)

Table 1 Local socio-economic indicators (Source: INSEE 2006)

	La Goutte d'Or	Paris municipal area
Residents without a secondary school diploma	44%	25%
Low-income households	28%	11%
Households without a private bathroom	20%	10%
Residents having requested social housing	19%	8%
Unemployment rate	10%	5%

(INSEE 2006).² This population is diverse and composed of several waves of immigration: North Africans, followed by sub-Saharan Africans, residents from the French Antilles, and Sri Lankan and Indians.

This diversity is particularly conspicuous at street level with its numerous North African and sub-Saharan African shops and grocery stores, African textile workshops, Indian restaurants, dense crowds in the public squares, and street vendors. Cosmopolitanism, relative poverty, and informal/illicit economic practices are very visible in La Goutte d'Or, which reinforces the public perception of the area as one of the few remaining *quartiers populaires* (working-class neighbourhoods) within central Paris.

The urban planning that created La Goutte d'Or also creates a sense of insularity that embeds residents within the urban fabric of the neighbourhood, where local belonging is largely defined by one's filiation with a historically entrenched migrant community. For example, residents of Algerian descent can usually trace a lineage within the neighbourhood, strengthening their feeling of localised belonging, whereas more recently arrived residents of French descent are often perceived to be (and acknowledge themselves to be) "outsiders". Already in 1990, Toubon and Messamah (1990) observed that La Goutte d'Or was "a central hub for immigration, where [immigrants could] question their rights to constitute their own space of urban centrality."

Delimited by the Boulevard de la Chapelle to the south, the Boulevard Barbès to the west, the Rue Ordener to the north and a line of train tracks to the east, La Goutte d'Or is an urban island, intersected by small streets, closed onto itself and separate from the areas immediately adjacent to it (see Fig. 1). This inward-looking geography combined with a demographically distinct population creates a strong sense of place and of belonging. One upshot of these characteristics is a strong network of local civil society actors in the neighbourhood. There are groups active in a wide variety of social domains such as after-school clubs, alphabetisation (literacy), administrative assistance, and social mediation. There are also clubs built around ethnic and national affiliations, such as Algerian and sub-Saharan social clubs. Finally, since the fallout of the European migration crisis, new civil society associations have been formed focused exclusively on the support of newly arrived migrants who congregate on the perimeters of the neighbourhood.

² This does not take into account the population of newly arrived migrants that the parish targets through its social action. As will be discussed below, this population is usually in transit, living either in makeshift campsites or in municipal dormitories. They are not registered as residents, although they have become a large and visible component of the local urban environment.

Table 2 Boltanski's regimes of actions

	Active equivalency	Non-active equivalency
Conflict	Regime of justice	Regime of violence
Peace	Regime of routine	Regime of love

“Les Migrants”

Starting in 2009–2010, indigent Eritrean migrants, who had recently arrived in France, began to congregate in makeshift camps under the aerial metro on Boulevard de La Chapelle, which is on the southern border of La Goutte d’Or. These newly-arrived migrants, almost exclusively young men, were a distinctive and new sociological phenomenon in the area, and in fact foreshadowed a much more important flow of migrants that developed into the European migration crisis.

Since 2010, this population has maintained a constant presence in the area, fluctuating in size according to the time of year and the public authorities’ tolerance of their presence. As this population arrives principally by boat in Italy before moving to Paris, their numbers are larger in the summer months when it is easier to cross the Mediterranean. In addition to Eritreans,

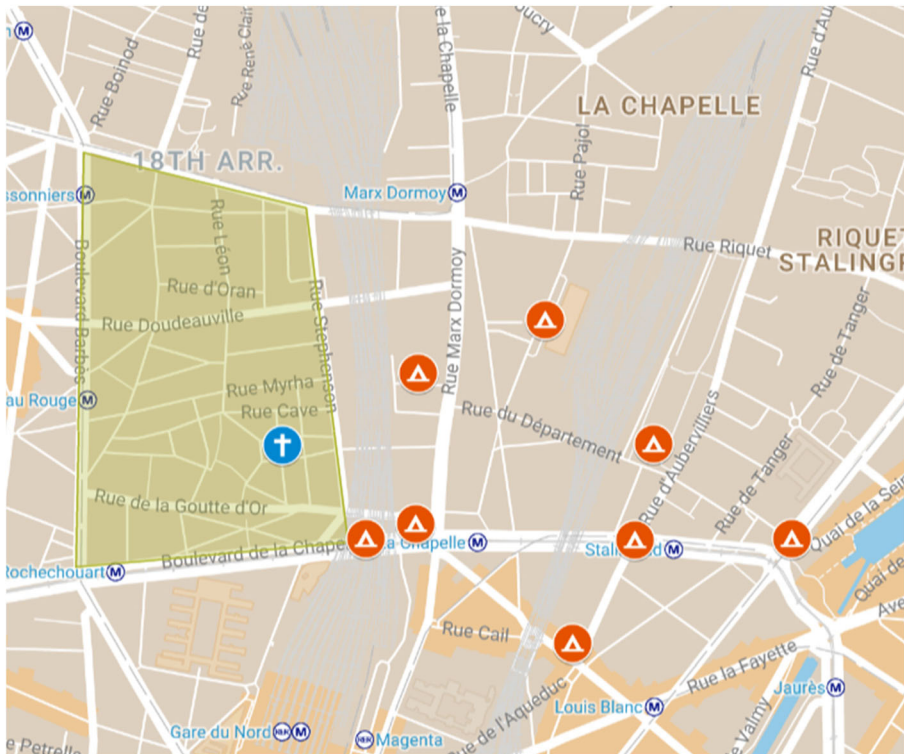


Fig. 1 La Goutte d’Or area (highlighted), Saint Bernard Church (blue cross), and migrant camp sites 2014–2016 (orange tents). Google Maps

there is now a majority of Sudanese nationals amongst this population, as well as smaller numbers of Ethiopians, Yemenis, Iraqis and Syrians. There is also a sizable Afghan presence. However, the Afghan indigent community in Paris is principally concentrated near *Gare de l'Est*. The population has also diversified in terms of age and gender. Since 2015, an increasing number of women have arrived in the camps as well as young children.

At their height, the largest makeshift camps housed several thousand individuals. Since 2015 however, the prefecture has systematically dismantled the camps in central Paris, causing the population to disperse to the municipal periphery and to sleep rough alone or in smaller groups. Since the destruction of the largest camps, the population remains present in the area, forming loitering groups who congregate during the day and disperse at nights towards shelters and makeshift camps in other localities. As an indication of this population's progressive rootedness in the area, several 'Sudanese cafés' have opened nearby. Owned by refugees who have acquired capital since their arrival in France, these cafés are operated for profit but serve a mainly indigent population of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers.

Although this population is internally heterogenous, they are externally identified by several shared key characteristics that differentiate them from the historic immigrant population who reside in the neighbourhood. They are almost exclusively asylum seekers, predominantly from the Horn of Africa, and do not have cultural or linguistic ties with France as many previous migration waves had. They have arrived through irregular routes into the EU, usually by boat across the southern or eastern Mediterranean. They are not a residential population. Many are in transit through Paris, en route to England or Germany, and stay between a week and a month before moving on. Others have applied for asylum in the Paris area but face administrative delays before they can access housing. These groups live in makeshift camps and tents or sleep rough on the sidewalks. Others still have asylum seeker or refugee status, have accessed housing, but are still unemployed; for them, La Goutte d'Or and the adjacent area of La Chapelle has become a centre of convergence. Through SSB, the Church of Saint Bernard de La Chapelle is one of the points of congregation for the indigent migrant population, who return to the neighbourhood to meet friends within their ethno-linguistic community, access social support, and find free sources of food and language classes.

Saint Bernard de La Chapelle

On September 6th 2015, Pope Francis made an appeal during his Sunday Angelus: "May every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every shrine of Europe welcome one [refugee] family, beginning with my Diocese of Rome." That appeal came at a time when European Catholic communities were already intensely debating questions of hospitality, charity, and openness with regard to refugees.

Religious belief plays a key role in motivating many individuals towards social action, including the support of migrants (Kessler and Arkush 2008). Within the Christian tradition, narratives of forced migration are a recurring theme in scripture and are frequently used as reference points for discussing moral and spiritual challenges (Hagan 2008; Riaud 2009; Padilla and Phan 2014). In recent years, the Roman Catholic Church has become a particularly prominent global advocate for compassionate policies and supportive community actions towards refugees as well as migrants in general. Such positions have been an explicit

component of Catholic social doctrine for decades, although this advocacy has become more prominent under the leadership of Pope Francis.³

Whilst many French Catholics dissent from these aspects of social doctrine and express opposition to new migrants entering the country (IFOP 2015), Saint Bernard de La Chapelle is representative of a socially oriented Catholic tradition in France that has embraced migration through the composition of its congregation and through its social work.⁴ Just as immigration has shaped the cultural environment of the neighbourhood, it has also explicitly shaped the church's sociology, self-identity, spiritual practices and social action.

The church building of Saint Bernard de la Chapelle is a neo-gothic edifice located in the heart of La Goutte d'Or and in close proximity to the migrant camps that have sprung up since 2010. The majority of churchgoers are either immigrants or recent descendants of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa, the French Antilles, South Asia, and Latin America. This is reflective of the local demographics with the notable exception of Maghrebis, who are perhaps the largest ethnic minority in La Goutte d'Or but who are entirely absent within the parish community.⁵ This cosmopolitan environment also impacts on the religious life and style of worship in the parish. There are reading and prayer groups for the African community and African prints are incorporated in the altar space and vestments during celebration. Certain lateral chapels, associated with particular saints, are favoured by specific ethnic communities. The Congolese community, particularly numerous, celebrate mass on Sunday afternoons in Lingála. The themes of exile, diversity, and *vivre-ensemble* (living together) are also strongly emphasised by the clergy at the pulpit.

The diversity of the parish is explicitly celebrated once a year during the *fête des nations* (festival of nations). This sort of event is held in many French Catholic parishes with a diverse community. At Saint Bernard, the festival is observed with a mass that incorporates the languages, music, and ritual practices from a cross-section of the parish's diverse community. The general intercessions are read in several languages, the parishioners sing hymns from several countries, and the presentation of gifts during the liturgy of the eucharist is performed according to a national custom (during my time with the parish, one year this was entrusted to the African community, and the next to the Sri Lankan community). Following the mass, a pot-luck lunch is organised in the aisles of the nave featuring food from the different communities.

Since 2007, Saint Bernard has been entrusted to clergy from the Scalabrini religious order rather than to diocesan clergy, whose specific mission is the pastoral care of migrant populations. The leadership of Scalabrini clergy has probably facilitated the parish's social action in the field of migration, but that action predates their arrival in 2007. In the 1970s, the church was already active in the debate over local migrants' rights, largely through the work of Father Louis Gallimardet, one of the team of parish priests. In 1996, the church was occupied during two months by a group of 300 undocumented migrants (*sans papiers*), who had been in France for several years and demanded a legal recognition of their status. This occupation was a high-profile event France at the time. Intensely covered by the media and involving direct

³ See key Vatican publications: *Exsul familia*, 1952; *Pastoralis migratorum cura*, 1969; *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*, 2004. These texts constitute the principal sources for Catholic social doctrine on migration, along with periodic papal encyclicals and the pastoral constitution following Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965).

⁴ On the tradition of left-wing and socially oriented Christians in France, see Pelletier and Schlegel (2012). On Catholicism and migration, see the special issue of *Migrations Société* edited by Vianna (2012).

⁵ The clergy at Saint Bernard report occasional instances when Muslims have asked for religious guidance or intervention with reference to particular saints who are associated with specific causes (such as domestic abuse or infertility). However, these cases of syncretism are uncommon.

negotiations between the occupants' representatives and the national government, it attracted the support of high-profile figures such as Léon Schwartzenberg, Georges Moustaki, and Dominique Voynet. For two months, the occupation of Saint Bernard was at the heart of public concerns in France.

However, although the occupation occurred within the church, it was not of the church. It was largely an exogenous phenomenon. The principal actors were the undocumented migrants themselves and the secular movements and trade unions that supported them (Blin 2008). They were not parishioners, and most did not live in the local area. They chose to occupy the church, having previously occupied and been forcibly expelled from another Parisian Church (Saint Ambroise) and a municipal gymnasium. The vicar of Saint Bernard at the time, Henri Coindé, was not notified prior to the occupation taking place (Coindé 1997). Despite this, Coindé supported the occupants' cause and refused to sign an authorisation allowing the police to enter the premises and carry out an eviction.

The identification of the church with the tradition of social Catholicism and with the cause of migrants in particular is also a factor that influences the composition of the assembly. About 20% of regular mass-goers are left-leaning Catholics who live outside of the parish's geographical boundaries and who are attracted by the parish's social history and its positions on social justice. One parishioner expressed his connection to the church in historical terms: "I'm attracted to the humanist commitment [of the parish]. You saw that in Saint Bernard's history, with Henri Coindé's courage in 1996," referring to the vicar who stood by the undocumented migrant occupants of the church in that year. This reference to 1996 is not surprising given the prominence of the event in France. However, the same parishioner continued by saying that his attachment to Saint Bernard was "also secular [*laïque*] with Louise Michel's revolutionary club in 1871," referring to a prominent figure of the Paris Commune who elected the church building as a meeting point for her *communard* cell. Such a reference to Louise Michel is fraught with historical tension because of the militant anticlericalism that accompanied the Paris Commune. Indeed the anti-clerical roots of the French left have been a recurring stumbling block for left-leaning Catholics who have historically struggled to find a comfortable place for themselves within atheist-dominated left-wing movements and organisations, but who have never managed to shift the political focus of French Catholicism away from the right (Pelletier 2002). Despite this tension, the historical reference to Louise Michel points to a recurrent narrative amongst other parishioners and SSB volunteers—the importance of accompanying a religious discourse with a secular republican discourse.

Not all parishioners are enthusiastic about the church's association with migrants. A minority feels that the theme of migration is too present within the church and worry that the social action with which the church is identified overshadows the church's spiritual identity. As Yvette, 34 and a regular churchgoer explains: "I'm not against the migrants. But I'm worried that our church is becoming a refugee centre instead of a place for prayer. Every Sunday there are large groups of migrants who congregate outside the church gates. They make a lot of noise. Sometimes, some even come in the church looking for the [clothes distribution point]." This group feels that the social actions of SSB do not belong within the church because it does not constitute an explicitly religious activity (i.e. a ritual act of worship). Generally, the opposition is moderate and based in pragmatic concerns, such as one Eddy, an elderly parishioner who argues that, "the state should be taking care of these things, not the church. If the parish has the resources it's OK to help out, but this should really be public". Giselle defends a similar position: "it's a sensitive issue and it should be organised by the state. The fact the parish takes care of them shows how much the situation is rotten. And

I wonder if the parishioners here don't feel like they have to get involved by moral obligation because the parish is so vocal about it." A small number of parishioners also expressed a desire that Christian refugees should be given priority over Muslims, although none objected to the participation of non-Christians within the activities of SSB.

It is significant that even the (anonymous) online survey did not collect any strong opposition or hostility on behalf of parishioners with regard to the migrants or to SSB. This is perhaps also attributable to a form of self-selection. The migration factor in the parish is so explicit that it is likely that some local Catholics who are uncomfortable with this attend services elsewhere. Indeed the urban density of Paris and its Catholic parishes means that several other churches are within walking distance from La Goutte d'Or. This encourages what Emile Pin (1956) described as a consumerist mobility amongst urban Catholics who are able to attend services that correspond to their aesthetic or ideological preferences.

Solidarités Saint Bernard (SSB)

Whilst Saint Bernard's most famous episode 1996 was not of the parish community's own making, its current social action in favour of migrants is rooted in and controlled by the parish. This began in 2010 when, in response to the growing number of Eritreans camping beneath the aerial metro line, a small number of parishioners organised themselves to distribute free meals at the camp site. Since that time, the group has grown and diversified its activities. At the time this study was conducted, SSB had approximately 110 registered volunteers.⁶ These volunteers are grouped into four 'teams', each with a specific activity:

- 1) The breakfast team serves between 100 and 200 free morning meals on Saturdays and Sundays and provides a space for migrants to socialise with volunteers and to ask for guidance.⁷
- 2) The night shelter team runs an eight-bed shelter during the winter months, which is housed in a classroom belonging to the parish.
- 3) The clothes bank team distributes clothing donated by individuals and charitable partners.
- 4) The French lessons team organises basic language classes on Saturdays and Sundays.

In terms of organisational culture, each team has a coordinator who is responsible for managing volunteers and assuring that the service runs smoothly from one week to the next. Although SSB is under the authority of the vicar, who is legally responsible for activities taking place on parish property, the team coordinators tend to function independently. The teams are loosely coupled to one another under the semi-formal umbrella of SSB, which provides funding, facilities, and a centralised identity linked to the church. Most volunteers identify with and are active within one team, and tend not to cross over into the others. Volunteers' only opportunity to discuss the global activities of SSB and to learn about other teams occurs during general meetings, which occur approximately every three months. Consequently, the internal culture and composition of each team is slightly different. The breakfast team is the original core of SSB, and it remains principally run by older long-

⁶ The membership fluctuated during my time with the group, but remained between 100 and 110.

⁷ An administrative orientation service was provided during my first year with the group. However this was discontinued when the volunteer responsible for these sessions moved to another parish.

standing volunteers who are also regular parishioners. The night shelter team is particularly large (40 members), as it must run every night during the winter months. Therefore, the team is more dispersed. The clothes bank team is mostly composed of temporary volunteers who are not otherwise affiliated to the parish. These volunteers also tend to be closer in culture and sympathy to far-left activist groups and are rarely present during general team meetings. Finally, the French language team is mostly staffed by students and young professionals who are relatively new to the group (less than two years' activity).

SSB's scope of activities is not in themselves exceptional. Several other formal or informal local organisations have emerged since 2014. These attract local volunteers and deliver similar services (e.g. *Solidarité Wilson Migrants*, *Bureau d'Accueil et d'Accompagnement des Migrants*). However, SSB remains distinctive because of its explicit faith identity and because its activities date from prior to the current migration crisis.

Courcy (1999) argues that parish structures possess three essential assets for local societies: space, time and organisation. SSB, through its affiliation to the parish, benefits from these. Because of its affiliation to the Catholic Church, SSB can rely on a stable institutional foundation. The church building provides a symbolic focal point recognisable by all residents within the neighbourhood. Through the parish, the group benefits from free access to facilities in which to carry out its activities. Rooms within the priory are available for French classes, food distribution and for the night shelter. The priory provides a kitchen and storage space. The group can also rely on the administrative support of the parish secretary and of the clergy who are legally responsible for the activities carried out within the parish premises and who provide a leadership role. Through its connection to the Paris diocese, the group also receives limited funding from the diocese budget.

Beyond receiving such material support, the continuity of SSB is also attributable to the ideological and discursive framing provided by the Catholic Church. Informal discussions around Catholic social doctrine, sermons delivered during Sunday Mass, regular events within the Parish such as the World Day for Migrants and Refugees and the Festival of Nations, provide recurring reminders and reference points for the moral and ethical premises underpinning the group's activities. During group meetings (as opposed to strictly parish events for practicing Catholics), there is an extra imperative to provide a discursive framework that justifies the group's activities: the majority of participants are not practicing Catholics. Thus, each group meeting is an occasion to revisit (at least within the opening remarks) the group's commitment to welcome members from outside the Catholic faith, why exogenous members choose to join an explicitly Catholic group, and what values are shared between Catholics and non-Catholics in this domain.

In terms of member composition, approximately a quarter of SSB volunteers are Saint Bernard parishioners, whilst the rest are not otherwise affiliated to the parish than through SSB. Amongst those, there is a range of religious identities, including atheists, non-practicing Catholics, and Muslims (practicing and non-practicing). When asked how they felt about the confessional affiliation of SSB, most replied that they saw it as both an important and positive characteristic of the group, whilst a small number of volunteers were indifferent to SSB's church affiliation.

Most SSB volunteers, both Catholic and non-Catholic, cite their religious faith as a motivation for volunteering. When asked to explain this link, a recurring theme amongst volunteers was a desire to "live concretely the words of the Gospel" and to reconcile their beliefs with their everyday actions. Thus, Monique, an SSB volunteer, explained her commitment as both "civic and Christian in response to the Gospel." Jean, a parishioner who is

supportive of SSB but not active, explains, “to help migrants is in the Gospel and it’s also in human rights and in the Republic’s motto: fraternity.” Ercole, a retired regular parishioner who is also active in SSB, argues that, “our duty to help one another is just as much about citizenship as about religion. That’s also a message for Christians, but you don’t have to be Christian. In the Republic [*En République*] we have to stand up for the values of solidarity and fraternity.” As mentioned previously, the juxtaposition of Christian and republican values is a recurring theme within the group that is also heard at the pulpit. On several occasions, the priest used his sermons to remind parishioners that they were called to act in the world *qua* citizens as well as *qua* Christians. The stereotypical opposition between Church and Republic, which is often presented as a constituent component of French *laïcité*, was never mentioned by interviewees. On the contrary, whatever their faith backgrounds, SSB members and parishioners insisted on the reciprocity between the moral imperatives of the Gospel and the constitutional principles of the republic.

For non-Christian volunteers at SSB, the justification for their participation in a Church-based association operates in an inverse fashion to that observed amongst the churchgoers. Instead of demonstrating that the value of fraternity they find within the Gospel can also be found in Republican values, non-Christians within the group explain that they can adhere to those values from outside a Christian framework. “Solidarity doesn’t need to belong to religion to exist: the motivation for helping other human beings is a common feeling that unifies us, no matter which religious current we belong to,” explains Christelle, a volunteer at SSB who describes herself as non-religious. Abdellah, a Muslim volunteer, approaches the question from an interfaith perspective: “In the Coran, hospitality and charity are duties, so in that way we are the same as Christians. We all want to do good.”

Whilst some non-Catholic members during interviews described themselves as sceptical or wary of the Catholic Church as an institution, none claimed to be strongly hostile. Damien, a volunteer who describes himself as non-religious, claimed to be unhappy with the “reactionary” Church, but found that “the style of this parish, its spirit of openness, and of the priests is very positive.” Annie, an atheist volunteer, explained her justification for volunteering with SSB: “At Saint Bernard you see that people are interested in things like solidarity and fraternity. I think that goes beyond one religion. It’s about human values, and we can all understand each other on that level.” This issue-based cooperation and solidarity has been identified as a characteristic feature of urban modernity, where individuals pick and choose their alliances and causes, rather than feeling structurally bound within an all-encompassing social class or category. Already in 1967, the sociologist Jean Rémy (1967) observed that social life in urban areas favoured diversity and pluralism in individuals’ social action, allowing them to collaborate on specific projects or causes with other people with whom they could disagree on all other topics beyond the matter at hand. Within this dynamic, an individual does not need to feel a particular attraction to the Church to volunteer with SSB; what matters to them is the local action, not the governing structure.

The inclusion of non-Catholics within SSB is necessary in order to run the four programmes on offer on a weekly basis. With a parish community numbering between 150 and 200 people, the church could not solely rely on its own internal human capital to maintain these activities. Beyond individual volunteers, SSB also receives weekly donations from a local charitable organisation based in a Muslim prayer centre. But widening the pool of participants within SSB serves another function for the parish’s standing in the local community. In a predominantly non-Catholic neighbourhood, it raises the profile of the church, educates local non-Catholics about Christian social teachings, creates interfaith links in a

national context of increased suspicion of religious others, and of Muslims in particular. In this manner, SSB serves a meeting point between the church and the neighbourhood.

Local Action, Global Problems

The social action of SSB volunteers is confined to certain parameters. It is locally focused and does not seek to extend its reach beyond the geographical footprint of the parish. It is responsive, perhaps even palliative, in that it does not aspire to preempt social problems or to address their root causes but only to mitigate their consequences. It is also ideologically uncommitted. Although SSB actions are framed within the ideology of Catholic social teaching, the group avoids prescriptive structural or political discourses. These parameters are not formally established, but they arise from the conditions in which SSB operates. It is an association rooted in the particular geographic area, with very limited financial resources and which draws together a wide spectrum of social actors. As such, SSB is limited in how far it can develop its capacity or its critical discourse before it risks overstretching its capacities and alienating a portion of its members. In this context, the group walks a fine line in order to maintain the momentum of the organisation, at the cost of being less effective or less openly critical than it might be in more accommodating circumstances.

Thus, SSB is characterised by an intense commitment to migrants' well-being on a local level, but also by a resistance or hesitancy to engage with the broader structural causes for these local problems. It is rooted in the domain of charity, not justice. The group does not seek to mobilise a political movement, refrains from engaging in an overtly political discourse that would indicate a party or ideological affiliation, and does not aspire to extend its organisation and activity beyond the geographical confines of the neighbourhood.

When interviewed, most Catholic volunteers do not explicitly refer to the idea of Catholic social doctrine, nor do they report a familiarity with the corpus of ecclesiastical texts and pronouncement that compose that doctrine. And yet, their discourses often reflect elements of Catholic social doctrine. This is the case with regard to their wariness of the notion of charity, when they consistently reject the suggestion that their engagement is a form of supererogation. Rather, they insist on the modesty of their action and that they are offering what recipients should have by right. Catholic social teaching insists that certain conditions of justice must be met before individuals can aspire to fully interact on the level of charity and love: "Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is 'mine' to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is 'his', what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting. I cannot 'give' what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice." (Benedict XVI 2009, §6).

Beyond the contextual constraints specific to SSB and la Goutte d'Or, this tension is also rooted in the history of socially progressive Catholicism (or left-wing Catholicism), which in France has been torn between two currents since the post-war period. On the one side were those who opted to participate *qua* Christians within the sphere of electoral party politics with an aim at institutional reform. I discussed earlier the stumbling-blocks left-wing Catholics have encountered in this direction. On the other side were those who opted for a discursive and associative approach: denouncing social injustices from a Biblical standpoint and organising locally, but not organising a programmatic political response. This discursive and associative approach was attracted to initiatives stemming from the cooperative movement and to local self-governance and community-based ideas

(Georgi 2012); and ultimately had more success in a national context where a Christian Democratic party never succeeded in gaining much ground and in which open Christians found little room in left-wing political movements. The identity, discourse and actions of SSB since 2010 clearly stem from this discursive and associative tradition: cooperative, focussed on local issues, and non-political.

This is true despite the fact that the historical identity of Saint Bernard Church is tied to a radical form of political contestation. It was the site of the migrants' occupation of 1996, which became a highly publicised direct confrontation with the right-wing national government, and of several hunger strikes prior to that date. However, as discussed previously, although that form of political contestation is associated with the church and occurred within the church, it was primarily an exogenous phenomenon that was supported by a minority current within the parish. Although Saint Bernard is a powerful politicised symbol associated with the struggle for migrants rights' on a national level, the endogenous social history of the church, like its current social action, is much more modest and locally focused. This can be said of the surrounding neighbourhood as well. La Goutte d'Or is periodically the focus of national controversies owing to its cosmopolitan population cohabiting in the centre of Paris, with topics such as Muslim street prayers, delinquency, prostitution, and sexual harassment feeding headlines. Yet, as discussed previously, the neighbourhood itself is defined by a form of insularity, which may add to its attraction for outside commentators.

This opposition between the local and the global, the political and the pragmatic, between charity and justice, is at the heart of an underlying tension within SSB. Volunteers report a discernible awareness as to the macroscopic political causes to the locally lived reality, and a recurrent recognition that the group's *modus operandi* cannot address the causes of the local migrant situation. For example, Christophe regrets that, "what we do isn't insignificant... but it's kind of a drop in the ocean. All these young people sleeping in the street, and more come every day. I feel good coming here [to SSB] but often I leave feeling like we're just digging a hole and filling it back in." There is also a recognition—voiced periodically during group meetings—that the church of Saint Bernard is a symbolically powerful focal point for debates around migration and justice for undocumented migrants in France. The group could mobilise that prominence to promote a broader vision of justice, which occasionally it does, but always briefly and timidly. In 2015, several volunteers wanted to organise another church occupation to reignite the national media frenzy that occurred in 1996, but this idea was not met with much support from others in the group. There exists a tension between the group's enacted commitment to local solidarity and its unenacted (perhaps unenactable) ideal of justice.

Saint Bernard, the Regime of Love and the Issue of Equality

Returning to Boltanski's framework, the issue that SSB volunteers identify as most needing to be addressed (equality) is situated within the regime of justice, where actors are able to mobilise in a conflict over the distribution of goods or rights in the body politic. Yet, as collective actors within SSB, their action is restricted to the regime of love because they are part of a loose and localised network. They lack the resources and the internal ideological coherence necessary to coordinate an effective macroscopic political action within the regime of justice. In this sense, SSB is always mobilised towards a certain ideal of justice, and yet by its very structure always frustrates its own progress towards that ideal because it operates a form of charitable giving that, although responsive to the immediate and local needs of migrants, is contrary to their idea of equality.

Boltanski's regime of love fits the type of social action that SSB engages in, because of its Christian roots and because of the free nature of the services SSB delivers. Actors within the group give their time voluntarily and no reciprocity is ever required from those who use SSB services. Within Boltanski's regime of love, there is clearly an active giving party and a passive receiving party, hence the notion of non-equivalence. But Boltanski specifically avoids characterising this relationship as unequal. The distinction between these two non-equivalence and inequality is ambiguous, but that is perhaps a strength of his model. Indeed, this ambiguity can be discerned amongst SSB volunteers who are reluctant to label their actions as charity, and who are attached to the idea that there exists a form of equality between themselves and the migrants they serve, despite an obvious dissymmetry in legal status, wealth, and well-being. In their discourse, SSB volunteers sometimes struggle to reconcile these elements.

SSB volunteers recognise that they are in a position of active giving with respect to the migrant recipients of their services (therefore in a certain sense, in a position of dominance). This recognition of non-equivalence also applies to volunteers who are themselves in positions of social precarity (e.g. unemployed, in a precarious state of housing, or lacking valid residency documents). Indeed, in the case of precarious or undocumented volunteers whose social standing is closest to the migrant recipients of SSB services, there are often explicit reminders that they are "on the side" of the volunteers and not of the beneficiaries. Group leaders remind other volunteers that these individuals have "passed over" to the side of the volunteers and, at times, they also point out the distinction to the migrant beneficiaries. Yet, at the same time, SSB volunteers contest in principle the notion that this non-equivalence translates as inequality. Several discursive strategies are mobilised in order to reconcile the recognition of non-equivalence with a normative insistence on equality.

The first is to affirm the principle of equality: the insistence on equal dignity and equal rights is recurrent in their discourse. Some characterise this equality in religious terms: Claire (also a parishioner) insists on her belief that "we are all equal in the eyes of God". Others evoke secular vision of equality: several volunteers (Christians and non-Christians) refer to the notion of universal human rights or to the national ideal that all within the French Republic have equal rights.⁸

A second discursive strategy that many volunteers mobilise is to argue that there is in fact a form of reciprocity in their relations with the migrants. Certain volunteers insist that the recipients of their services reciprocate, tacitly or intangibly. Abdel, a non-practicing Muslim volunteer, argues that, "preparing a meal, it's simple, fraternal and direct. Sure we give, but we receive a lot as well." This sort of phrase is recurrent, without ever explaining *what* is received. Some volunteers insist on the social exchange component; for Christelle: "I enjoy meeting people from different cultures, they open my eyes to the world and they teach about things that I never thought about in my own life". Other volunteers insist upon their pleasure in participating in the group as an indirect form of reciprocity. Paul, a committed parishioner and volunteer, explains: "as volunteers it is a joy for us to stand by our brothers in Christ." Another argument advanced by certain Christian volunteers is that their volunteering is a means to deepen their own faith. For Fabienne, "this allows me to concretely live the Gospel".

A third discursive strategy is also discernable, which is a more radical and explicit critique of the notion of charity as an act of giving. Antoine, a volunteer and parishioner, articulates the argument thus: "What do we give people? Just enough to live today, food, clothing, a bed for

⁸ This is not strictly correct. Full equal access to rights in France is restricted to adult citizens.

some. These are the basic necessities to live, things that they have a right to have. It's not like we're sacrificing ourselves for them. These are things that they should have by right. So it's not charity. These are things that the government should be doing." Several other volunteers express a similar sentiment when they describe their commitment within the group as "normal" or "it's just something everybody should do." Discursively, the word 'charity' is almost entirely absent from the internal discourse of both SSB and of the parish. This discursive pattern is not maintained by any explicit guidelines or rules, and yet it is consistently maintained in the network. SSB volunteers refer to their activities as 'action' (*action*), 'work' (*travail*) or 'volunteering' (*bénévolat*), but not as charity (*charité*). Similarly, they explain that they are committed to or motivated by the values of solidarity (*solidarité*) or fraternity (*fraternité*), but never mention charity as a motivation; the same linguistic pattern is heard on behalf of the clergy on the pulpit. Finally, the migrants who receive SSB services are either referred to as *les migrants* (the migrants) or as *les accueillis* (those who are hosted), not as recipients or beneficiaries or clients.

In reality, these three discursive strategies point to rather than resolve the central tension within SSB, which is the disjunction between the group's localised engagement and its inability to address the macroscopic political causes to the problems it confronts locally. There is an awareness that although they may want to treat the migrants as equals, they remain trapped within a larger socio-political context in which that equality is not actualised. When volunteers reject the language of charity, this is partly an indication that they view charity as social condescension, a vision of charity that John Paul II (1991, §28) describes as "a mentality in which the poor — as individuals and as peoples — are considered a burden, as irksome intruders trying to consume what others have produced."

That vision of charity is at odds with their discursive commitment to equality, but there is also a discernable worry amongst volunteers that their form of action does not correspond to their discursive commitment to equality either. Boltanski insists on agents' ability to engage in a plurality of regimes of action, but that is not to say that they can set the parameters that define a regime. To the contrary, actors are constrained by their structural, legal, and relational frameworks. The place of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers on the margins of French legal guarantees, and the loose, cooperative nature of SSB, prohibits volunteers from transforming their local, charitable action into a collective, politicised campaign for justice.⁹ For some volunteers, this is not a problem. Thus Angela, a non-religious volunteer, argues, "we can't do things beyond our level. But what we do is important, and we've been here every week for years. You make things at your own scale." For others, this sort of relativism is less comforting. As Paul, a Catholic volunteer cited previously, observes: "Now we're just in a distribution role. We don't have any time to chat with them [the migrants]. It feels kind of like a soup kitchen sometimes. For me, that's not what we were trying for. But I don't know how to do it better." These limitations in interpersonal relations, and ultimately in mutual recognition, between the volunteers and the migrants highlight the group's inability to enact its ideal of fraternal equality.

With reference to that ideal, SSB fails to achieve its own social goals. Yet, the members of the group are able to both lucidly acknowledge that they fall short of their own collective ideal,

⁹ Asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants are not legally equivalent. However, there is much overlap between these two categories, as many asylum seekers enter the country through irregular channels and live as undocumented migrants for a period prior to requesting asylum. Further, since the majority of asylum requests are unsuccessful, many asylum seekers become undocumented migrants.

and still they do not consider their collective action to be a failure. Individually, members have varying internal rationalisations to account for this apparent contradiction. Collectively, the group's perseverance at the local level in the face of looming structural challenges recalls Thomas Aquinas's account of hope. For Aquinas, hope is one of the "passions of the arduous faculty", which have for object the good that is hard or arduous to achieve (*Summa Theologiae*, ST 1a2ae, qq.22–48; Miner 2009). Hope as a passion functions to promote rational agency in cases where agents have both knowledge of the possible and knowledge the obstacles which hinder their progress towards their desired outcomes. Thus, although actors in SSB can see the limits of their actions in delivering their ideal of equality, they can persevere in the hope that the structural obstacles they face do not outweigh their knowledge that their ideal is within the realm of the possible.

Another element to consider is that the group's ideal of equality is only loosely articulated. Whilst the group mobilises a discourse that insists on the importance of equality, this idea is never fully developed in terms of what it would imply for the members' lives and actions. Even though such equality is acknowledged as desirable and possible, it is distant enough to remain a vague image 'over the horizon', and (in part as a consequence of this vagueness), it is not taken fully literally by those who adhere to it. Here, the parallel with the religion practiced in the church that houses SSB is striking. Members do not need to literally believe the full extent of the ideal promoted by the group, nor do they need to see the accomplishment of that ideal, in order to still be strongly committed to the group's actions and values. The ideal gives a direction to the members' actions and allows them to coalesce around a common project, despite their diverse origins and sociological typologies. Certainly, some are more literalist than others, and these members will be more active within the realm of justice through their actions in other more politically militant groups. However, the ideal is sufficiently vague and distant that it does not interfere with the localised and relatively modest actions that form SSB's daily operations.

Conclusion

At the outset of this article, I aimed to examine how Saint Bernard parish functions as a local hub for social action in favour of newly arrived migrants living precariously on the outskirts of the neighbourhood. Beyond the immediate goals of solidarity achieved through this action, I argued that the parish's semi-formal organisation, SSB, also fosters cohesion between the parish community and the local non-Catholic community by drawing on a diverse pool of volunteers and getting them to collaborate in a form of collective action. I further argued that this coalition-strategy is vital to achieving the immediate goals of the group since the parish does not have within its membership sufficient human capital to carry out its multiple programmes in favours of the migrants. At the same time, the parish (due to the historically dominant position of the Catholic Church within French society) can provide material and organisational resources, as well as a visible hub around which unaffiliated volunteers can coalesce.

These elements allow SSB to function successfully as a locally focused, charitable organisation in the model of Boltanski's regime of love where actors engage in free gift-giving towards others without expectation of or desire for reciprocity. However, these elements are also restrictive to the form of social action SSB can successfully undertake. Lacking an ideological core, having to accommodate a diversity of actors, and remaining focused on the

local manifestations of social problems, SSB is unable to mobilise collective action for contesting the structural and political causes at the root of the migrants' legal and material precarity. What conditions are required for a collective charitable action to be transformed into a broader contestation regarding the structural conditions which give rise to the need for charitable action? Beyond the case of Saint Bernard de La Chapelle, this analysis calls for further inquiry concerning the conditions under which inter-community coalitions and local grassroots initiatives can be effective in mobilising collective action within the regime of justice with regard to the distribution of goods and rights.

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