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# Assessing the Significance of Religion in Gender and Migration Studies: New Avenues for Scholarly Inquiry

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*In this article I discuss the need for more systematic integration of approaches dealing with religious beliefs and practices into the discussion about sources and areas of gender social changes that occur in global migration. Firstly, starting from the discussion about negative representations of religiosity in contemporary debates, I consider from theoretical and methodological perspectives why we should move the religious dimension from the margins more to the centre of analysis. Secondly, basing on an exploratory review of empirical research about intersections of religion and gender in the lives of international migrants, I discuss findings that reveal about religion as a potential mediator in the gendered revolution. I answer how they help to understand the complexities and ambivalences of social changes and identify the areas they concern. I argue that the revolutionary potential that arises at the intersection of migration, gender and religion is not limited to changing gender orders in religious organisations. It is religious beliefs themselves that influence migrants' everyday lives and challenge the existing gendered contract in lay areas, in work relations, civic and political participation.*

*Keywords: global migration; religion; gender; social changes; empowerment*

## Introduction

'The certain importance that religious belief and practice has for millions of women around the world is one of the most important challenges for the human rights and reproductive health movements today' (Freedman 1996: 66). This declaration was formulated two decades ago by Lynne Freedman, a feminist lawyer, who warned social activists against identifying growing religious fundamentalisms with the usual need for religiousness. This declaration can also be referenced today to the distance that still divides studies of religion and gender in global migration research. The question about the 'gender revolution' as a result of mass migration of women, first raised by Rhacell Salazar Parreñas (2001) in her prominent study of 'global women servants'

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from the Philippines in Europe and the USA, then developed in hundreds of studies, has been rarely systematically investigated in relation to religion (Urbańska 2016). And it is despite the fact that most global migrant women come from the religious Global South or Central and Eastern Europe; and religiosity plays an important role in their everyday lives as part of their beliefs or values or as written in cultural patterns.

When Parreñas (2001) posed a question if we are facing the gendered revolution in migration, she referred its definition to the similar phenomenon of the mass transition of women – middle-class housewives in the USA and Western Europe – to the labour market since the late 1970s. Other sociologists, Arlie Russel Hochschild and Anne Machung (1989), asked whether this gendered change in the labour market – called the second shift – would change the relationship between women and men towards more democratic partnerships. Parreñas (2001) associated the contemporary global and pioneer economic migrations of wives and mothers from the Global South countries with that phenomenon of transition. And she asked if wider reconstruction of roles in households toward more egalitarian gender relations would follow that mass migration? Or maybe we were dealing with a real ‘gender revolution’ instead of the fiasco of renegotiating the new partnership – the so called ‘stalled revolution’ – as described by Hochschild and Machung (1989)? In what direction would this gender social change go? Answers to those questions in the first decades of research, since the 1990s, as shown by Stephanie Nawyn (2010), focused researchers’ interest almost exclusively on reproductive roles.

The separation of gender, migration and religion research areas was not only due to disciplinary divides within social sciences. Since the first wave of feminism, religion has been perceived rather as a primary force that ‘discriminates against women and subjugates them to male control’ (Ebaugh and Chafetz 1999: 586) than as an analytical dimension. Religious dogmas that legitimise power inequalities and underlie oppression of women – violence against them and denying women’s rights – present women as essentially inferior and morally weak (Mahler 2008: 265). In some European countries, such as Poland or Ireland, political history of liberal feminist movements is largely shaped in the fight against the role of Roman Catholic Church institutions in gender politics and power in these countries (Bobako 2017). Only in the recent decade one can observe significant changes that have exerted impact on migration studies. Firstly, the feminist reinterpretation of religion as a source of women’s empowerment has become more visible, mostly due to debates on multiculturalism (Leszczyńska 2016 Longman, Midden and van den Brandt 2012) or postcolonial critics of neoliberalism (Bobako 2017; Mahmood 2012). As Monica Mahler (2008: 266) pointed out in her article on religion, violence and women’s empowerment in Latin America: ‘The recognition of the complexity of both women’s multiple identities, including religious belonging, and religious traditions themselves, has led to an increasing challenge of the supposed irreconcilable rift between religion and women’s rights. Feminists are acknowledging religion as an internally contested and shifting cultural terrain like any other, a site of conflict in which many women struggle for increasing voice and authority’. Secondly, outbreak of numerous, scattered and rather descriptive field studies of religious immigrant organisations (e.g. Hüwelmeier 2010; Jackson 2013; Rey 2013; Williams 2008) as well as findings of transnational approach to global mobility constituted an important impulse for gendered approach in migration studies. First summarisations of these papers show various interesting processes of genderisation of immigrant religiosity and its empowering potential (Ryan and Vacchelli 2013). They revealed also ‘the ways religion is important for immigrants outside of religious organisations in social institutions, including civic organisations, families, workplaces, schools, and health-care organisations’ (Cadge and Ecklund 2007: 359). All of these has led to an increasing interest in a multidisciplinary and intersectional empirical research in migration studies and has initiated a theoretical debate on gendered change, religion and migration.

The goal of this article is a more systematic integration of religion into the discussion about a gendered social change and global migration. I contribute to the existing knowledge in two ways:

1. Firstly, starting from the discussion about the post-secular skepticism to the role of religion in contemporary world and stereotyping of religion in contemporary debates, I point out why we should include religion as one of the key dimensions of analysis to understand the complexity and ambivalence of gendered social change in global migration.
2. Secondly, I discuss what the existing empirical research of (trans)migrants reveals about religious issues as a potential mediator in the gendered social changes and identify the areas they concern. I argue that the potential for change that arises at the intersection of migration, gender and religion is not limited to changing gender orders in religious organisations. It is religious beliefs themselves that influence migrants' everyday lives and challenge the existing gendered contract in lay areas, in work relations, civic and political participation. Thus, the purpose of the article is a preliminary, exploratory review of this type of research.

Although the discussion about the relationship between religion and migration has become present in pioneer literature reviews, we are dealing with the general lack of systematic inquiry and review into the role of religion as a mediator in gendered changes experienced by global migrants. Therefore, the article is an attempt to answer Peggy Levitt's call to 'put religion front and center in our attempts to understand how identity and belonging are being redefined in this increasingly global world' (Levitt 2001: 26–27). It thus also addresses the call for a 'paradigm shift' with regard to the role of religion in every area of migration research (e.g. in refugee studies, see Goździak and Shandy 2002).

### **Lost in the post-secular skepticism**

The reason for the slow development of research showing the relationship between religion and gender changes in migration has a wider background than feminist critics. On the one hand, social sciences are influenced by post-secular skepticism, on the other hand, the inclusion of religion in research in the context of its negative impact and misunderstandings prevails. I will discuss here these two phenomena in relation to gender and migration research.

Firstly, in the second half of the twentieth century the neglect of religion perspective on research agenda was explained by the skepticism of contemporary researchers in the field of social sciences as to the importance of religious beliefs and practices in the life of the individual in post-secular Europe and North America (Cadge and Ecklund 2007; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000). Sociologist Peggy Levitt, who advocates giving more recognition to the role of religiosity and spirituality in everyday life of migrants (a 'lived religion' approach) refers to 'post-secular skepticism' in the following way: 'Until recently, the script went something like this. We live in a secular world where religion is an aberration rather than a normal part of daily life. Because surveys indicate that most people don't go to church on Sundays (except in the United States, where people do at higher levels than in any other country with a comparable standard of living), we confidently declared that religion was of little importance. But, of course, that failed to take into account the deep ways in which religion is embedded in bricks and mortar' (Levitt 2012: 2).

We encounter a similar situation in the field of studies of gender and social change in migration, which has been developing for more than two decades, and its fruit is a huge number of publications on migrants from around the world. Analysing the leading research perspectives and research summaries, it is difficult not to notice that research rarely places religious and spirituality issues among methodological and theoretical approaches dealing with gendered roles changing. The answer to the question pertaining to the specifics and directions of gender and social changes is primarily sought in the context of global economic inequalities, which result in the reconstruction of care work markets and gender orders. The most important research areas

focus on the new professional position of women, new gender orders in the family and communities within the context of transnational life ('here and there'), patterns of reconstruction of caring roles and family identities in mobility. However, the marginal presence of analyses of the role of religious beliefs and practices in gender and social change processes in migrations is a kind of paradox if we realise that many researchers collect data in religious organisations where migrants can be found (Urbańska 2016).

When we pose questions about gendered revolution in the area of family, care and work, but also in public life, the broadly understood religious dimension should take a more important place in research. It is difficult to imagine renegotiations of gender rules without mediation of religious beliefs and practices as well as its structures. Even when a person is not religious, he cannot escape the pressures and cultural demands. Thus, gender rules are very closely related to religiosity. Many studies point to the direct relationship between religious values and gender roles. Patriarchal attitudes, for example, are strongly associated with the Christian tradition. The foundation of this tradition on masculinised culture has influenced the validation of differences in relations between men and women, which is reflected in identifying the role of women with caring and the sphere of the home rather than the place on the labour market (Sherkat 2000 and Hofstede 1980, 1991, after: Voicu 2009: 145). Thus, how will these relations change in a new context, when migration as an important modernisation mechanism favours secularisation (Voicu 2009) and provides more new opportunities as well as new constraints for the 'doing gender' (Mahler and Pessar 2001)?

Secondly, the problem with the skeptical approach and the tendency to neglect religious and spirituality dimensions in research agendas becomes serious when it concerns migrants for whom these spheres are important empowerment components of identity and practice. This problem has deeper causes, related to another problematic issue – namely one-sided, reductionist and/or politically negative and stereotypical understanding of religion. As some of authors point out, the category of religion appears in the analysis primarily in the context of its destructive role in social processes. This is related to reducing the significance of religion to the main source of today's social conflicts (Goździak and Shandy 2002: 130; Levitt 2012), especially in Europe, when the explosion of research on Islam has become a growth industry (Bobako 2017; Levitt 2012: 2; Lutz 1997; Szczepanikova 2012). The consequences of such reduction are substantial because the black and white image of religion entails the risk of colonisation of the Migrants Others. As Elżbieta Goździak and Dianna Shandy point out, it also brings the risk of politicisation of ethnic or other identities portrayed in essentialist religious ways (Goździak and Shandy 2002: 130). The essentialisation of migrants' identities in religious terms invalidates constructivist ways of creating different components of identities. It also invalidates other sources of social problems, such as class, racial, ethnic, gender and other rooted differences, inequalities as well as sources of discrimination. Consequently, it justifies the impassable differences between the host society and migrants, legitimises inequalities and social hierarchies (Goździak and Shandy 2002; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007), and as such becomes the technology of power (see Bobako 2017).

The problem of the politicised use of religion is expressed primarily in the debate about gender and migration. As Alicja Szczepanikowa, who researched Chechen refugees in refugee centres in various European countries – Germany, Poland, Austria – explains: 'The construction of migrant women as victims of their culture is commonly used to depict migrants as inherently different and less civilised in contrast to more liberal receiving societies' (Szczepanikova 2012: 479). Her research findings and approaches are in contrast to the stereotypically reductionist understanding (or rather misunderstanding) of the role of religion in the lives of migrants. Firstly, when she interpreted young women's turn to stricter and less egalitarian gender roles, she avoided the popular essentialist pattern of seeing the culture of religion as inherently patriarchal and oppressive. She explained that even if patriarchal norms remain relatively persistent, they undergo some level of transformation and reinvention. They are not rigid, especially under conditions of migration and/or life in transnational settings. Migrants can apply very different gender practices, even if they come from the same

groups equally constrained by patriarchal norms. As such, she avoided ‘the ideological dichotomy between the roles of religion as either facilitating or obstructing the incorporation of immigrant minorities into mainstream society and culture’ (Szczepanikova 2012: 187), which permeates the debate surrounding gender and migration. Instead, she focuses on showing the role of contexts and agency. Secondly, she goes beyond ethnocentric interpretative approaches explaining the role of religion in coping with trauma (in the same way as the pioneering work of Goździak (2002) and Goździak and Shandy (2002)), ‘for the civilian population, who experienced tremendous losses, including that of control over their own life, turning to God was often seen as the only way to cope with events that surpassed the limits of logic. Conditions of prolonged instability produce a tendency to cling to institutions that are most resilient at times of crisis. Together with faith, the extended family was a crucial source of support during the wars’ (Szczepanikova 2012: 482).

The risk of colonisation becomes clearer when we acknowledge the constructivist nature of religion and look at it also as a source of agency. Monica Mahler notes that after criticism of religion as a main source of women’s oppression in the first and second waves of feminist movements one can observe a turning point. Religion ‘is now being reinterpreted as a critical source of women’s empowerment’ (Mahler 2008: 265). Religiosity can be, therefore, not only a mechanism reproducing the existing order of power, including the gender regimes, but also a source of strength and agency, so that such existing order can be changed in various ways from the inside or from external positions (Woodhead 2013). A lot of research has shown the patterns in which women use religion and its organisations to contend for egalitarianism as spaces in which to raise feminist consciousness with others (Ebaugh and Chafetz 1999: 586–587). In turn, other gender and religion studies often show spirituality, and religious practices and beliefs as the only source of agency and empowerment for the excluded. For example, anthropologist of gender and religion, Agnieszka Kościńska (2009), stresses that the older generations of Polish women, who were the victims of the most-excluded mechanisms of the post-socialist transformation to the greatest extent, found the only source of agency in religiousness and community-related practices connected with it. Thus, the contemporary research on religion conceptualises it as ‘internally contested and shifting cultural terrain like any other, a site of conflict in which many women struggle for an increasing voice and authority’ (Mahler 2008: 266). Strong attention is also paid to the analysis of ambivalences and internal contradictions of gaining empowerment in religious organisations, when religion favours the secondary status of women as compared to men and at the same time empowers women, which is not mutually exclusive (Ebaugh and Chafetz 1999; Leszczyńska 2016). This approach entails breaking the ‘myth of a monolithic homogeneous’ religion (Freedman 1996: 59, 66) and results in a more inclusive definition of religion (Goździak and Shandy 2002). The problems are, therefore, the simplifications and the lack of nuanced conceptual apparatus in relation to the ways of defining religion. As Levitt explains: ‘We could see religion not as a stable set of beliefs and practices rooted in a particular time and space but as contingent clusters that come together within to-be-determined spaces that are riddled by power and interests. The resulting assemblages – made up of actors, objects, technology and ideas – travel at different rates and rhythms across the different levels and scales of the social fields in which they are embedded’ (Levitt 2012).

To sum up, more serious dealing with the dimension of religiosity in the intersectional analyses of gender and migration could more fully reveal the various dimensions of agency. This would help to solve the problem that Floya Anthias and Maja Cederberg (2010: 28) call the homogenisation of the experiences of migrant women, as well as to avoid the risk of colonisation or the orientalising of migrant women’s identities. It would also help to re-examine the processes of secularisation in the context of migration.



## Religion as a mediator in social change – the review of empirical gender and migration research

It is not easy to answer the question pertaining to where the phenomena related to religion and religiosity already occur in empirical migration research, and, above all, which phenomena related to gender are perceived in this scope. The first analyses summarising the empirical research achievements at the intersection of religion and migration have appeared only recently. In all these analyses, researchers paid attention to the importance of the phenomenon of genderisation of religion or its mediation in social changes (Cadge and Ecklund 2007; Ebaugh and Chafetz 1999; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Yang and Ebaugh 2001). However, such research is still scarce. There are only a few special issues (e.g. Bonifacio and Angeles 2010; Goździak and Shandy 2002; Longman, Midden and van den Brandt 2012; Ryan and Vacchelli 2013), a few books (e.g. Bobako 2017; Levitt 2012) and, above all, scattered, single case studies (e.g. Goździak 2002; Hüwelmeier 2010; Jackson 2013; Rey 2013; Williams 2008). Although they are very few, they answer the key question of this article whether and how different aspects of religiosity mediate in social change at the intersection of migration and gender. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that it will still be a picture that is not complete, because the issue of religion began to be the subject of a broader interest in migration research only in the 1990s and since then has been developing rather slowly (Cadge and Ecklund 2007; Ebaugh and Chafetz 1999; Yang and Ebaugh 2001). As a matter of fact, if religion has already been studied, it is usually within the framework of specific ‘religious organisations started and/or attended by immigrants (...) rather than of the social institutions, families, workplaces, health-care organisations or other social institutions’ micro contexts focused on individuals’ experiences outside of religious gatherings. A “lived religion” approach that focuses on immigrants’ stories and experiences in a range of social spheres is relatively new to this area of research’ (Cadge and Ecklund 2007: 360). The available studies are primarily monographic, descriptive papers, documenting the activities of small, ethnic religious assemblies of immigrants. There is no comparative analysis synthesising the accumulated knowledge. Despite everything, the review of available monographs allows to chart patterns.

Literature analysis will be divided into three sections. In the first section, I will discuss gendered changes through religion as the effect of top-down pressure. I will present new functions and positions in lay and religious organisations in migration processes as the effect of the pressure of new macro- and mezo- structures. In the second section, I will depict gendered changes through religion as the effect of bottom-up pressure. I will describe the influence of beliefs and practices on creating and redefining gendered roles in lay and religious organisations in migration processes. The last section will focus on the unnoticed role of religion in reproduction of global gendered division of markets.

### *Gendered changes through religion as the effect of top-down pressure. New functions and positions in lay and religious organisations in migration processes*

One of the key areas in the field of migration research is the analysis of gender changes in functioning of lay and religious organisations in relation to the analogical ones in the countries of origin. Here the attention is paid to different positions of women and men as the initiators of these changes, which results from their new, different position on the labour market and new patterns of activity that open spaces for both empowerment and re-traditionalisation.

Firstly, the basic dimension of the study of the organisational changes of religious and secular institutions is also an attempt to understand how diversely these institutions mediate in the process of integration of women and men into a new country. Most monographs document a huge role of religious organisations in providing formal and informal social assistance to immigrants. Such actions are taken not so much by professional clergymen but by secular people gathered around religious institutions. And as a number of studies show, these

are largely women who in volunteering find the possibility to fulfill the role of devoted carers. Additionally, women seek support and help in the care and education of their offspring, which are obtained through entering and acting in social networks centered around religious organisations. Wider than in the countries of origin, the non-religious function of the parish and mission covers the whole range of informal support including help in finding a flat or a job, school and care for children in the case of childbirth, illness or death, education of children in their native language, and even starting their own business and taking mortgages. This is especially important for families of economic migrants working in the lowest sectors of the labour market and, therefore, experiencing multiple exclusions. Bankston and Zhou (1995, 1996) argue that Vietnamese children and their carers receive protection and support in religious organisations that mediate educational success and better adaptation to American society. Researchers of the Chinese working-class immigrant communities in New York's Chinatown show that the access to such a friendly space is important, especially for teenage immigrants who are vulnerable to 'dangerous and destructive behavior patterns'. Networks gathered around local churches play roles similar to foster families, in which they receive social, financial and caring support, which facilitates the process of social promotion to the middle class (Cao 2005; Guest 2003).

Sometimes the differences in defining gendered migration functions of religious organisations are so large among religious organisations in the countries of origin and in the sending countries of migrants that some of the organisations significantly loosen the ties linking them with their headquarters. This is the case especially when the religious organisations operating in an immigration country have less patriarchal structures than in the migrants' home countries. In such a situation, religion is an empowering resource for migrants, from which they draw strength and legitimacy for change. It is not uncommon to see splits related to a different vision of gendered relationships and practices. Gertrud Hüwelmeier (2014), who describes the trans-nationalisation of life in convents from historical and gendered perspectives points out how non-European branches of women's orders at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries started to gradually become independent from their headquarters and from mothers superiors themselves. This strengthened the reforms that took place in the 1960s after the Second Vatican Council, which were to support the missionary functions of religious orders. Describing the American branches of the first generations of nuns migrating to the USA from the 'Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ' convent in Germany, Hüwelmeier (2012) shows that the symbol of struggle to abolish the hierarchy and of the fight for the new idea of sisterhood and independence was the question of wearing civilian clothes instead of habits and owning one's own hierarchy. Migrant nuns fought for egalitarian relations with their superiors in Germany. However, the anthropologist remarks that this process of individualisation primarily concerned non-European branches of orders in which sent nuns got gradually individualised or where nuns from indigenous communities of Africa, Asia, and South America entered and struggled to take into account their cultural differences. Hüwelmeier (2014) describes the protests of indigenous Hindus who fought to break the ethnocentrism of their prioress. They wanted to introduce local cultural patterns, a ritual of sitting instead of kneeling, eating meals prepared in accordance with rules of the Hindu cuisine instead of the German one.

New immigrant practices change functions and related gender orders in institutions originating in the countries of origin. For example, in the USA, underlyingly hierarchical immigrant churches have a tendency to transform with time into small congregations, associations with rather direct, horizontal relationships and different, far more egalitarian gender relations. This is the effect of the influence of American culture based on congregationalism (Warner and Wittner 1998; Yang and Ebaugh 2001). And although many of these congregations are still run by professional clergymen, from one year to another secular leaders, particularly female leaders, occupy an increasingly important central place. In the new context, rituals, practices and styles of prayer are also changing (Yang and Ebaugh 2001). This is especially true for young organisations. Migrants then transfer such changes to the countries of origin. American research of migrants from South America shows that they play a major role in exporting the idea of congregationalism to the places they have left behind.

Secondly, when we ask about new gender positions (and orders) in organisations, the answer is that we often deal with hybrid strategies. On the one hand, women in religious organisations reproduce traditional ethnic culture while, on the other hand, more and more frequently take up high and prestigious positions there, which men would not be able to or do not want to hold. Ebaugh and Chafetz (1999) noticed such patterns while examining thirteen religious organisations in the American city of Houston. They also noticed that men activate themselves for their communities only when they lose their class status. In turn, Jolly and Reeves (2005) remind that even if men are active in their ethnic organisations, they usually choose those whose policies are targeted at activities in their countries of origin. The explanation for this is a worse adaptation of men to life in immigration countries. This is confirmed, in particular, by the research on the first generation of American immigrants from South America. It shows that for Latin men immigration is associated with the must to undertake jobs below their qualifications, deskilling and degrading mobility down the social ladder, which is, among others, the consequence of racism-related segregation on the American labour market. This results in the reluctance of Latin men to settle and the feeling that their stay is temporary, even if they have spent many years abroad. The reluctance to engage in local activities is, therefore, the result of such experiences. However, the experiences of women, i.e. wives of immigrants, are completely different. With migration, women experience mobility up the social ladder and gain relative independence. This involves gaining access to paid activities, even if they are still related to caring and cleaning. In addition, the caring roles that they perform in their households as wives and mothers involve them more effectively in the life of local communities integrated around schools, playgrounds, social welfare and religious organisations. All this translates into a better adaptation to the new environment and into the reluctance to return to the home country. Women are more likely than men to engage in activities of religious organisations that solve local problems (Hardy-Fanta 1993) and much more often than men obtain US citizenship (Jones-Correa 1998). Mehrdad Darvishpour (2002) who examines cases of patriarchal Iranian families living in the egalitarianism-oriented Sweden noticed a similar phenomenon. The researcher stresses that mothers want to integrate more closely with the culture and society of the country that has become their new home than men. This may be seen on the example of different approaches to raising daughters, who are much more restricted by their fathers. The author emphasises that ‘in many immigrant families men live in the past, women in the present, and children in the future’ (Darvishpour 2002: 14). He also adds that ‘those who, as a result of migration, seem to lose the most from their social and family positions, try to cultivate most the least changed traditional social and family relationships’ (Darvishpour 2002: 14, after: Muszel 2013: 92). Therefore, new women’s positions related to their involvement in the activities of ethnic churches and religious congregations can be perceived as exemplification of new positions that women hold not only in the labour market, but also in the public sphere.

*Gendered changes through religion as the effect of bottom-up pressure. Beliefs, practices and roles in lay and religious organisations in migration processes*

The changes in gender positions and functions in religious organisations imply also changes in secular institutions that are closely related to them, such as family institutions and broadly defined gender roles. Susanna Calkings’ (2005) research on the Quaker communities reveals that transnational mothers, who completely revolutionised the institution of motherhood and gender systems in their communities, existed as early as in the 17th century. These were female Quakers – wives and mothers – who independently and on their own initiative, following their vocation, went on long-term foreign missions. The revolution they initiated was spectacular – they managed to create something like the role of substitute mothers in the community, and their role of the woman who is also a mother transposed into the legitimate and admired role of the spiritual mother



of the community. Certainly, these were not such mass migrations as modern ones of women workers, transnational wives and mothers who leave behind their families in the country of origin for many years. There were few female Quakers who went on missions abroad and their trips were perceived as pioneering even in their communities. However, these cases show a huge role of religion as a means of legitimating migration (*push factor*) and institutional changes and, as shown above, of maternal practices and changes in gender patterns of sending communities.

Similar processes may be found in modern research. Anthropologist Catharina Williams (2008), who researched domestic workers from Indonesia, showed how religious beliefs and spirituality can serve women as a source of power in transforming patriarchal role models and home positions assigned to women in the community. Women justify their intention to emigrate in front of the patriarchal Others: fathers, husbands and members of local communities by giving references to the will of God and the traditional role of women as caregivers. This is even the case when migration is associated with ‘impurity’, as immoral, contested space especially for women. ‘In addition to promising to help with the family income, young women use their beliefs and faith to persuade fathers to let them go. They convince the family that God will look after them as they follow God’s will to help the family’ (Williams 2008: 348). The search for sources of legitimation of such a change only in the dimension of a new division of care work in a migratory household – and therefore excluding religion as it is done in most research of this type in the world – would not give an answer why such projects were successful. The transforming role of religion at every stage of migration is best summarised by Williams herself: ‘Women told stories of how throughout the process of migration they drew strength from their religious belief as a way of coping and enduring any hardships. For them, their faith provided a support through the transformative process of migration and stepping beyond the purview of their domestic supports and constraints. The way that women’s agency emerges through this process and the shifting sense of self that it entails (Gibson 2001; Gibson-Graham 2006) must be taken into account in increasing our conceptual understanding of female international migration’ (Williams 2008: 348). Needless to say, the religious components of motives for migration should be included in the analysis of push-pull factors. Unfortunately, their presence is still rare.

### *The role of religion in reproduction of global gendered division of markets*

Some studies include secular contexts in the analyses on the role of religion in migration by focusing on the mutual relations between religious organisations and the gendered labour market. Both these spheres, as shown by empirical studies (e.g. Małek 2008; Jackson 2013; Rey 2013; Williams 2008), reproduce each other and become important interlinked (but not visible) sites of ongoing gendered social change in migration.

Firstly, new gendered religious identities that can be redefined in exile are also created as a reaction to the experience of exclusion, invisibility and life at the margins of the receiving society. Agnieszka Małek (2008), who researched Polish women working as domestic workers in Rome, points out that some women become religious only in exile. The experience of loneliness, separation from family, hard work, illegality of stay, work and residence, as well as negative experiences with employers and isolation of carers working in households result in many women seeking a meaning of life in religion, beginning to identify with saint figures such as St Mary or Jesus and in engaging in the life of Polish religious communities. Catharina Williams (2008) writes about a similar situation. Domestic workers from Indonesia described in her papers carry out individual and common religious rituals, worship services and prayers as a coping mechanism at every stage of migration, especially when confronted with hardship in the domestic work sector. ‘The women agreed that they drew affirmation through the religious rituals and social activities together and described them as strengthening their bonds as “a family”’. They seemed to obtain comfort, security and a sense of belonging (Ozorak 1996) and often referred to each other as “sisters”’ (Williams 2008: 350). Such strategies ‘represent proactive decision-making

and awareness in facing a challenging situation' (Kwilecki 2004; Pargament 1997). It may be said that religion is an important symbolic resource for the growing global class of the proletariat helping to cope with new living conditions, class position and cross-exclusion. Such strategies certainly reveal what else, apart from economic factors, affects the survival and reproduction of global markets of care work. For example, Vivianne Jackson (2013) shows how the responsibility for another person and the ethics of caring – stemming from religious beliefs and gender role design – delay the decision of Filipino migrants in Israel to abandon the work of a caregiver of elderly people. Religious beliefs are, therefore, an important source of mediation in the decision taken by migrants whether to leave or return to their homeland.

However, even in secular organisations, e.g. when workers' rights are violated and when migrants are discriminated against, religion may be the resource used to contest the existing institutional order. Williams (2008) points out how faith helps domestic workers from Indonesia in negotiating their borders and workers' rights. It is the basic resource of social movements, it mobilises for protests, as in the case of Mexican Catholicism. It becomes a political and moral resource used by individuals or secular and religious organisations to articulate political resistance, e.g. the protests of migrant workers at the border between Mexico and the USA (Hondagneu-Sotelo, Gaudinez, Lara and Ortiz 2004).

Goździak and Shandy (2002) point out the key issue of the empowering role of religion by discussing its importance in coping with trauma in refugees. Therefore, they critically compare the approach to trauma treatment present in refugee centres based on secular Western behavioural science with indigenous approaches to human suffering, including religious and spiritual beliefs and postulate a 'paradigm shift' that includes religion as an important dimension of social research and practice (Goździak and Shandy 2002: 131).

Secondly, new strategies of actions taken by clergy and secular female volunteers in religious organisations are often a response to new gender regimes. Precisely the relationship between masculinity and femininity that are formed in exile and mediated by labour markets. And this relation is often perceived as a threat to old accepted systems. Anthropologists, such as Gertrude Hüwelmeier, who examines the lives of Vietnamese immigrants living in Berlin, as well as researchers dealing with various African varieties of the Pentecostal Church in Europe, draw attention to the connection of the transformation of church structures and the existing patterns of gender practices and images with the new gendered experiences of migrants. Churches and congregations take over the role of negotiators of the existing gender systems and relationships between spouses put at risk in exile (Hüwelmeier 2010, 2013; Rey 2013). The Swiss Church of Pentecostals from Ghana and Congo begins to specialise in intense rituals of purifying women and men allegedly seduced, and visited by demons in exile (*spirit spouses, mermaids*). According to the beliefs of practitioners and clergymen, these demons spoil family relationships and marriages, or do not allow single people to find a husband or a wife. Churches become real therapeutic centres for marriages and couples being subjected to a crisis in exile. Interestingly, the reason for such a crisis is often a new, gender-diverse situation in the labour market, where it is harder for men to find a job, in contrast to women who are doing better and having better chances of finding a job in care. The empowerment of women entails a change in roles in intimate and family relationships, which is difficult to accept by men. And men more and more often experience the degradation of status in relation to the position before departure as well as social invisibility. The crisis of masculinity in this situation is expressed in the sense of being visited by female demons and the need for religious rituals of purification. In this context, churches, in addition to becoming a place for establishing intimate relationships for lonely couples, are important to such an extent that they reconstruct ethnic ties and begin to implement therapeutic and healing functions. This new type of practice and specialisation, marginal or absent in churches in African countries of origin, becomes a tool for managing relations and gender in emigration (Rey 2013). The same happens with Buddhist temples examined by Hüwelmeier (2013) in Berlin or Szymańska-Matusiewicz (2018, in this volume) in Poland. They are largely funded and built by female Vietnamese entrepreneurs who often deal with

business better than men. The position of female funders, organisers and volunteers working for temples significantly changes their position within the religious structures in the country of immigration, in relation to the conservative structures of organisations in Vietnam.<sup>1</sup>

## Conclusion

In the study of social change pertaining to gender in migration processes, the religious dimension appears relatively rarely. And if it does appear, it usually takes the form of the assumption that men and women come from conservative religious backgrounds and cultures and can free themselves from these cultures by means of migration. The review of the few studies that include religiosity reveals a number of phenomena that make it easier to understand migration processes, especially the intrinsic complexity and ambivalence of changes at the intersection of gender and migration. It may be clearly seen that often this agency ingrained in religiousness and spirituality, but also capitals associated with belonging to religious organisations, can catalyse change leading to egalitarianism. Such studies reveal a more complete picture of agency; a religious resource, i.e. beliefs, practices, affiliations are at the core of coping strategies at every stage of migration. Despite this, they are rarely included in the analysis of migration motivations (*push-pull theory*). What is more, including these dimensions also allows us to go beyond the limitations formulated by Maria Kontos, Krystyna Slany and Maria Liapi (2010). The researchers assessing the state of literature in the studies on gender and migration point out that ‘despite a wide range of literature on migrant women, migration research is still based on gender stereotypes. This results in migrants being perceived through their reproductive roles, which has far-reaching consequences for their social representation’ (Kontos, Slany and Liapi 2010: 12). Therefore, drawing attention to the mezo level, which concerns the gendered changes in migrant religious organisations in relation to new gender positions on the labour market, in the migrant family and community, reveals how and why migrants become involved in civic and political activity. Here, the intersection of gender and religion can help us understand things like access to rights or social services, claims to citizenship, or the issues of labour and mobility. It also provides understanding of how empowerment in the labour market of the host country in relation to the position in the country of origin affects the reorganisation of traditional religious structures, i.e. new, often leadership, positions being taken up by women within such structures. Such research would therefore give the opportunity to show a fuller agency and image of gendered change in migration than only for the secular migration roles of wives and mothers or the atomised global community of servants. If our research skipped the dimension of religion as intermediates in renegotiations of global migrants’ new belongings, we would lose sight of the dimension where perhaps the most important gender and social change occurs. Considering religion and gender together would help us understand aspects of migration that have otherwise gone unnoticed or have been addressed in problematic ways.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, analyses of network relationships linking local religious centres with their broader macro structures are published very rarely (Cadge and Ecklund 2007: 363). It is difficult to summarise to what extent these structural changes are permanent and turned into ever higher levels. An in-depth comparative research as well as research of the transnational perspective that will take into account transnational contexts and gendered migration regimes is much needed.

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