

The Atlantic Return and the Payback of Evangelization

VALENTINA NAPOLITANO*

Abstract

This article explores Catholic, transnational Latin American migration to Rome as a gendered and ethnicized Atlantic Return, which is figured as a source of 'new blood' that fortifies the Catholic Church but which also profoundly unsettles it. I analyze this Atlantic Return as an angle on the affective force of history in critical relation to two main sources: Diego Von Vacano's reading of the work of Bartolomeo de las Casas, a 16th-century Spanish Dominican friar; and to Nelson Maldonado-Torres' notion of the 'coloniality of being' which he suggests has operated in Atlantic relations as enduring and present forms of racial de-humanization. In his view this latter can be counterbalanced by embracing an economy of the gift understood as gendered. However, I argue that in the light of a contemporary *payback of evangelization* related to the original 'gift of faith' to the Americas, this economy of the gift is less liberatory than Maldonado-Torres imagines, and instead part of a polyfaceted reproduction of a postsecular neoliberal affective, and gendered labour regime.

Keywords

Transnational migration; Catholicism; economy of the gift; de Certeau; Atlantic Return; Latin America; Rome.

Author affiliation

Valentina Napolitano is an Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology and the Director of the Latin American Studies Program, University of

*Correspondence: Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto, 19 Russell St., Toronto, M5S 2S2, Canada. E-mail: v.napolitano@utoronto.ca

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Toronto. She has worked on affect, transnational migration, gendered subjectivity and the Catholic Church. She is the author of *Migration Mujercitas and Medicine Men: Living in Urban Mexico* (UCP 2002) and of the forthcoming book *Migrant Hearts and the Atlantic Return: Humanitas and the Challenge of Transnationalism to the Catholic Church* (Fordham University Press).

Introduction

This piece is a contribution to a debate on gender, religion and the 'anxieties' of Europe. It does so by turning an analytical eye (and an ethnographic mode) toward the Roman Catholic Church as a political subject, and to its current and historically sedimented pedagogies *vis-à-vis* gendered, transnational migration.¹ It builds on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken from 2005 to 2011 in the Catholic Latin American Mission, a system of different parishes dedicated to the care of Latin American migrants in Rome.² In this ethnographic work I explored the different postures that the Catholic Church has taken up *vis-à-vis* transnational migration, both as official papal positions, as well as 'politics on the ground' fostered by two of the major religious orders working with migration in Rome, the Scalabrinians and the Jesuits.³

A debate on the tensions that are present *within* the Catholic Church towards different postures on transnational migration constitutes a much-needed angle

¹ This is an angle somewhat understudied, at least within the subfield of the Anthropology of Christianity. With this field there is a growing and by now established body of work about forms of religious mediation, ethics, materiality and temporality intrinsic to Christianity, and how Christian perspectives on time, rupture, absence and presence of the divine through the texts and material art crafts have actually underpinned wider anthropological discussions. In short, these debates have pointed to the fact that anthropology has been less secular, but much more Christian in its analytical pre-suppositions than thought. For an indication of this large debate see, amongst others: F. Cannell, *The Anthropology of Christianity*, Durham: Duke University Press 2006; M.E. Engelke, *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African church*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2007; W. Keane, 'The Evidence of the Senses and the Materiality of Religion', in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14 (2008), 110–127. W. Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2007; J. Robbins, 'Transcendência e Antropologia do Cristianismo: linguagem, mudança e individualismo' in *Religiao & Sociedade* 31:1 (2011), 11–31; J. Robbins, 'Anthropology, Pentecostalism, and the New Paul: Conversion, Event, and Social Transformation' in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 109:4 (2010), 633–652; J. Robbins, *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2004.

² This is a system of parishes set up in 2003 by John Paul II to care for lay Catholic Latin American migrants in Rome. Their headquarters is in the neighbourhood of Trastevere, on the west bank of the River Trastevere, in a small tucked-away church called Santa Maria della Luce.

³ V. Napolitano, *Migrant Hearts and the Atlantic Return: Humanitas and the Challenge of Transnationalism to the Catholic Church*, New York: Fordham University Press (forthcoming).

to broaden our understanding of the nature of the political anxieties awakened by current transnational migration to Europe. Anxieties around multiculturalist policies and their limitations are not only the domain of 'secular' European states, but very much at the heart of the Vatican State and its concern about the changing nature of Europe and the perceived demise of its Catholic faith.⁴ Therefore in order to understand the complexity of multi-faith immigration to Europe we also need to engage with the anxieties that the migration phenomenon engenders within the Roman Catholic Church. To calibrate a debate on postsecular societies and immigration, we need to rest our analysis at the interstices of the Roman Catholic Church and the Catholicization of neoliberalism.⁵

The ethnographic focus of my research has been the gendered nature of Catholic Latin American migration to Rome, the majority of which is in the form of a female labour force, with or without legal residency status (*permesso di soggiorno*), and whose members find employment mainly in the caring labour industry. The Catholic Church plays a crucial role as a *trait d'union* between the newly arrived labour force and its placement in Italian families which are primarily looking for childcare or support for the elderly. The discursive practices of Catholic priests and missionary nuns, working with the *Misión Católica Latinoamericana* (Latin American Mission), engage this mostly female migration in a language of 'sacrificial carriers'. Migrant women are often addressed as the carriers of the sacrifice for their families and children, left behind in the country of origin in Latin America. Migrant women are heavily devotionally constructed as transnational maternal figures, with the limitations that this implies.⁶

However the Catholic Church is challenged by this gendered migration to Rome in ways that partly resonate with Catholic imaginings of the 'natives' – and anxieties about their conversion – in the Americas of the 16th century. The core of this challenge is that both lay and religious female migration does not fit with the pattern of the sacrificial carrier; there is much more to female migrant experience than is captured by the pedagogies of the Catholic Church toward migration. The current migration to Italy is imagined as a 'return of blood' primed for the current *new evangelization*⁷ that offers the possibility

⁴ Concerns with the decline of the Catholic Faith at the heart of Europe are clearly a battle over the changing nature of European societies as the cradle of 'traditional' values and the 'defence of life'. This is taking forms of political action that have both a long history and a contemporary religious one of self-immolation. I would here mention the case of the suicide of Dominique Venner, a member of the anti-immigration far right French political spectrum in the Notre-Dame Paris, protesting against the passing of the same-sex marriage law, in May 2013.

⁵ A. Muhelebach, 'The Catholicization of Neoliberalism' in *American Anthropologist* 115:3 (2013), 452–465.

⁶ Napolitano, *Migrant Hearts and the Atlantic Return*.

⁷ The *new evangelization* references a set of debates and disciplinary guidelines initiated by John Paul II and developed by Benedict XVI as a response to and (re)interpretation of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). The new evangelization wishes for a conversion and a reaffirmation of faith that requires new forms of socialization in the world, pivoting around Christo-centric ideas. Christ is seen here as the mystery of the divine presence (rather than privileging his historical presence, something highlighted originally by the Second Vatican Council) while the reaffirmation of this Christ is also seen as a path to

for rejuvenation to the Catholic Church, and yet also generates anxiety over its possible pollution. To analyze this phenomena I use the notion of 'Atlantic Return' by which I mean the movement/return of labour, faith, fantasies and missionization that started with the encounter with the New World in the 16th century, as a movement from the metropolis to the colonies. I read the return of 21st-century missionization at the heart of Catholic Europe in continuity with this early period. In a sense this return is profoundly postcolonial as well as, in a particular way, catachrestic.

This characteristic return here is intrinsic to the *longue durée* of the Atlantic Return – catachresis being a central theme to this collection of essays. Derrida has suggested that catachresis is a condition of language that intrinsically rests in the incommensurability of signifier and signified. Its production, rather than being a mistake to be corrected, is rather a potential for the generation of new sense which figures the potentialities of language. Hence it is a transformation, a being-affected-through, and by, language. In his words:

Catachresis, in general, consists in a sign already affected with a first idea also being affected with a new idea, which itself had no sign at all, or no longer properly has any other language.⁸

By focusing on the dimension of being affected, in time and space, I interpret this Derridean understanding of catachresis also to mean those processes that *diachronically* transform and produce material exchanges and socialities. Catachresis affects – through interruptive language extensions – bodies in space, time and histories.

Hence a study of an Atlantic Return cannot only be revealed by a misuse or abuse of words that can be productive of alternative modes of being. Rather, as I discuss below through the work of Michel de Certeau, a process of catachresis dwells in the embodied and *affective forces of histories*. In particular, one such process dwells in the knotting of the affective (and haunting) histories of an Atlantic Return lived at the intersection between the Roman Catholic Church and Latin American transnational lay and secular migration to Rome. Here I use the term 'affective forces' to delink affective labour and faith from residing exclusively in an individual/subjective position.⁹ This is to imagine the affective

eternal life, a reaffirmation of the hierarchy of transcendental aspects of Catholicism over its immanent corpus.

⁸ J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1982, 225.

⁹ I mean here affective forces of history with and beyond notions of an affective sensorium as developed by Berlant (L. Berlant, 'Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event' in *American Literary History* 20:4 (2008), 845–860) and the exploration of historicity by Hirsch and Stewart (E. Hirsch and C. Stewart 'Introduction: Ethnographies of Historicity' in *History and Anthropology* 16:3 (2005), 261–274). Berlant argues that the past can be explored as an affective dimension of the past in the present. For that she argues against the object becoming a past event in the present (her critique of trauma theory) and highlights instead a visceral being in history, a historicity that is immanent, and present to everyday life. Hirsch and Stewart understand historicity as an important field of anthropological and ethnographic exploration where 'Western' concepts of history are only one perspective of a division and linearity between past, present and future. Historicity, instead, is a creative, multiple, contextual and open way towards

circulation of histories as that which gets attached to bodies, shapes them in space and time, but is not one and the same with bodies themselves.

An Atlantic Return operates on at least two registers. On the one hand there are the lingering anxieties over the question of where to place the 'human', in light of the return of the mission and the re-missionization of Europe. There is an extensive literature on alterity and migration in Italy and a debate on the de-humanization of transnational migration due to very restrictive citizenship legislation, which has permitted de facto exploitative labour conditions for many 'illegal' migrants in Italy.¹⁰ A part of the Catholic Church has been very vocal in defending migrants' rights. Here a long history of the Catholic Church's 'defence' of the 'humanity' of the Other in the history of missionization is only briefly highlighted. By engaging with the work of Diego Von Vacano and his readings of the Dominican Friar Bartolomeo de Las Casas, and through references to my own fieldwork among the Latin American Mission and Latin American priests and nuns in 21st-century Rome, I argue that a long-time anxiety about the 'place of the human' in the process of missionization and encountering the Other is still very much present within the Catholic Church.

Secondly, I discuss the Atlantic Return through a debate on de-colonization and the economy of the gift, championed by, among others, Nelson Maldonado-Torres. This author is part of a growing movement within Latin American Cultural Studies engaging with the positionality of Latin American intellectual voices through debates on post-colonial theory and its relation to 'decolonization'.¹¹ The return of faith and labour from the Americas to Europe needs to be read critically through the lens of such debates.

Roman Catholicism does not only shape potential pious and productive labour migrants (especially migrant women) in opposition to the neoliberal ideology of 'cold' and rational material accumulation. By stressing a form of Catholic and ethical citizenship, it also invests female migrants in the task of re-producing immaterial and affective labour – which is increasingly a constitutive part of the current transformations of neoliberal economies. Drawing on an example from my own fieldwork among a group of Mexican Catholic nuns in Rome, I will highlight how parallel gendered labour regimes cut across an often unproductive

'the commitment to the possibilities that already are, but are preset only as the "not yet" of the actual' (p. 271). While I agree with both Berlant and Hirsch and Steward, I understand the affective forces of histories as examples that further problematize, on the one hand, a division between 'Western' history and 'other' historicities and, on the other, that which is not only circumscribed by an ongoing historical present that is constantly lived through, made and apprehended. Contrary to Berlant, there is a weight to the past in the transmission of affective histories – within and without the crisis of ordinary lives – that is not open to constant aesthetic and present re-inhabiting. Moreover, there exists a constrictive power of past histories lived, and not fully lived, which is more than Berlant acknowledges, that is, the weight of the past and the constrictive power of past histories, as I explain below, and thus the Catholic Church's take on the gift of Catholic faith given to the Americas as part of the early evangelization of the New World.

¹⁰ One of the best examples of this work is A. Dal Lago, *Non-persone: l'esclusione dei Migranti in una Società Globale*. Milano: Feltrinelli 2004.

¹¹ Championed by authors such as Walter Dignolo, Fernando Coronil, Arturo Escobar, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Anibal Quijano.

lay/secular migrant analytical divide. The lay and religious gendered labouring of faith is central to an Atlantic Return of Catholicism to the 'heart' of Europe.

The Place of the (Catholic) Human

I have explained elsewhere the need to engage with the study of the Roman Catholic Church as a passionate machine and to reflect on 'historical forms of Roman Catholic pastoral power, its logic of power based on the confessional mode, its fostering of the "inner" depth of adherents, and the emergence of modern forms of technologies of governmentality'.¹² The Catholic Church mobilizes a type of governmentality and bureaucracy, which is not cold in a Weberian sense, but is animated by affects and passions. This governmentality in the history of missionization started with the marriage of the sword and the pen, and writing about others. Some do say that ethnography as a political discipline was born with missionization.¹³

Michel de Certeau in a wonderful passage of *The Writing of History* shows that missionary Christianity in the 16th century was involved in a catachrestic conundrum. Describing the account of Jean de Léry, a Calvinist Swiss missionary in Tupi/Guarani-populated Southern Brazil, de Certeau stresses that there were moments of impasse between the bodies and words of the natives, and the bodies and words of the missionary. Describing an indigenous ceremony which Léry witnesses, de Certeau engages beautifully with the catachrestic moment, the 'lack of translation' in which the signifier and signified do not come together, creating both a moment of impasse, and one of opening. That opening for de Certeau is potentially creative, partaking of 'unknown' bodily aesthetics. Talking about Léry's encounter with the Tupi/Guarani's ritual chanting, de Certeau writes:

In the jewel setting of the tale, native speech takes on the figure of a mission precious stone. It is the moment of ravishment, a stolen instant, and a purloined memory beyond the text....An absence of meaning opens a rift in time. Here the chant measures *heu, heuaure* or, further, *He', hua, hua* just as voice utters *re re*, or *tralala*. Nothing can be transmitted, conveyed or preserved. But immediately afterword, Léry appeals to this interpreter for several things he was unable to comprehend.¹⁴

¹² V. Napolitano and K. Norget, 'Economies of Sanctity' in *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts and Contemporary Worlds* (Special Issue on Economy of Sanctity and the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America) 5:3 (2011), 251–264: 256.

¹³ I refer here to the work of the Jesuit José de Acosta in 16th-century New Spain. For a discussion of these debates see the classic works of T. Todorov *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, New York: Harper & Row 1984; A. Pagden, *The Uncertainties of Empire: Essays in Iberian and Ibero-American Intellectual History*, Brookfield: Ashgate 1994; A. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*, New York: Cambridge University Press 1982; S. Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonders of the New World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992.

¹⁴ M. de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, New York: Columbia University Press 1988, 213.

Later in the text though, Léry reaches for a closure of signification on indigenous societies, their gendered bodies and the subjectivity of the missionary. Although the moment of rupture is an excess of the eroticized bodies of women, women's bodies are more than ever a very ambivalent vision; the native world, as a potentially diabolical cosmos, is declined in the feminine gender.¹⁵ Missionary life and writings are peppered with these awkward moments of not-knowing, followed by belated efforts at hermeneutic closure, which then become a building block for the political agenda of Christianization. The effort is concerned with where to place the indigenous natives in terms of an ideal 'common humanity', while at the same time representing their embodiment of a phenomenology of emerging racialised and eroticized differences.

Central to the 16th-century tensions was the conundrum posed by Bartolomeo de las Casas, a Dominican Spanish friar, of possible Jewish *converso* descent, who settled first in Peru, and then, refusing the wealthy Bishopric of Cuzco, took up a more modest posting in Chiapas, Mexico. Bartolomeo de las Casas, through his *Historia de las Indias*, but especially in his *Short Accounts* (1542), engages with affinities of different cultural groups under the umbrella of a Catholic unitary origin of all human races.¹⁶ This common humanity becomes more of an ideal type beyond any specific cultural group termed 'Christian'. For de las Casas the Spanish Christians show, in some incidences, much more violent and genocidal behaviour than the soon-to-be converted and child-like natives. Natives and Europeans are natural kin rather than culturally different.

This perspective on humanity was still very much involved in the colonial, political rhetoric calling for the Spanish Crown to expand its endeavours in the New World. Bartolomeo de las Casas' dispute with Friar Juan Sepulveda, about the latter's defence of an opposing position that pointed to the sub-humanity of the natives, highlights a tension still present now. That is a vision of a universal human nature based on Catholic humanity, *vis-à-vis* a humanity embodied and produced by different racialized and gendered bodies. The latter, de Certeau has reminded us, is often highlighted in catachrestic translations, in the aesthetic moment of lacking, and/or of mis-translation.

Nonetheless the place of 'humanity' in Catholicism has been a long and complex rhetorical practice that has given political subjectivity to the Catholic Church. At its inception in the 16th century, it was not only a problem of relating the reduction of the particular (the phenomenology of the natives) to a conceptual generality (the idea of a common Catholic humanity), but a debate about a particular form of alterity that was potentially not alter-human, but sub-human. Since de las Casas came out as a 'winner' in the dispute with Sepulveda, the Catholic Church still struggles with the place of eroticized gendered bodies at the edges of this concept of humanity. In a way, the Tupi women dancing and singing are still lingering affective histories of the present. In the words of Von Vacano:

The paradox of the Spanish Empire is that while, on the one hand, it devastated, butchered and annihilated people on the ground, on the other hand its Catholic universalism allowed apologists of imperialist policy such as Las Casas to defend

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁶ D.A. Von Vacano, *The Color of Citizenship*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012, 5.

the idea that the natives should be incorporated into the fold of the Crown as human beings on a par with Europeans.¹⁷

But why is the continued presence within the Catholic Church, of tensions related to the notion of 'humanity' important now? And how do these tensions evoke current catachrestic intersections between religion, gender and post-coloniality? I would argue that primarily, but not exclusively, this is a question of labour, and of the gendered labouring of faith embedded in the articulation of affective forces of histories within Catholicism. This is in the light of the current need to re-evangelize the increased secular heart of Europe. Let me explain.

On the one hand, the Catholic Church at its hierarchical centre (*Curia Romana*) is still suspicious of immigration as affecting and polluting the centre of 'Western civilization'. Migrant Catholic associations may not be given access to 'precious', cultural heritage churches to meet in, for fear that they may not take good care of their artistic heritage, for example. This was the direct experience of the Latin American Mission in Rome at its early stages, when it was promised a better, larger, and more well-known parish in the neighbourhood of Trastevere, but was instead given a rather small, and originally rather run-down parish that had been closed to the public for some time. Migrants are seen, on the part of the Roman Curia, as spoiling the 'sacrality' of these spaces with their noise and the smell of their food. However, migrants are also the ones who, beyond tourists, animate those churches, which are often otherwise largely empty spaces. Thus migrants are seen as a precious return of blood, as they are wanted for their faith (and labour), but are at the same time, to some degree subtly despised as 'uncivilized' and threatening to the integrity of the *civitas* that Rome and its papal splendour have historically entailed.¹⁸

These tensions have to be read within a rapid demographic turn in Italy that has made the country shift from a country of emigration (up until the 1960s), to a country of immigration, where in 2013 more than 20% of every new-born has at least one immigrant parent. Secondly, migrant transnational Latin American labour in Italy is heavily feminized. The majority of female labourers come from mainly Peru and Ecuador, work in the caring industries, taking care either of children, or elderly people living on their own. There is high demand for this chain of transnational labour of care (what in Italian is called the figure of the *badante* from the verb *badare*, literally 'taking care'). The feminization of Latin American labour has also been present, not only in the junctures existing in the economic downturn in Rome, but also as a long-established labour pattern. In Italy this has not been helped by a lack of comprehensive immigration law reforms, and by an immigration strategy that has privileged *ius sanguinis* over *ius solis*.¹⁹ Immigration policies in Italy have been symptomatic responses

¹⁷ Von Vacano, *The Color of Citizenship*, 54.

¹⁸ This is a classic split analyzed from earlier neo-Marxist Foucauldian studies of US/Mexican transnational migration onwards, see the work by R. Rouse, 'Making Sense of Settlement: Class Transformation, Cultural Struggle, and Transnationalism among Mexican Migrants in the United States' in *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1:645 (1992), 25–52.

¹⁹ This is more than even a political and civil battle in Italy. In April 2013 the incoming government of Enrico Letta elected Mrs. Cécile Kyenge as the Minister of Integration. Within the first weeks of the election she expressed her wish to initiate as soon as possible

to the absence of long-term national and regional strategies in the welfare system toward life-course demographic changes, and to the increased presence of Italian women in the labour market at a reproductive life cycle phase. In Italy immigration *sanatoria*²⁰ have worked mainly as ad hoc and often inefficient responses to increasing demand for a low cost caring labour force. Many analyses have explored the complexity of the labour of love in transnational immigration, Italy being one of many comparative examples. Few, however, have looked at this question through an analytical lens which refrains from dividing lay and religious migrant labor.²¹ Gendered lay and religious migrant labour should not be analytically divided. There are differences of course, but also resonances between Latin American lay women and religious nuns who are working in present day Rome.

The Latin American Mission is coordinated by priests who belong to the 19th-century order of the Scalabrinians, the only one in the Catholic Church exclusively dedicated to caring for migrants. Different priests belonging to the order have moved into positions within the headquarters which oversee the pastoral care of the migrants in the Church of Santa Maria in Trastevere. While each of them has brought a different touch, all of them have stressed the sacrificial nature of the labour that Latin American women do in Italy. Yet there is an element of gendered experience that cannot be fully translated (or domesticated) into the trope of being a sacrificial carrier (for children and family back in Latin America).

Migrants do aspire to have erotic and affective lives that do not fit the model of the normative family: out of wedlock relations can and do proliferate among migrants. I have written elsewhere about how this relates to the body and the erotic impulses that are lived by migrants attending the Latin American Mission,

a legislative discussion that would promote *ius solis* as a road to Italian citizenship, particularly for children of first generation immigrants born in Italy. She was quickly rebuffed, however, by Enrico Letta, as speaking on personal grounds, rather than out of a ministerial interest. Even a discussion of potential changes to the law in the direction of immigration reform is seen as a minefield for the politically fragile new coalition government.

²⁰ This is a legal one-off amnesty for selected numbers of immigrant with 'illegal' status already living in the country. The most recent took place in 2012.

²¹ For an insight into the debate on the transnational labour of love, and the reshaping of regimes of intimacies in the global labour markets see: E. Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 'The "Hidden Side" of the New Economy: On Transnational Migration, Domestic Work, and Unprecedented Intimacy' in *Frontiers* 28: 3 (2007) and G. Pratt, *Families Apart: Migrant Mothers and the Conflicts of Labor and Love*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2012. See also A. Russell Hochschild, 'Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value' in W. Hutton and A. Giddens (eds.), *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, New York: Oxford University Press 2001. On this subject in Italy and Europe see M. Daly and J. Lewis, 'Introduction: Conceptualising Social Care in the Context of Welfare State Restructuring' in J. Lewis (ed.), *Gender, Social Care and Welfare State Restructuring in Europe*, Aldershot: Ashgate 1998, 1–24; J. Andall, *Gender, Migration and Domestic Service: The Politics of Black Women in Italy*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2000; C. Saraceno *Mutamenti della Famiglia e Politiche Sociali in Italia*, Bologna: Il Mulino 2003; F. Degiuli, 'A Job with No Boundaries: Home Elder-care Work in Italy' in *European Journal of Women's Studies* 14:3 (2007), 193–207.

as well as being very much present in the carnal devotional aesthetic of Catholicism, such as the devotion to the Sacred Heart:

Once in private, away from Catholic ritual performances, narratives of relations out of wedlock proliferate, as a constant reminder of the partial failure of the Church's evangelical discourse of family values – the haunting memory of a project of Catholic subjecthood and subjectivation which is never completed, and may never be. Hence the Sacred Heart is talked about, by some of the migrants who attend the church, as a vessel in which a sense of home is made present, but at the same time it is talked about by a part of the clergy as a reproduction of a particular Catholic *hogar* (household). Migrants' intimate sense of homely presence may not coincide with the social reproduction of a clerically-championed Catholic household.²²

While in the domain of out-of-wedlock relations, but within the nature of their practices of caring, many Latin American nuns have more in common with Latin American *badanti* than might be superficially apparent. Some come to their respective orders' headquarters in Rome, and end up taking care of older Italian sisters. The hope and fantasy of evangelizing new souls is often replaced by more than a few runs to the local chemist's counter. The nuns' battleground is to translate their vocation to a changing nature of the Catholic Church, and the changing demographics of vocations worldwide. A crisis of vocations in Europe and its nuns' aging population is a palpable crisis in Roman convents. In some cases Latin American nuns are called to Rome to take care of male orders, which see many of their aggregates coming to Rome to study or serve in some administrative positions. So while some of these nuns dream of coming to Rome to better their catechesis skills and training, they often end up taking care of other religious members. Their embodied experience is also about the catachresis of the *payback of evangelization*, intrinsic to an Atlantic Return. To explain this I need to turn briefly to an ethnographic encounter taking place at the Roman headquarters of the Mexican female order of O.J.S., an order formed in Mexico in 1924 and officially founded in 1937, with the call to assist a parallel, and already existing, male Mexican order.²³

This day in the convent, the same as every day, we prepare food for over thirty people. I start to bring down one of the many cases of food left by the weekly delivery on the ground floor. Marisol, a nun from Monterrey, gently approaches and whispers that I shouldn't do that chore. I am puzzled, but as a 'good' anthropologist I bring the crate back to where I found it. Still puzzled, I rinse the salad. Rosa giggles and with her northerner accent says, 'If we do it, the *padres* get used to it and that's it, they pretend they become used to us doing it.' Here are the tactics of gendered labour relations in practice. Mexican nuns and Latin American *badanti*: with veils or without, they all set up as well as trespass boundaries.

This gendered negotiation is a public secret among the clergy, and it is often portrayed to 'outsiders' in politically correct terms of female heroism. Padre Hector, a very intelligent and informed Mexican father who led the Comunidad

²² V. Napolitano, 'Of Migrant Revelations and Anthropological Awakenings' in *Social Anthropology* 15:1 (2007), 71–87: 82.

²³ I have chosen to withhold the names of all orders and their founders for reasons of confidentiality.

Católica Mexicana (a group originally part of the Latin American Mission, but now working separately) says:

The women are the strong hands in Mexico and so they are here as well. The religious sisters here live off their rents, but women here in Italy do not go into religious orders, so the orders receive new blood from Mexico. For example, in the order of the A.P., they now have six Mexican nuns in Ischia, and two in Castellamare and some in Rome's convent too. The same for the order of S. S. M. A. in Chioggia. Now they have vocations in Chioggia who are running the convent, who are from Veracruz! The Italian nuns are very old. This *el pago de la evangelización* [payback of evangelization], these nuns come back with the gospel. The more middle-class nuns in Mexico go to orders that are expert in education, but the others who are from more working class [backgrounds] often end up here, to take care of the older Italian sisters. They are heroic nuns.

But where there is heroism there is often war. The evening before I leave the convent, Madre Consuelo, the superior of the house, shares what has been burdening her. She closes the door – they are at war. War is permeating these walls, not only dampness. It's an historic war. They call it the negotiation of labour between diocesans and religious orders, and between gendered religious orders. They are at war with the *padres* of the house. She would like to negotiate a new and better 3-year contract with them, but her superior in Mexico 'doesn't want to hear.' Her superior does not know the real prices of *zapatos* [shoes] in Rome, and Mother Consuelo has to juggle with book-keeping.

So Consuelo has told the nuns to take their time in doing the chores, to not iron too fast, to leave the mess the fathers may leave on display for longer, and to take time to study and eat more leisurely together. These are fallen words for a few of the nuns, who do not slow down but Consuelo is clear that doing too much weakens their collective labour position, and creates too much 'wrong' love – *el amor tonto* (stupid love), in the nun's words. This 'wrong' love is one expression of the complex histories of care and self-less devotion to the well-being of others. There is a catachrestic tension here around the meaning of love, the gift of faith and the payback of evangelization. The meaning of vocational, religious love is opened up, and pushed beyond given hermeneutic limits; it is too a space of crisis. The relation between the payback of evangelization, the religious sisters' love and their loving labour practices is ridden by an (ex)tension, an inadequate framing, that Hawthorne points to in her paper in this volume, that is the tension between the categorization and value codings of religion and gender. In this sense the gendered critique that Consuelo and other sisters generate on love, in tension with a long history of evangelization and a current history of transnational migration, is the product of the 'historical facticity of colonialisms and their afterlives'.²⁴ Catholic nuns are part of a transnational circuit of religious labour that on the one hand consolidate the *afán apostólico*²⁵ that Benedict XVI²⁶

²⁴ S. Hawthorne, 'Displacements: Religion, Gender, and the Catachrestic Demand of Postcoloniality' in *Religion and Gender* 3:2 (2013).

²⁵ 'Apostolic eagerness' are the words spoken by Pope Benedict XVI at the 2011 Celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Saint Peter, for the Bicentenary of a few Latin America countries' Independence.

²⁶ This research covers the period between 2005 and 2011, and thus does not reference the unanticipated resignation of Benedict XVI on the 28th February 2013. There is of

evoked, while at the same time undermining it. Maybe not exactly as Tupi natives, and inhabiting their monastic skins and habits in a different way, the Atlantic return of this labour nonetheless challenges a simple reading of gender resistance too. There are different forms of love involved, but also different forms of the labouring of faith. While transnational migrant women are represented by priests working in the Latin American Mission as sacrificial carriers who take care of other (Italian) families, nonetheless they do not fully embrace this representative vessel of love and care. Migration for them is at moments also a history of family betrayals and a fantasy and potential for an out-of-wedlock erotic sphere. In parallel, transnational nuns do not fully comply either with what is expected from them by superiors, or male religious counterparts. They may challenge, in unexpected moments and forms, what they see as a blind and stupid form of love.

In a well-known encyclical Benedict XVI argues that *agape*-love is what should compose the nature of newly ethically-engaged citizenships, and be at the base of renewed and more just economies. The Church is very much an important global political subject that is re-imagining the relation between productivity and love. Re-imagining the heart of the state, through subsidiary acts, not only of voluntarism but of *agape*-love, becomes an explicit political and ethical agenda in post-secular societies.²⁷ The underpinning of Catholicism with social democracies is nothing new, and is definitely not on the wane, but is more than ever on the rise. In Benedict XVI's words:

This situation has led to the birth and the growth of many forms of cooperation between State and Church agencies, which have borne fruit. Church agencies, with their transparent operation and their faithfulness to the duty of witnessing to love, are able to give a Christian quality to the civil agencies too, favouring a mutual coordination that can only redound to the effectiveness of charitable service. Numerous organizations for charitable or philanthropic purposes have also been established and these are committed to achieving adequate humanitarian solutions to the social and political problems of the day. Significantly, our time has also seen the growth and spread of different kinds of volunteer work, which assume responsibility for providing a variety of services.²⁸

But this labouring of love that Benedict XVI expands upon is traversed by tensions. It is not part of a single 'universal' humanity, but is embraced, fought over, and queried by different racialized bodies, and in different phenomenologies of lay and religious everyday life, with an *eros* both within and without of wedlock. The *agape*-love does not belong to an ideal type of human in a Weberian sense (and in Benedict XVI's sense too, I would argue), but is a situated, embodied expression. This situatedness of *agape*-love is shared with *eros*-love; both are communicative practises.²⁹

course much to be written about migration, the Atlantic Return and Pope Francis, the first ever Argentinian and Jesuit Pope, which I can only but signal here.

²⁷ A. Muehlebach, *The Moral Neoliberal: Welfare and Citizenship in Italy*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2012.

²⁸ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 2006, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html. Accessed 20th February 2013.

²⁹ *Eros*-love (as *agape*-love) can be read as a communicative practice and a remaking of moral subjectivities that are lived in the light of the presence of love as an event in the

If we may return to Bartolomeo de las Casas, one question at stake here in a post-secular society underpinned by Catholicism (such as Italy, for example), is that transnational migrants and European 'natives' may well be culturally different, but *the former still needs constantly to be made good, natural kin* – through caring, and productive labour within the intimacy of Italian families/convents. In this sense an Atlantic Return is to a certain extent neo-colonial. But this is not the whole story.

Catholic Pedagogies and Coloniality

An Atlantic Return is and is not part of a process of de-colonization too. Nelson Maldonado-Torres, developing a concept of the coloniality of being – meaning the inquiry into the existential modalities of the *damnées*, the wretched of the earth, so to speak – has argued that the colonizing of the Americas was not a local event but a model of lived power, and that earlier in this history of encounter, humanity as concept was imbued with a hermeneutic of suspicion.³⁰ The conquest was a complex terrain of feminization of the natives both as a symbolic domination and as an exploitation of women's labour.³¹ For Maldonado-Torres then, the process of decolonization or *des-generación*, as he also calls it, is about restoring a logic of the gift through a politics of 'receptive generosity', and the opening of one's self to the racialized other to the point of substitution.

The *damnées* of the earth, the socially excluded, the invisible or the excessively visible, become for him the important constitutive nexus for this radical opening of recognition through an economy of the gift. In his words:

Substitution occurs when one's identity is teleologically suspended and when one offers one's life to the task of achieving decolonial justice: that is, a justice oriented by the trans-ontological dimension of the human. Decolonial justice opposes the preferential option for imperial Man by the preferential option for the *damné* or condemned of the earth. Such justice is inspired by a form of love which is also decolonial. 'Decolonial love' – a concept coined and developed by the Chicana theorist Chela Sandoval – gives priority to the trans-ontological over the claims of ontology. Decolonization and 'des-gener-acción' are the active products of decolonial love and justice. They aim to restore the logics of the gift through a decolonial politics of receptive generosity.³²

His argument is part of a wider debate on the remainders of coloniality in present day post-colonial and post-Fordist formations.³³ Anibal Quijano has rightly noted that coloniality is a lens through which we understand the present existence of ideologies, materialities and dispositions in race and labour

world (J. Zigon 'On Love: Remaking Moral Subjectivity in Postrehabilitation Russia' in *American Ethnologist* 40:1 (2013), 201–215.

³⁰ N. Maldonado-Torres, 'On the coloniality of being' in *Cultural Studies* 21:2–3 (2007), 240–270: 244.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 246.

³² *Ibid.*, 260, 261.

³³ I refer here in particular to the work of L.G. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, Durham: Duke University Press 2011.

relations that were shaped in colonial encounters, but that have 'survived' the end of colonial empires in new post-colonial formations.³⁴ He argues that Otherness and Sameness have been, and still are, central to the reproduction of inequalities in Atlantic terrains from the conquest of America onwards, especially as a hegemonic form of knowing. Moreover, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez has rightly noticed that the housework of undocumented Latin American migrant women in private households is a 'living' labour constantly permeated by affective registers that upset easy hierarchical distinctions of master/slave, but also open up the possibility of alternative, gendered ways of being – and of being convivial, of relating to each other.³⁵ In this sense, transnational affective labour can also be part of a process of de-colonization, by opening other potential ways of being with each other.

Coloniality is then about embodied knowledge, but also about subtle returns of affective histories – the Church's anxieties about a never-ending project of full conversion to, and a desire for an increased apostolate for, Catholicism. Migrants need to become the living blood for the *new evangelization* – the new missionaries so to speak. In Benedict XVI's words, once the same Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron Saint of the Americas, is celebrated in Rome, it drives this *afán apostólico*. Coloniality is also about a return and reinforcement of a traditionalist wing of the church at the heart of Rome *at the same time* that this return migration acts as a decentring of the Catholic heart of Europe.³⁶

Whether part of a coloniality of being, or part of an opposite process of decolonization, the nature of the intersection of gender, transnational labour, Catholic faith and the payback of evangelization shows that the Atlantic Return is not a simple selfless economy of the gift, as Maldonado seems to imply. Jonathan Parry has argued that the gift economy is always part of capitalist encounters.³⁷ The economy of the gift is always an economy that is set up based on un-reciprocal standards and obligations that assert hierarchical forms of social prestige.³⁸ In this context, a pure Catholic gift (of labour and faith) does not exist, certainly not amongst some of the Mexican nuns in Rome, nor among many of the women who attend the Latin American Mission, who do not comply with the image of sacrificial carrier, but create erotic and affective ties which do not fall into a Catholic normative idea of family. They are nonetheless the new blood of evangelization in what is perceived as an increasingly secular Europe: they are not fully the 'good' gendered subjects that many of the Scalabrinian priests wish them to be, nor are they selfless nuns who subscribe to a 'wrong' love. The process of 'conversion' is still ambiguously an open-ended one within this Atlantic Return.

Morny Joy has called to attention a gendered historicity of the gift that is not a mere context, but a dialogical setting that 'opens' up rather than being at the

³⁴ A. Quijano, 'Coloniality and modernity/rationality' in *Cultural Studies* 21:2–3 (2007), 168–178.

³⁵ See Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2011 'Politics of affects, Transversal conviviality', <http://eicpc.net/transversal/0811/gutierrezrodriguez/en>, accessed 31st May 2013.

³⁶ See Napolitano, *Migrant Hearts and the Atlantic Return*.

³⁷ J. Parry, 'The Gift, the Indian Gift and the 'Indian Gift' in *Man* 21:3 (1986), 453–473.

³⁸ J. Pitts-Rivers 'The Place of Grace in Anthropology' in *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 1:1 (2011), 423–450: 437, 442.

mercy of circumstances. The heterogeneity of the gift contains always its own negation: 'The gift as the sign of ultimate gratuitousness still remains an intangible moment of heterogeneity in a culture that, despite its convoluted escape mechanisms, cannot honestly confront its repressive controlling impulses.'³⁹ Hence the question we should ask, while exploring the political economies that sustain and are exposed by catachrestic moments of mistranslation, is not so much whether a 'receptive generosity' is a liberatory path at the core of an economy of the gift – as is potentially evoked or enlivened in gendered religious fields of Latin American Catholic migration to Rome – but how economies of the gift disguise profoundly non-redistributive affective forms of exchange as well as intangible moments of irreducibility and catachresis, in this case around affective histories of labour, faith and the payback of evangelization. This is because the uncanny payback of evangelization is part of the economy of an original gift of faith to the Americas, uncanny because it is a realm of familiar and too-familiar return to a primal encounter of evangelization. The transnational labour of caring in Rome, analysed through a Catholic lens, should not only be studied through a 'secular' affective quality attached to female, racialized transnational labour, but through a post-secular analytical lens seen also as part of an economy of the gift of faith, as a payback of evangelization. Moreover, an economy of the gift and its catachrestic moments of 'wrong' love or not knowing where to leave crates of food, once delivered, allow us to see another aspect of the process of the *new evangelization*, so central to the current Catholic Church's internal renovation worldwide. The new evangelization requires transnational Latin American migrants to be the 'new apostles' of Catholicism in a Europe perceived as increasingly secular. The weight of the payback of evangelization as well as the dynamics of the new evangelization are part of a same economy of the gift, rooted in the labour of transnational lay and religious women. Transnational migration here, when analysed through the angle of an Atlantic Return and a gift of faith, is then permeated by a history of grace and awe, but also erotic excesses and lack of compliance to the 'wrong' sort of love. Hence, in different permutations the Tupi/Guarani gendered aesthetic moments of catachresis, of lack-of-translation that de Certeau described so well, are in a way still with us in the gendered realm of the Catholic faith's payback of evangelization.

³⁹ M. Joy 'Beyond the Given and the all-Giving: Reflections on Women and the Gift' in *Australian Feminist Studies* 14:30 (1999), 315–332: 330.