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Moralized Mobilities. A Multi-scalar Analysis of the Role of Religion in Migrant Care Work

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The globalization of care work constitutes a major equality issue in contemporary societies. Although the relevance of religion and morality in constructing/organizing migrant care work (MCW) is acknowledged, their role remains undertheorized, and the debate has mainly centered on secular actors/processes. Yet organized religions carry specific gender/ethnic projects and are concerned with regulating social reproduction. Based on a critical literature review spanning different historical periods, contexts, and faiths, we develop a conceptual framework serving a multi-scalar analysis of the role of religion in MCW. We focus on the interconnections between macro-level transnational religious networks promoting care mobilities, meso-level religion regimes shaping MCWs' inclusion into national labor markets, and micro-level work practices. The concept of "moralized care mobilities" captures the multi-level and ambivalent role of religion(s) in upholding traditional gender regimes and in enabling and constraining pathways to MCW mobility, providing resources for empowerment but also sanctifying social inequalities.

Key words: migrant care work; multi-scalar analysis; religion; morality; religion regimes; gender regimes; moralized care mobilities.

Over the past twenty-five years, a wealth of research has pointed to the global "outsourcing" of care work.[1] In affluent societies, privileged households purchase lowly paid care services from migrant women (and men), who in turn rely on lower-wage care workers in the home countries to look after "left behind" kin (Misra, Woodring, and Merz 2006). Nurses' transnational recruitment raises concerns for sending states' health systems, undermining equal access to care provision in these contexts (Gallo 2023; John and

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Wichterich 2023; Thompson and Walton-Roberts 2018). This globalization of care is a key equality issue in contemporary societies and a relevant context in which to analyze the gendered implications of neoliberal capitalism, as global hierarchies play out in the most intimate spaces (Anderson 2000; Parreñas 2001; Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a,b; Kofman and Raghuram 2015; Michel and Peng 2017).

Religion[2] importantly shapes the globalization of care. Since the late nineteenth century, European faith-based organizations have trained and promoted care workers' transnational migration (Rastén 2019; Yeates 2009). Across the world, religion enhances or hinders migrant care workers' (henceforth MCWs) access to the labor market and shapes the internal stratification of the job (Ahmad 2011; De Regt 2009; Gallo and Scrinzi 2017). Religious organizations provide MCWs with spiritual and material support (Moors *et al.* 2008), and church-based organizations such as Caritas Internationalis are also relevant international players in promoting MCWs' rights (Caritas Internationalis 2012). The International Labour Organization emphasizes how religion is grounds for discrimination in the job and advocates that contracts consider MCWs' faith-related requirements to ensure religious freedom (ILO 2011).

Furthermore, care work has specific moral connotations: morality is intended here as a culturally informed set of "thick values and norms" (Wong 2014, 362) and "obligatory concerns" (Dahl 2023, 54) shaping the relation between care providers and care beneficiaries/employers. In this "moral economy of care" (Näre 2011, 397), work-related activities—often carried out in the private sphere of the home—are ethically embedded in values emphasizing interdependence and altruism, as opposed to the economic-oriented, amoral, and individualistic nature of the market. Work relations are importantly infused with moral values (bad versus good, honest versus dishonest) and by a care ethic emphasizing the employee's sacrifice and the employer's humanitarianism. Morality constructs care work in personalist terms and obscures contractual relations, relegating it into the "private" domain (Anderson 2000; Osborne 2012; Sahraoui 2019). In defining codes of conduct that are differently endorsed by individuals, groups, or society, morality can draw from heterogeneous repertoires, such as customs and traditions, authority-dependent relations, or religion (Gert and Gert 2025). While we acknowledge the multiple bases of morality and recognize that morality and religion are not the same thing (Gert and Gert 2025), we focus on the role that religion plays in the moralization of care as a key, and understudied, social force. The influence of religion in shaping workplace morality is acknowledged in Weberian studies of business corporations (Benefiel, Fry, and Geigle 2014) and, rarely, of nursing (Byrne, Morton, and Dahling 2011). Instead, scant attention is paid to what Nicola Yeates (2011, 90) terms the "enmeshment of the secular and the religious" in the globalization of care and—we add—to the role that gender plays in the process. Näre's (2011, 397) research illuminates the "moral

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economy of care" while discarding the role of religion in culturally framing care work ethics. Furthermore, Näre's work mainly considers morality at micro-level work relations, overlooking the significance of morality/religion for national policies and MCWs' transnational mobility. As noted by Annelies Moors (2003, 393–94) the "covert cultural-religious notions submerged in normative ideas about care labour, family and domesticity" have remained largely unaddressed in studies of MCW.

The religion–morality nexus therefore lacks a comprehensive conceptualization in debates on the globalization of care. Considering this discloses the possibility of complementing the dominant approach centered on neoliberal welfare capitalism and laboring subjects, with an attention paid to non-state actors and the sociocultural norms underpinning care work relations. We move from the assumption that religion's importance goes beyond its role of providing transnational networks facilitating "secular" care labor migration. Indeed, religions actively shape MCW mobilities, policies, and employment relations. In order to fully grasp the significance of gender in globalization, we consider organized global religions as key polities[3] concerned with regulating social reproduction and the family and carrying specific gender and ethnic projects (Walby 2009). Organized religions enforce such projects by exerting a moral authority, through political pressure on states, and by sanctioning believers who diverge from religious doctrine. To what extent, and in what forms, do these processes shape the globalization on MCW? In addressing this question, we take into account that the relationship between religion and morality is context-sensitive (McKay and Whitehouse 2015) and consider both a formal dimension of morality, intrinsic in normative prescription, and a material one, related to these prescriptions' language/contents (cf. Wong 2014). In our analysis, morality's formal/material dimensions address religions' macro/meso-level role in legitimizing workers' transnational mobility and inclusion into national labor markets through a gendered normative framing of MCW. We add a phenomenological dimension: this refers to how MCWs and employers differently engage with religiously informed morality in the micro-politics of everyday working lives, to construct/negotiate social boundaries.

Engaging with these debates, we develop a conceptual framework sustaining an analysis of religion in the globalization of care. We originally expand Fiona Williams's (2018, 547; 2021) framework to shed light on the role of religion in moralizing care work across three intersecting scales: macro-processes underpinning the "transnational political economy of care," the meso-level of national governance of MCW, and the micro-dynamics of work relations. The multi-scalar embeddedness of care holds both a horizontal dimension—related to transnational connections/movements—and a vertical one, linking the global with the national and local in both directions (Michel and Peng 2017; Mahon 2024). Religion similarly operates as a social force cutting across the public/private divide, ranging from transnational organizations to national institutions and to micro-level lived experiences.

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By doing this, we accomplish a double task. On the one hand, we complement existing micro-level analyses of the moral underpinnings of MCW, by paying attention to faith and spirituality in the workplace. On the other, we connect micro-level negotiations of MCW to transnational and national-level processes of the globalization of care, showing how the moralization of care at one scale is shaped by, and in turn informs, the other ones. In examining the relationship between religion and MCW across the public/private divide, we link the analysis of the public/institutional forms of religion with a "lived religion" approach (Williams 2010), which considers migrants as gendered actors engaging with the embodied expressions of religion in their work (Gallo 2024; Moors 2003). As such, a multi-scalar perspective on religion in the globalization of care thus allows a more comprehensive gendered analysis of MCW.

After a methodological section, the article presents our multi-scalar framework and then moves to a detailed discussion of religion across the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of the globalization of care. This leads us to discuss our notion of "moralized care mobilities," conceptualizing how religion connects the three scales. The conclusion provides indications for further research and policy.

Methodology

We inductively draw from a critical review of extant English-language studies of MCW, relying on secondary analytical sources as well as on our own empirical findings, which we locate within the field (Fink 2005). Our review of the literature adopts both an integrative and a thematic strategy. First, the integrative strategy critically identifies a research puzzle—in our case the religion–morality nexus in MCW—to assess all studies that explicitly or implicitly address it, to generate a new perspective on it (Torracro 2005). We employed an interdisciplinary approach—covering studies in sociology, anthropology, history, social work, psychology, and social geography—based on three large literature databases (Scopus, Web of Science, and JSTOR). We adopted three criteria: *relevance* (reference—in the title, abstract and/or main text—to the association between "care", "domestic work", "reproductive labor", "nursing", "healthcare" with "religion", "faith", "morality", and "spirituality"); *religious diversity* (refining the research through direct reference to different faiths and religious denominations); and *context diversity* (considering MCW's mobility within and across the Global North and the South). The last two criteria were key to expanding our analysis beyond the dominant focus on the United States/Europe and Christianity.

Second, data emerging from the integrative literature review were thematically organized around the three dimensions of transnational processes (macro), national regimes/policies (meso), and work relations (micro). Adopting these dimensions allowed us to reinterpret prior research through a

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multi-scalar lens (cf. Tonette and Plakhotnik 2008) and to focus on each scale separately before analyzing the crosscutting interconnections. This process included a reassessment of our earlier/ongoing empirical research, as we both have over twenty years of in-depth qualitative (joint and individual) research experience on MCW (Gallo 2024; Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a,b; Scrinzi 2010; Scrinzi 2013).

The multi-scalar role of religion in the globalization of care

We identify the multi-scalar role of religion along the following lines (fig. 1). At the macro level, "the transnational political economy of care involves care labour movements and practices, care capital, care commitments and political actors" (Williams 2018, 550). This addresses global capitalist dynamics involved in care governance and mobilities, specifically the wealthier nations' tendency to relieve their social reproductive costs by outsourcing care to MCWs, who function as an alternative to public care provision (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Huang et al. 2012). We consider, at this level, how religious institutions/networks operate as stakeholders in the global governance of care: by facilitating labor global mobility and the development of transnational connections between faith organizations supporting migrants, by pressing international communities for more progressive legislation to protect MCWs, and by orienting households' transnational strategies. We look at how, in turn, migration generates religiously informed care connections across the globe.

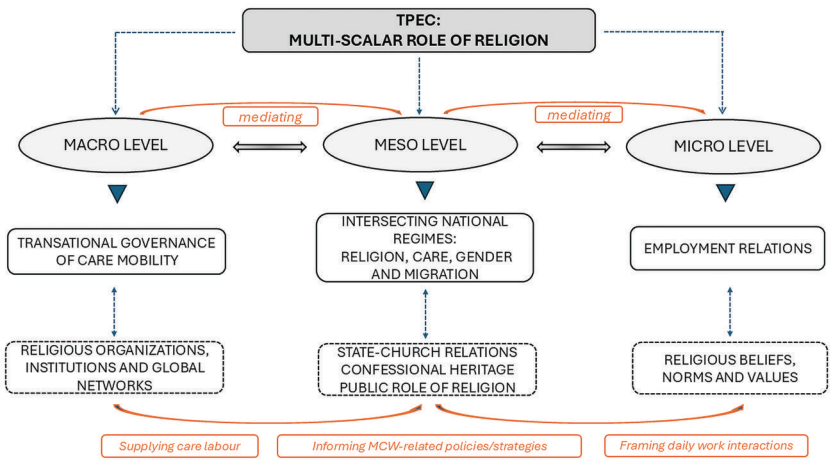

Figure 1. Authors' re-elaboration of Williams's (2018) multi-scalar framework incorporating religion in the analysis of the transnational political economy of care (TPEC).

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At the meso level, we consider nationally specific and interrelated care, migration, and employment regimes. Regimes are intended as "clusters" (Williams 2021, 2012, 371) of institutions, historical legacies, social relations, state policies, and representations surrounding care, migration, and employment. Care regimes involve welfare and labor market restructuring and are closely intertwined with gender regimes. These refer to policies and practices ordering the gendered division of (paid/unpaid) work across the public/private divide. Employment regimes define national labor policies, including the neoliberal casualization of work. Migration regimes relate to legislation governing majority/minority group relations, which are shaped by colonial legacies insofar as they are associated with gendered racialization and whiteness repertoires (Anthias 1998; Marchetti 2014). Williams terms the cross-national diversity and intersection between regimes "converging variations" (Williams 2012, 390): this institutional dimension of interlinked regimes importantly mediates macro-level processes and bridges them with micro-level practices. We incorporate into Williams's approach the notion of religion regimes, which include state–church/religion relations, confessional heritage, and the role religion plays outside confessional domains (Bonjour and Lettinga 2012). Together with secularism, religion shapes dominant narratives of national belonging and the ways in which immigrant/minority faiths are accommodated. Furthermore, religion regimes hold heteronormative assumptions and govern people's lives by supporting some gender projects while countering others. In Europe, established Christian Churches have responded to major changes in social reproduction and the gendered division of work generated by industrialization by shaping welfare policies around traditional family values (Morgan 2006; Woodhead 2007).

At the micro level lie the complex interpersonal encounters between MCWs and care receivers/employers, saturated with intersectional inequalities (Kofman and Raghuram 2015). Here, we focus on how religious beliefs, norms, and values inform the experiences and meanings of care relations and workplace cultures at the interplay with other layers of inequality and on how care work relations/skills are interpreted through the lens of religiously informed morality. Drawing on a "lived religion" (Williams 2010) approach emphasizing everyday-life faith uses beyond institutional sites, we capture how religion provides individuals with a structure of meaning to make sense of mundane work relations.

Macro-level: global religions and the transnational governance of care mobilities

Religious institutions/networks have historically facilitated care labor supply from the colonies toward Europe and across the Global South (Göel 2023; Marchetti 2014). We suggest how the macro-level importance of religion in

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MCW articulates around three interconnected roles of global religions: as transnational brokers of care mobilities, often driven by a global evangelization agenda; as global promoters of religiously inflected (racialized and gendered) cultures and representations of care, centered on moralized notions of religious affinity; and as ethical guarantors of accepted gendered values/conducts in the transnational migratory space. This well emerges with respect to Christianity and, to some extent, Islam (fig. 2).

Since the late nineteenth century, Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant missionary organizations in Europe, South/Southeast Asia, and Latin America have mobilized working-class women within feminized care work migration flows toward other colonies and the Global North (Higman 2014; Yeates 2009), promoting femininity models valuing societal reproductive needs (Gallo 2016; Magat 2007). The case of Ireland is telling: the Catholic Church promoted the migration of Irish nuns across America, Asia, and Australasia, to work in colonial hospitals (Alonso-Garbayo and Maben 2009; Yeates 2009), thereby forging connections that shape Ireland's recruitment of nurses from the Philippines and India today. In a partly similar line, the post-Vatican II Council (1962) Catholic Church officially reasserted the importance of fostering connections with Asian contexts where Christianity played a demographically and socially significant role. Since then, Catholic institutions have fostered the recruitment of nuns, nurses, and domestic workers to be directed toward Italy and Europe, thereby filling a double demand in terms of religious vocations and (health) care workers (Gallo 2005; 2016). Over time, Christian organizations have constructed care jobs in moralized terms, ascribing MCWs with gendered positive stereotyping, as decent or trustworthy, to valorize their

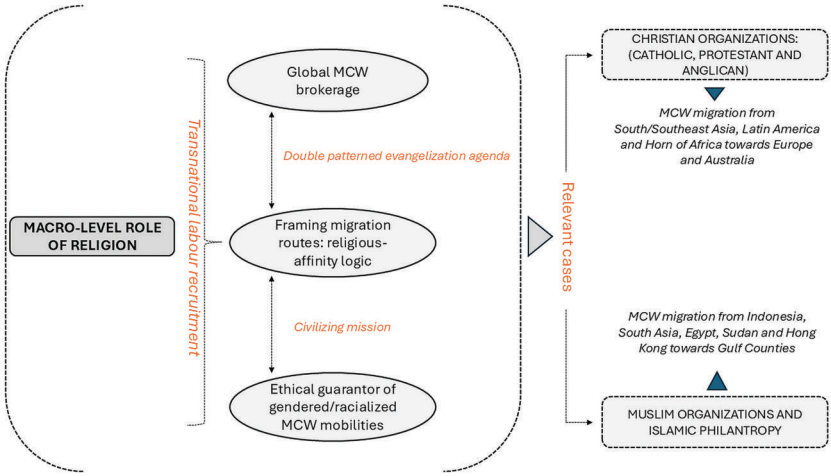

Figure 2. Macro-level role of religion in the TPEC with analyzed cases/countries (authors' elaboration).

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subalternity (Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a,b; Kurien 2002; Thompson and Walton-Roberts 2018). In this context, care workers were racialized because the interpersonal encounter between the employees and their "morally superior" White/non-migrant employers was seen as a means of civilization (Haskins and Sen 2002; Martinez et al. 2020). This strategy was promoted at both ends of migrations by religious/laic actors within the Catholic Church to reassure MCWs, their families, and prospective employers about the appropriateness of migration opportunities (Gallo and Scrinzi 2021). While this largely involved women MCWs, our research also unravels how the process also included racialized "Asian men" (Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a): assumed "common Christianity" constituted a repertoire to construct male MCWs as feminized subjects, thereby promoting a colonially informed association between respectable migrant masculinity and de-masculinization (Gallo and Scrinzi 2019, 2017; Scrinzi 2010). Christianity symbolically sanitized MCWs' "indigenous masculinity" by celebrating moral codes of monogamy and household respectability, turning racialized men into trustable care workers.

Religious organizations developed transnational MCW connections also to support a double-patterned evangelization agenda (Napolitano 2016; Sarti 2001). They first expanded Christianity from Europe to the colonies through religious conversion and care work training, to serve the colonial states' needs. They subsequently developed postcolonial MCW recruitment/training toward the Global North, looking at workers as agents of "inverse evangelization." In Italy, Eastern Christian Churches in South/Southeast Asia, alongside Catholic Churches in Latin America, constitute important basins for the recruitment of MCWs. They further represent sites of racialized religiosity which could inspire the revitalization of Catholicism, counterbalancing secularization (Gallo 2016; Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a,b; Scrinzi 2008, 2010). In Southern European countries, where Catholic institutions overall play a key role in integrating public healthcare provisions, the intertwined demands for religious vocations and for healthcare labor have been met since the 1960s by Asian, and subsequently Latina American, women. Trained as novices/nurses, migrant women worked as cleaners/carers in religious orders and in private Catholic healthcare structures (Gallo 2023). Christian migrant nurses and domestic workers are often deemed by religious institutions to inspire care work with religious values and to inspire declining "European" family cultures and the workplace with renewed religious values (Gallo 2023; Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a,b). At the same time, class inequalities and racial discrimination lay at the core of a double hierarchy of dependency between native and foreign nuns/nurses, as well as between native Catholic Italian employers and Catholic migrant workers. Like in the colonial past, racialized migrant nuns working as nurses often constitute the "ultimate flexible workforce" (Yeates 2011: 80), expected by religious congregations to perform "dirty work" and often exposed to humiliating and degrading working conditions within and beyond religious institutions (Gallo 2024). Furthermore, while until the 1990s, the cost of

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professional training was met by Italian Catholic educational institutions, in the last twenty years, this has been outsourced to sending contexts, generating a heightened brain drain. In Spain, Latin American, and South/Southeast Asia, religious organizations continue to train and place working-class young women as MCWs, based on an ethic of servitude and a conservative gender and class ideology (Magat 2007). Existing studies confirm the importance of transnational Christian networks beyond Catholicism, by highlighting the role of Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches in Southeast Asia and Latin America in connecting MCWs with Southern Europe and in reproducing a colonial ideology representing them as subservient (Liebelt 2011; Williams 2008).

Beyond Christianity, Muslim organizations engage in the macro-level governance of MCW by orienting transnational migration flows along values of religious compatibility, and moralizing MCWs' family/community duties. For instance, Islamic philanthropic organizations in Indonesia expanded the scope of *zakat* (the charity obligation expected of believers) to include emigrated Muslim MCWs. They also set up branches in destination countries such as Hong Kong to cater for MCWs who, unlike migrant women in Middle Eastern countries, are deemed to be exposed to the potential influence of non-Islamic religions (Latief 2017). Similarly to Christian organizations, although with less centralized structures, Islam acts as moral guarantor for female MCWs, who could be exposed to faith unorthodoxy and/or to immoral behavior by their transnational mobility. Moreover, religious institutions/networks ensure that female MCWs remain reliable in sending remittances, as proofs of family devotion and conformity to "proper" transnational motherhood (Ahmad 2017; Constable 2010). Based on their moral authority, religious institutions/networks confer respectability to and legitimate (female) transnational mobility, or may stigmatize it, in the eyes of the family/society. They promote migration into the centers of Christian or Islamic orthodoxy—like Southern Europe or the Gulf countries—and exposure to "true faith" as strategies mitigating the gendered deskilling/downward social mobility involved in MCW (Ahmad 2011; Gallo 2016).

Overall, our analysis on the macro-level role of religion in moralizing MCW unravels a persistent colonial legacy and points to the gendered and racialized contours of global religions. In the latter, we include both past dependency relations based on former colonial domination (i.e. recruitment of MCWs from South Asia in the United Kingdom, from Latin America in Spain, from the Horn of Africa in Italy), and the broader application of a colonial logic based on care extractivism from the Global South. Gulf immigration policies too exhibit characteristics of postcolonial forms of exploitation (Alnuaimi 2022). These policies perpetuate power imbalances echoing the colonial structures that have shaped global MCW flows for centuries. This colonial legacy emerges at two interrelated levels. First, from the role of religions in promoting global labor movements along lines of (reformed) religious affinity between MCWs and the home/immigration society. This makes MCWs'

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mobility socially more acceptable and enhances the role of religious organizations as transnational brokers in care work provision/consumption. Second, this becomes visible from the role of religions in forging care around gendered notions of valorized and racialized subalternity: religions ambivalently naturalize MCWs' work and skills and prescribe their adherence to transnational kin commitment as a way to prove faith. The religious moralization of MCWs further emerges in global evangelization dynamics underpinning labor mobility. Across interrelated migration ends, religion infuses care work with faith revitalization aims. In turn, care work provides organized religions with the possibility to bring faith into intimate—and assumedly mundane—workspaces. In doing so, global religions persist today in their historical role of governing care migration routes that might potentially challenge the traditional gender order.

Meso-level: national regimes of religion and MCW

We conceptualize religion's meso-level role by referring to a double dimension of MCW governance. First, in both religious and secular states, religious organizations directly engage in the national governance of MCW: they lobby state institutions with a view to uphold their gender (and ethnic) projects, shaping policies and public discourses on care. Second, they act as gatekeepers of MCW, mediating between care labor offer/demand, while also advocating for workers' rights and supporting them in the face of economic, health, and legal vulnerabilities. In so doing, they construct MCW in gendered and racialized ways.

Religion and the national governance of MCW

We note how, across migration contexts, the governance of MCW relies on a mutuality of (or tension between) interests between the state and religious organizations, the latter often—but not necessary—representing majority faith traditions (fig. 3).

In both Muslim- and Christian-majority emigration countries, religiously informed narratives depict MCWs as irresponsible women leaving their families for economic gain and promiscuous relationships abroad. In Ethiopia, Muslim Wahabi leaders oppose the governments' strategy of exporting MCWs to secure remittances, actively supporting MCWs' return migration (Fernandez 2014). In Indonesia, the government deploys a Muslim morality in exporting MCWs. When the number of female emigrants skyrocketed in the 1980s, the state fostered religiously informed gendered ideologies on proper migrant destinations. Migrant women's unconventional earning power was legitimated on the grounds that MCW constituted acceptable "feminine" employment, particularly for Muslim Gulfan employers (Hirano 2015; Silvey 2006). Yet the Indonesian Ulama Council has enacted Islamic legal opinions

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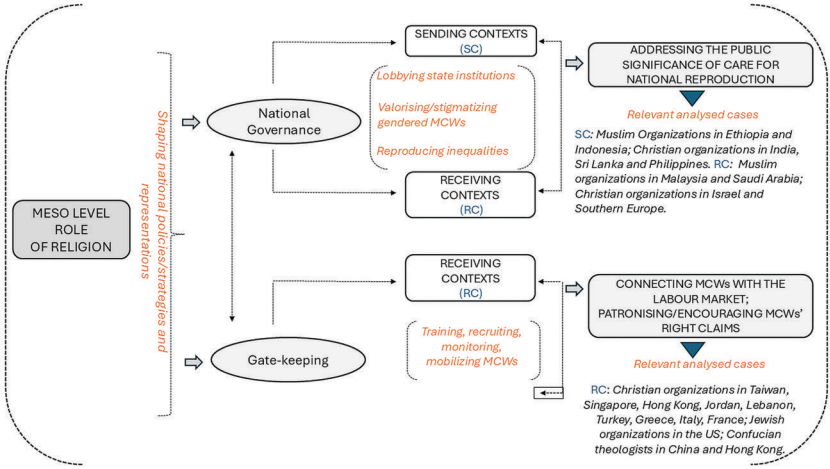

Figure 3. Meso-level role of religion in the TPEC with analyzed cases/countries (authors' elaboration).

condemning the export of women workers overseas as "illicit" (*haram*). Along with Muslim NGOs, the Council urged the government to stop female MCWs' emigration unless their dignity was ensured through specific state-measures (Latief 2017). Similar processes characterize South/Southeast Asian sending contexts where Christianity makes a significant share. In Sri Lanka, India, and the Philippines, the state and transnational religious organizations (e.g. Caritas Internationalis) counter the stigmatization of MCWs by valorizing them as models of traditional femininity. Christian organizations offer mandatory predeparture training sessions on sexual conduct, conjugal fidelity, and compassionate care (Magat 2007; Whiters 2019).

In receiving contexts such as Malaysia and the Gulf countries, Islam informs the state's action on MCWs' import. In the context of economic restructuring, and related increases in native families' wealth and women's education, these states use domestic service to consolidate intra-/inter-class and ethnoreligious inequalities. The "religion rule" implemented by the Malaysian state in the 1980s prescribed that only Malay/Muslim employers recruit Indonesian Muslim MCWs, while non-Malay/non-Muslim employers could only hire Filipina Christians (Chin 1998). MCWs function as gendered boundary-markers reproducing the privileges of expanding Muslim middle classes and allowing the preservation of a traditional gendered division of work in native households (Ahmad 2017; Chin 1998; Longva 1997). In Saudi Arabia, Muslim scholars advocate reforming the law to protect the MCWs' rights in accordance with *sharia* (Truluck 2023). Yet Muslim leaders also express concern with the corrupting effects of non-Muslim workers in Islamic

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homes. This determines a policy shift, favoring the immigration of Muslim workers and restricting the entry of Christian MCWs (Bergem 2006; Moors et al. 2008). Similar developments occurred in Israel, where, in the 1990s, the recruitment of MCWs from Christian countries served the replacement of Palestinian care workers from the Occupied Territories (Kemp and Raijman 2003).

Close gendered relationships between religion, state institutions, and MCWs also mark weakly secularized immigration contexts in Southern Europe. In Italy, the governance of MCWs largely rests on Catholic parish networks (Ambrosini 2013; Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a,b; Scrinzi 2008) which facilitate migrant women's live-in employment: this has allowed Italian care workers to work by the hour, thus maintaining a traditional breadwinner model in native families (Andall 2000). In Italy and Spain, Catholic organizations press the state in favor of massive regularization of MCWs to meet long-term elderly care service needs (Gallo and Scrinzi 2016b; Itçaina 2006). While Catholic discourses/policies foster pro-migration inclusivity, they also promote a racializing narrative on Christian/Catholic workers as more reliable than, for instance, Muslim ones. In both domestic service and nursing, Catholic training/recruitment networks construct skills in reference to moral values of endurance and sacrifice rooted in a religious interpretation of care work as duty exceeding contractual arrangements (Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a).

The relevance of religion regimes in defining MCW governance also marks highly secularized contexts such as France, where state-sponsored third-sector organizations and private companies are key care service providers (Scrinzi 2009, 2010, 2013). Here, gendered and racialized practices are shaped by republican values of secularism and migration regimes formally banning religion from the public sphere. The French care sector promotes a modernist discourse on the professionalization of care, articulating it around the "secularization" of female MCWs, including avoiding the Muslim veil at work. Differently from contexts such as Italy or the Gulf countries—where the "home" becomes a place of care-driven evangelization—here the gatekeepers of MCW aim at "converting" workers to secular values as an inroad to assimilation into the nation.

Overall, our analysis stresses the importance of looking at the meso-level governance of care through the interrelated perspectives of sending/receiving migration ends. Studies mainly focus on Muslim- and Christianity-majority countries, highlighting a tension between different institutional approaches to MCWs: while the interests of states and religious organizations might converge in forging moralized representations of care along gendered/racialized lines, the latter might also oppose the state's governance of MCW on the ground that economic interests compromise morality and the family. Depending on the context, care attains public moral significance as either a locus of religious indoctrination/performance or, conversely, as a space for aligning with secularist national values. Either way, MCW emerges as a

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morally charged policy subject: a field in which religious regimes in both weakly and strongly secularized countries play a considerable role in drawing ethnoreligious boundaries and in reproducing gendered class hierarchies through a governance of MCWs that valorizes their subalternity.

Religions as gatekeepers of MCW

Our framework identifies the meso-level role of religious organizations as "intermediary actors" (Scrinzi 2013, 25) or "gatekeepers" (Bakan and Stasiulis 1994, 304) of MCW: they provide MCWs with employment opportunities, legal assistance, and linguistic/professional training, and engage with workers' right issues. Through vocational training and job placement practices, religious organizations challenge but also reproduce the stratification of the job across class, gender, faith, and ethnicity: their intermediation provides migrants with material/spiritual support but also reinforces stereotypes and social hierarchies in the job.

In Italy, training/recruitment of MCWs in Catholic parishes and associations revolves around gendered notions of morality associated with idealized "Italian religiosity", which reasserts traditional feminine submission (Gallo 2016; Scrinzi 2010, 2013) and associates care with racialized servitude (Osborne 2012, Sarti 2001). While training largely occurs locally, the National Episcopal Conference promotes a narrative on Indian or Filipino Christian women as docile and pious, associating Asian ethnicity, "oriental faith," family devotion, and care work (Gallo 2016). Similar findings regard Christian organizations in Turkey, Jordan, and France, where religious networks facilitate employment and bestow gendered moral qualities on MCWs (Daniş 2007; Frantz 2008; Fresnoza-Frot 2010). Studies on Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Jordan confirm how different Christian organizations constrain MCWs' demands for dignity: they do so by preaching patience vis-à-vis employers' abuses and discouraging collective mobilizations (Lindio-McGovern 2004). Problems arising in the "private" workplace are seen as requiring personal spiritual solutions or individual assistance, as opposed to political interventions (Frantz 2008; Yeoh and Huang 1999). This conciliatory approach to MCWs' rights mostly characterizes mainstream national churches, and to a lesser extent ethnic ones. Yet in Greece, migrant Filipina Churches prescribe MCWs' silence and patience based on Christological references (Topali 2013).

However, religion does not necessarily promote essentialistic representations of care (Gallo and Scrinzi 2021). Rare work on Judaism shows that, in the United States, while Christian Orthodox Churches construct care work as a Christian calling, Jewish institutions orient Eastern European MCWs to deploy professionalism as wage-earners entrusted with rights (Solari 2006). Similarly, Evangelical Latin American Churches in Italy support empowering views of the job, valorizing female workers' rights (Scrinzi 2016). Religious organizations may also buttress MCWs' collective struggles. Pentecostal

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Ethiopian pastors in Lebanon or Christian Churches in Taiwan openly support MCWs' mobilizations and advocate for changes in immigration law (Frantz 2008; Laliberté 2017; Pande 2012). The Filipina diaspora lobbies to politicize the Catholic liturgy, using Philippine Independence Day Mass to denounce the plight of MCWs (Lindio-McGovern 2004).

Different religious approaches to MCW, promoting conservative or empowering views of MCW, ultimately shape the workers' experiences. In Taiwan, where Muslim leaders stigmatize migrant women's work and frame their difficulties as personal issues, MCWs avoid seeking help from mosques. Instead, when Christian Churches support MCWs, these more easily engage with labor rights claims (Baig and Chang 2020). Religions' ambivalent approach to MCW may also activate intra-faith controversies. In China and Hong Kong, there is debate among Confucian theorists on MCWs' unequal citizenship status: while some advocate for greater protection of these workers, others claim that family-like affective relationships—a key Confucian value—can foster harmonious employment relations even in the absence of equal rights (Kim 2019).

Overall, religions operate at the meso-level of the globalization of care to mediate transnational mobilities according to nationally specific religion regimes and informed by their gender (and ethnic) projects. Our analysis points at religions' gate-keeping role within/beyond Islam and Christianity, to include Judaism and Confucianism. In moralizing MCW, religion can enhance depoliticized, personalistic, and racializing constructions of care work but can also foster workers' mobilization.

Micro-level processes: religion and care encounters

Our analysis suggests that religion holds relevance in the negotiation of face-to-face work interactions, playing a micro-level role within three interrelated dimensions of MCW: in framing "boundary work" (Lamont 2009, 270) through which employers/employees construct "us" versus "them" based on morality/immorality notions; in building respectability; and in performing emotional labor (fig. 4).

Religion and boundary work in MCW

In the practices of employers/recruitment agencies, ethnoreligious stereotypes underscore notions of cleanliness and reliability, and workers' skills are often inferred from their religious background. MCWs' positive stereotyping often follows a "same religion" logic because MCWs' religious proximity with the employers facilitates employment (Andall 2000; Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a; Scrinzi 2010, 2013; Silvey 2006). However, in Europe, care work shortages can lead to the valorization of religious difference involving otherwise (Muslim) stigmatized migrants (Rohde-Abuba 2020). Our own research highlights how,

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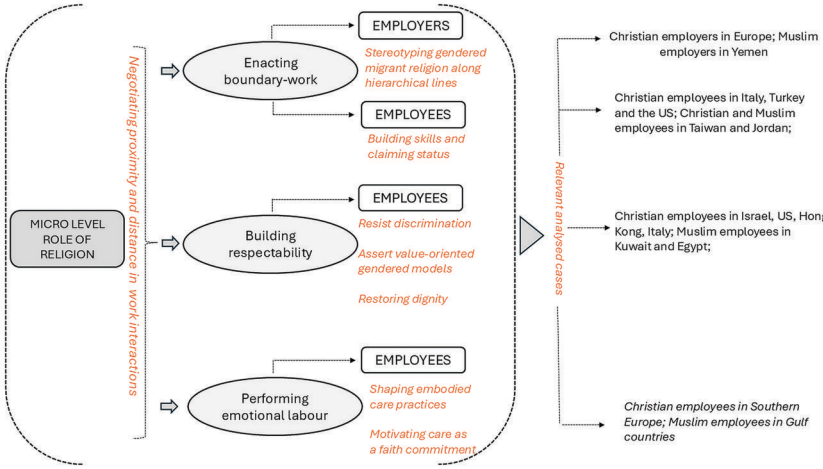

Figure 4. Micro-level role of religion in the TPEC with analyzed cases/countries (authors' elaboration).

differently from what is promoted by religious organizations at macro/meso levels, faith affinity is not necessarily regarded as a positive value. Italian employers hold hierarchical preferences stratified along ethnoreligious lines, with Christian Filipina and Indian MCWs at the top and Muslim Arabs/South Asians at the bottom. Yet migrant Christianity is often folklorized and deemed distant from the secularized modernity of Italian families. This significance of migrant Christianity in the eyes of the Italian employers is gender-specific. While religiosity is seen as a marker of trustworthiness of female MCWs, male MCWs are sometimes considered as a source of overtly patriarchal, if not misogynist, behavior (Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a). As such, from the point of view of the employers, religious sameness moralizes MCWs less as evangelizing agents and more as tolerated anti-modern subjects, to become important only if socioeconomic distance based on class, citizenship status, and gender is ensured. This finds partial resonance in other contexts/religions. In Yemen, for instance, some employers hire non-Muslim workers to mark social distance, while others prioritize compatibility in domestic habits such as food consumption (De Regt 2009). Employers' religious considerations are also enmeshed with class notions, as in some cases MCWs' religion may be associated with higher educational levels (Fresnoza-Frot 2010).

In a complementary way, MCWs actively use religion as a social capital to access the labor market and negotiate better conditions by constructing "skill" through religious references. Evangelical and Catholic migrants in Italy (Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a, Scrinzi 2016), Iraqi Christian Orthodox in Istanbul (Daniş 2007), Filipinos in the United States (Paul 2011), and Christians and Muslims in Taiwan (Lan 2006) mobilize religious belonging and connections with

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religious leaders to claim a superior moral status and to draw racialized boundaries with other MCWs. Irrespective of their faith, Sri Lankan MCWs in Jordan attend Christian worship sites or self-declare Catholic to secure jobs (Frantz 2011), aware that many employers distrust Buddhists and Hindus. MCWs may therefore reproduce colonial assumptions around religion to assert their superior moral stance and negotiate a higher socioeconomic status.

Challenging subalternity and building respectability

Religion offers psychological and spiritual solace to MCWs, who find in it a source for claiming respectability. Respectability (Dazey 2021) is intended here in relation to MCWs' strategy to resist/accommodate their subordinate gendered valorization by actively claiming religiously informed moral qualities. Religion allows them to negotiate respectability—a morally superior status—vis-à-vis further marginalized/stigmatized migrant groups.

First, MCWs use religion to negotiate work relations, endure job-related difficulties, and resist abuse in face-to-face interactions. In European, North African, and Southeast Asian contexts, Islam or Christianity's principled emphasis on equality leads MCWs to challenge exploitative and unethical employers and claim respect (Debonneville 2019; Silvey 2006; Williams 2008). MCWs also use religion to renarrate their work experiences through a moral code emphasizing migration as a missionary/spiritual endeavor rather than as an economic necessity (Ahmad 2011; Debonneville 2019; Gallo 2018). This is the case of born-again Christian MCWs in Israel, as Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches emphasize the Jewish roots of Christianity (Liebelt 2011). Similarly, Muslim MCWs in Kuwait (Ahmad 2011) and Christian MCWs in Hong Kong (Constable 2011) draw from care work to find a renewed Islamic piety or convert to new religions. MCWs therefore interpret their work through the prism of religion, in a way that brings them to moralize MCW and to conceive demeaning experiences as trials of their faith.

Second, MCWs use religion to build gendered respectability. As religious organizations stigmatize them as bad mothers/wives, MCWs find in progressive interpretations of their religion a resource opening the possibility of a morally viable self-image and status. They mobilize religion to legitimate their decision to emigrate, asserting how God rewards their family/community commitment (Debonneville 2019; Frantz 2011; Williams 2008). For instance, in Hong Kong, Filipina MCWs define themselves "as servants of the Lord" (Chang and Groves 2000: 87), thereby disconnecting domestic service from its sexual overtones. By affiliating with religious organizations, MCWs subscribe to feminine modesty not only as a form of compliance to social norms but also to reassert their migration choices and renewed autonomy. In other words, for MCWs, religion does not simply reproduce conformity and compliance with tradition (cf. Neitz 2014) but is adapted to the reality of their working lives. This concerns male MCWs too, who use religious repertoires to make sense of their insertion into a "woman's job". Our own research

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highlights how male MCWs in Italy rely on Evangelical as well as Catholic religion to counter the symbolically degrading effects of performing the "dirty work", and how they nurture their faith to endure work hardship. Here religion serves as a way to reassert gendered respectability for men who engage in feminized jobs (Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a; Scrinzi 2016). Similarly, in the United States, male Orthodox MCWs from the former Soviet Union renegotiate dominant notions of masculinity, arguing that paid care work is a Christian calling (Solari 2006).

We note how religion supports both female and male MCWs to negotiate unorthodox mobility patterns and/or downgrading tasks, leading to a moral gendered superiority over non-migrants. For instance, in Italy, Latin American Evangelical women promote a certain model of values-oriented and family-minded "Latina Christian femininity," criticizing Italian women as "immoral," individualistic, and career-focused (Scrinzi 2016). MCWs also claim superiority over those employers who are not their co-religionists: Filipinas in Singapore and Hong Kong prefer Western/White Christian over Buddhist Chinese employers, seeing the latter as egoistic, and the former as fair (Paul 2011). Similar findings concern Israel, Egypt, the Gulf countries, and Southern Europe (Ahmed 2010; Debonneville 2019; Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a,b; Liebelt 2011), overall showing how MCWs use religion for a bottom-up negotiation of work-related moral concerns about respect and shame.

Religion and emotional labor

Religion should be analyzed as an important dimension of MCWs' emotional labor, not only due to the distinctively emotional character of religions (Byrne, Morton, and Dahling 2011) but also due to the specific nature of care jobs. Emotional labor is inscribed into MCWs' bodily practices, requiring corporeal self-discipline and leading them to develop techniques helping them to sustain employers'/care beneficiaries' well-being, and to restore their own self-respect. Religious values and spiritual practices rank high in both private homes and public/private healthcare institutions, for both employees and—to a lesser extent—employers/care beneficiaries (Lavik, Gripsud, and Ramvi 2021; Liebelt 2011; Topali 2013). Ahmad's research on South Asian MCWs who converted to Islam in Kuwait shows how religious sensibilities develop through everyday embodied care work practices (Ahmad 2011). In Muslim households, care is infused with religious norms because of the employers' religiosity and of the emotional nature of the work.

We find a similarly close relationship between emotional labor and religion in our own research, as MCWs draw from emotional labor to moralize and sanctify their "impious" Italian employers. Unlike for the employers, who can more easily dismiss the migrants' evangelization projects, for MCWs religious mission constitutes one way of performing emotional labor, as they regard paid care work as faith commitment. This is the case specifically for evangelical/pentecostal MCWs, given the emphasis placed on evangelization by these

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religious movements. For instance, Latin American women in Italy pray for/with their employers, in the hope of spreading the Gospel and converting them (Scrinzi 2016). Catholic Filipinas in Italy see themselves as "new apostles" following in Jesus's footsteps (Magat 2007). Similarly, in Egypt or Gulf countries, employers too can express/enact their religiosity through domestic practices, thinking that it is their duty to foster maids' conversion to orthodox Islam as a charitable gesture (Ahmed 2010). In all these cases, religion is a source of proximity/distance through which emotional labor is performed and work relations negotiated.

Overall, at the micro-level, our framework conceptualizes how gendered and racialized notions of religion orient the employers' practices and criteria but also MCWs' agency in resisting racialization and asserting autonomy, dignity, and respectability as global migrant workers. Due to the specific nature of the job, religion importantly informs MCWs' emotional and embodied care work as well as the employers' views and practices. In the process, homes and healthcare structures emerge as morally charged loci where macro/meso-level evangelization projects and micro-level religiously informed relations of proximity/distance are differently enacted, resisted, and negotiated by workers and employers.

Moralized care mobilities

We introduce the notion of moralized care mobilities to apprehend the multi-scalar role of religion in shaping the globalization of care across faiths, contexts, and time (fig. 5). Our analysis shows how religion shapes the "moral economy" (Näre 2011, 397) of MCW, both in its normative/formal dimension and in lived experiences, and how this cuts across the three scales of the globalization of care.

First, religion operates as a global broker of MCW, by facilitating transnational labor mobility and the related demand/supply of care. Religion moralizes migration routes on the ground of "religious compatibility" between contexts and related gender models, contributing to spreading religiously inflected (racialized and gendered) care cultures. Global religions provide "safer" networks/opportunities, crafting—and acting as guarantor of—women's and men's respectability.

Second, nationally specific religion regimes interplay with care, migration, and employment regimes to mediate the global dynamics and geopolitical inequalities underpinning MCWs' mobility. The transnational religious governance of care generates national/local responses to the "care crisis", and at interrelated migration ends, state institutions rely on religious actors in governing MCWs. By managing migrants' inclusion into care work, religious institutions shape national welfare state systems and national care/gender regimes. The moralization of MCWs results in religious actors promoting

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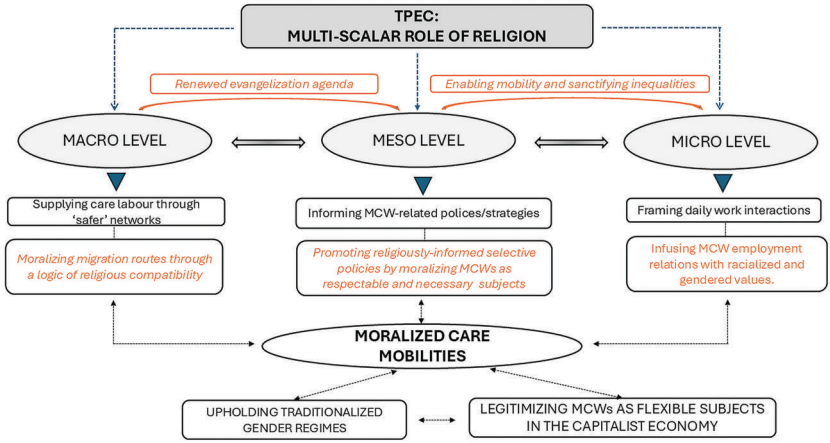

Figure 5. The multi-scalar role of religion in framing moralized care mobilities (authors' elaboration).

selective positive policies toward MCWs' legal sanitation and (limited) rights recognition by stressing MCWs' value for national social reproduction. In managing MCWs, state institutions use moral religious authority to support nationalist gender ideologies and gendered and racialized divisions of work in society. Exporting MCW largely derives from socioeconomic interests of the governments in the home countries, which rely on religious institutions to pursue their goals. Religion may mitigate public stigma surrounding MCWs by framing care work around models of femininity/masculinity centered around values of respectability and decency. Yet the states' interests may also conflict with those of religious actors. The migration of (female) MCWs lies at the center of competing gendered visions of the nation where religion, and religiously informed morality, shape normative representations of migrant/native women's bodies.

Third, religion infuses face-to-face MCW relations with values/norms centered around ethically grounded notions of respectability, intertwining with gendered racialization processes. Religion constitutes a resource for accessing the job, resisting inferiorization, seeking respectability, and performing emotional labor, while constraining MCWs' access to the labor market. Religion and morality are highly relevant in "boundary work", as racialized and class social divisions are often constructed in moral terms. In particular, we note how differential degrees of religiosity and of secularism are used as a measure to reassert class difference in care work relations. In secularized and weakly secularized European societies, employers draw from a self-identification as modern and secular to distinguish themselves from the (assumed or professed) employees' religiosity, ascribing them to a premodern folklorized and racialized faith. Differently, in contexts such as Gulf countries, employers may

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more easily draw from ideas about their religious orthodoxy to engage in paternalistic relations with MCWs and help them to learn a purified Islamic practice.

Furthermore, we argue that a specific linkage connects feminized care work and faith. The material/immaterial labor of caring for dependent subjects, and of supporting employers in reproducing their status, involves an important relational investment and bodily self-discipline, shaping MCWs' affective life and self-perception. Embodied emotional labor thus opens up to religious morality, largely performed in these work relations. In performing/consuming care services, employees and employers draw from an "encultured knowledge" (Williams 2006, 102) associated with broader categories of religion and nation. Micro-level practices are shaped by gendered/racialized and moralized notions of care spread by religious actors through their meso-level and macro-level roles of governance and gatekeeping. Yet religions also support emancipatory notions of MCW, fostering migrants' self-assertiveness in work relations. For men and women, faith and spirituality are resources to move transnationally across different national regimes, to navigate multiple challenges involved in MCW, and to negotiate shame and legitimacy in the workplace. Religion thus helps migrants to negotiate the tension between traditional gender ideologies upheld by religious leaders in sending/receiving countries and MCWs' non-conformity to conventional models of femininity/masculinity.

Our framework can thus be useful in connecting different levels of analysis, as opposed to privileging a single scale. It traces how the macro-level role of religion in the transnational mobilization of care is further apprehended at the meso-level of national institutions and public policies—facilitated by secular and religious institutions—and at the one of micro-politics of daily work relations. In a complementary logic, it also reveals how evangelization projects and institutional policies are accepted, negotiated, or resisted by MCWs and their employers through the provision and consumption of paid care work.

Furthermore, we argue how the moralization of care should be read through the lens of religiously inspired efforts of upholding specific gender (and ethnic) projects at both ends of migration. Concerns around female respectability, public morality, and traditional family are central to religious organizations' governance of MCW. State authorities, civil society, and public opinion are moved by similar concerns, both in countries where religion shapes national belonging and traditional gender/care regime and in secularized contexts. Religious gender projects connect with the reproduction of class and ethnic inequalities. The governance of MCW by organized religions is driven not just by their moral concerns on reproduction and intimacy but also by their aspirations to reproduce other social hierarchies at the intersection of gender, class, ethnicity, and racialization, sometimes in line with nationalist projects.

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We argue that, in order to fully grasp the role of global religions in upholding traditional gender (and ethnic) regimes, it is necessary to recognize how their governance of MCW is underpinned by a (re)evangelization agenda, differently targeting the native employers' and migrants' families. Christian and Muslim organizations differently assign to MCWs a role of "reverse missionaries" from the Global South. On the one hand, MCWs can benefit from cultural exposure to the centers of religious orthodoxy—like Christianity in Europe or Islam in Gulf countries. On the other, they ideally revitalize public and private religiosity, particularly in secularized contexts. In this respect, homes/care homes are seen by religious organizations as spaces for enacting a religiously inflected work ethic, and employment relations as sites for faith revival. In upholding traditional gender/class regimes, and in linking MCW with their evangelization projects, global religions partly draw from a colonial legacy: they do so by framing dedicated policies toward MCWs, moralizing their presence in the receiving society/labor market around gendered/racialized qualities of usefulness and virtue. Yet the moralization of MCW emerges not only as top-down process but also as one where MCWs (ambivalently) engage. Migrant women and men draw from their faith to legitimize unorthodox migrations, to negotiate hegemonic models of femininity/masculinity, and to turn care into a project of moral self-transformation. Within a structurally limited context of possibilities, and with religious organizations operating to constrain migrants' inflow into specific labor niches, MCWs may nonetheless use religion to empower themselves, carving out spaces of sociogeographical mobility.

Conclusion

Our framework expands the conceptualization of multi-scalar processes of the globalization of care because it encompasses non-secular actors/processes and combines public expressions and negotiations pertaining to public religion with understudied informal "lived religion" practices in private spaces. It thus points out "hidden" informal practices of migrant religions in care settings. In connecting transnational actors and national policies with different institutional and informal actors, a multi-scalar perspective further allows us to look at the complexities and contradictions that religion generates in care work across the public/private divide and the role played by gender in the process.

Rather than pointing out a monolithic role played by religion, our framework grasps its ambivalent role as a social force in both empowering MCWs and reproducing inequalities of gender, ethnicity, and class. This is key to including the often neglected role of religion in reproducing/challenging structural inequalities in migration studies (cf. Anthias 1998; Faist 2016). Indeed, the moralization of care mobility reveals this tension between transformation

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and continuity: religious institutions/networks have traditionally contributed to carve out spaces of legitimate sociogeographical mobility for subjects—women but also men—who, due to their class, ethnic, and gender locations, were marginalized from global mobility. Yet, their actions also draw the contours through which this mobility occurs, in terms of occupational opportunities, social control, right claims, and future prospects. Our analysis reveal the "domesticating potential of religion" (Lindio-McGovern 2004, 231) in sanctifying social hierarchies as well as its liberating interpretations and practices for four MCWs. It invites us to avoid a monolithic representation of religion as a conservative social force in the context of MCW. Religion forges MCWs as subordinated and racialized global workers within the globalization of care: MCWs become morally and religiously valorized insofar as they are accepted as beneficial and useful to native families and the social reproduction of society. Yet MCWs may "sanctify" their work to resist marginalization and assert their religious identities to promote respectability and a self-transformation.

Our conceptualization thus moves beyond the dominant focus on migrant laboring actors and the states' economic interest in outsourcing the costs of social reproduction and in shaping the "transnational political economy of care" (Williams 2018), to encompass religious institutions/subjectivities as key actors/processes in MCWs' moralization. The governance of MCWs must be understood not only in terms of meeting market demands and making economic gains or savings but also in terms of their role in maintaining national health, social stability, labor docility, and cultural purity (Bergem 2006). Religious actors' as well as states' efforts to dictate MCWs' religiously informed morals and intimacy norms are an important dimension of the global governance of MCW. Female (and male) MCWs' bodies and sexuality—not just their labor—are a site of ideological and material struggles against the backdrop of the globalization of care, where organized religions play a key role. In turn, MCWs may be moved by religious motives in addition to economic purposes.

In so doing, we open pathways for future research that fruitfully broadens our knowledge of the moralization of MCW by considering different faiths and migration patterns in the Global North and South, as well as in relation to models of masculinity alongside femininity.

First, our framework paves the way for further research that shifts the dominant focus on the nexus between global Christianity, particularly but not exclusively Catholicism, and MCW. This results from Christianity's overall greater organizational structure, alongside its long-standing role in fostering inter/intra-faith conversion and transnational labor mobility. Future comparative analysis should identify continuities and differences across the three scales in the way this religion moralizes MCW as a locus of evangelization, a policy concern, and a site of self-transformation—both across faiths and within the same faith as well as across contexts, including South–South and internal migration. In particular, cross-national analyses could examine the impact of

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different religion regimes and their distinctive intertwining with formations of gender and ethnicity/national belonging, comparing MCW in secularized and more religious contexts.

Second, when religion is addressed in existing research, it is mainly in relation to female MCWs. While this is certainly motivated by the overrepresentation of women in the job, men are nonetheless present as providers of care services and active—as religious representatives and employers—in moralizing care (Gallo and Scrinzi 2016a,b; Scrinzi 2010). Future research could explore the gendered relevance of religion in constructing and organizing MCW, as men and women have gender-specific religious practices and relationships to faith (Woodhead 2007). Male and female MCWs could differently mobilize their faith to negotiate work relations and resist ethnic and class hierarchies in the job as well as to engage in emotional labor.

Third, future studies could explore in depth the relevance of religion/morality to constructing class hierarchies in MCW, along the lines of what we suggested in relation to micro-level practices of boundary work. These involve, for instance, attributing to MCWs qualities of devotion, trustworthiness and submission, to reproduce a divide between middle-class (secularized) "us" and working-class (religious) "them". Ideas of emancipation from religious belief or, differently, of piety, contribute in different ways to frame gendered class and racialized work relations.

Finally, our analysis can inspire research that supports policy. First, future research can expand policy understanding of the processes racializing MCWs through gendered positive/negative stereotypes. Policy should be informed by awareness that religion can constitute a resource for enhancing workers' rights but can also perpetuate subalternity, if not open discrimination. Research could further underscore the cultural mechanisms underpinning MCWs' recruitment, mobility, and discrimination in the labor market and the extent to which and how these mechanism are informed by religions. Future research would also importantly address stakeholders' concerns about the need to respect religious freedom at work. Rather than assuming a deproblematized (positive) importance of spirituality and faith at work, it is necessary to develop a "religious literacy" (Lavik, Gripsud, and Ramvi 2021, 262) in multicultural care work settings such as homes and healthcare structures across the public/private divide, a literacy that differently apprehends the extent to which migrants draw from faith—or take a distance from it—to cope with emotionally charged and often exploitative work, and to face religiously driven discrimination.

Notes

1. Care, largely performed by women, encompasses material and emotional activities addressing dependent individuals' and active population's needs (Williams 2018). It comprises "feminized" (cleaning, elderly care, or

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cooking) and "masculinized" work (janitors, gardeners, or handymen) and includes skilled healthcare professions (Yeates 2009).
2. We regard religion as a "sensitizing concept" (Bruce 2011, 116) guiding researchers in approaching specific empirical instances. It is a sociocultural system of beliefs, values, and practices articulated around institutional, community, and personal power relations, within and beyond religious spaces to include secular domains (Woodhead 2007, 2011).
3. For Walby, only salvation religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam rely on hierarchical structures of governance, thereby operating as polities. While we do not exclude that other religions regulate MCW, we focus on these three, mentioning others where appropriate.

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Conflict of interest. None declared.

Data availability

Being a theoretical article that draws from secondary sources, all data are incorporated into the article and its online supplementary material.

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