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# The contribution of the Puebla Mixtecs to the consolidation of the American Catholic Church: migration of the Rosario micaltepec from 1980 to 2015

Gustavo López-Ángel<sup>1</sup> Pedro Rodríguez-Suárez <sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract:** The objective of this article is to show, from an ethnographic reference point located between the Mixteca poblana, a region in the center of Mexico, and the county of Brooklyn, New York, the transnational religious practices that show the importance of the Hispanic communities in the growth and consolidation of the American Catholic Church. It is only possible to account for the transnational life that occurs between societies of origin and destination, through cultural practices such as those of religion. In this sense, I resort to a multilocal ethnography at the methodological level, which breaks with the classic paradigm of focusing research on a single community. Through a practice like the first communion I seek to account for the transnational fabric that develops in it.

**Keywords:** migration, catholic religion, mixteca poblana and belief systems

Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo es mostrar, desde un enfoque etnográfico situado en la Mixteca poblana (región del centro de México), y en el condado de Brooklyn, Nueva York, las prácticas religiosas transnacionales que muestran la importancia de las comunidades hispanas, en el crecimiento y la consolidación de la Iglesia Católica Americana. Sólo es posible dar cuenta de la vida transnacional que ocurre entre las sociedades de origen y destino, a través de prácticas culturales como las de religión. En este sentido, se recurre a una metodología etnografía de nivel multilocal, que rompe con el paradigma clásico de enfocar la investigación en una sola comunidad. Así, a través de una práctica como la primera comunión, se busca explicar el tejido transnacional que se desarrolla en esta.

Palabras clave: migración, religión católica, mixteca poblana y sistemas de creencias.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Facultad de Derecho y Ciencias Sociales, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Puebla – México. Doctor en Ciencias Antropológicas, División de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana. e-mail: mixteca migration@hotmail.com.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Facultad de Derecho y Ciencias Sociales, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Puebla – México. Doctor en Estudios Europeos, Facultad de Periodismo y Ciencias Políticas, Universidad de Varsovia, Polonia. e-mail: <a href="mailto:pedrosuarezbuap@yahoo.com">pedrosuarezbuap@yahoo.com</a>.



### Introduction

When we talk about immigration and the process of integration into the receiving society, the concept of assimilation is controversial, especially because of the supposed "tabula rasa" of the identity of origin of the immigrant subject. In this sense, in the specific case of Hispanic immigration, a contextual reassessment is necessary in order to understand the historicity of belief systems and their relationship with the construction of a favorable environment in the integration into the receiving society.

The panorama of religious affiliation in the United States has been modified by immigration, a phenomenon of which immigrants from Latin America, especially Mexicans, did not remain left out. Without denying the presence of a process of religious disaffiliation, an example of this is the following data: 10 percent of the US population are former Catholics, according to data from the PEW study (Lugo, 2008). Faced with such a scenario, Max Weber's prediction of the disenchantment of the world seems to be fulfilled, yet despite the collapse the numbers of Catholics, this church remains one of the leading religious institutions in the United States. One in four Americans declares himself Catholic. The persistence of

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the percentage is due to the presence of Hispanic immigration. The cycle of replacement once initiated by the waves of Polish, Irish and Italian immigrants seems to be repeated, they having been the main ones responsible for the founding of Catholic churches in the central and northern states. In that sense, the case of California has a historical trajectory more in common with Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, due to the presence of the Mexicans from the annexation of their territory in the middle of the nineteenth century.

In those American cities with a strong presence of Mexican immigrants and their descendants of different generations, a readjustment can be seen of their Catholic local neighborhood communities and churches (Rivera, 2004). In other words, we face a process of ethnification rather than a process of assimilation in the Melting Pot style. These sociocultural dynamics express a process of consolidation of diasporic sentiments and practices.



## Mixteca's migration to the United States

Two moments in migration studies characterize the Mixteca poblana<sup>3</sup>: the predominant note since the 50's was the internal aspect, which begins to show its decline in the 80's, starting the phenomenon of international migration, as well as burgeoning academic literature which incorporates aspects like transnational links to classic poverty themes, exclusion and vulnerability. That was not for free; Smith, one of the pioneers in the transnational studies, took the term of Mixteca like "transnational region" (1993) to describe the dynamic of social, economic, cultural and transformations politics generated by international migration. Smith and Cederström point of view, contributed to a better understanding of the roll by the migrants as social actors in the structure of social relations and cultural spaces that overflowing the limits of nation state. National frontiers lose their character of these processes that contains cultural, political, social and economic aspects. A complex

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tissue of intertwined relationships linked communities of destination and origin.

Although from transnational studies had sought to break with the limitations from methodological nationalism (Glick Schiller y Wimmer, 2003) supported in a factual notion of anchored territory in physical limits or tangible frontiers, the duality: origin and destination community had become a quasieternal figure of the coming and going of time and social and cultural changes; the attempts to conceptualize social space led to what has been reported by Besserer as a reification of analytical; concepts used to understand the social reality (2004: 8) losing their condition of instruments. Two decades after, it is not a surprise to keep finding, in some works, the same bucolic image in academic production, transmigrants returning to their villages in order to keep their "local" memberships, a kind of perpetuation Ad.

Maintaining same logic in Transnational Studies leaves out new dynamics in which are immerse the generations of believers, which protrude into religious identities and notions of "place of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Mixteca is, a mountainous region that is located between the current states of Guerrero, Oaxaca and Puebla, Mexico



belonging". Besides of representing migrants and their anchor descendants in a memory space, which by antonomasia all successive generations will likewise, without considering the integration processes and even new forms of assimilation (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998) in the host societies.

Links between religion and transnational migration, begin to gain importance, establishing its own weight as research line.

The text "Religion and the New Immigrants" (Ebaugh and Saltzman Chafetz, 2000) is an interesting approach because it falls squarely on the role of the various sociocultural and aesthetic practices on the creation or strengthening of ethnic minorities in the city of Houston. One of the limitations of the text is reduced to homogeneous fields faiths, the nature of the various items without noticeable religious diversity within the same ethnic group. One of the contributions of the text is the role of the churches in the reproduction of identity within secular celebrations incorporating practices or better say, from within the religious sphere.

Recognition of membership is built with various discourses and practices of different actors, which do not always form a

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community projects is a strong indicator of its existence; the historical memory also plays a role in the collective perception. The role played by migrants in conflicts that have affected the community, streamlines the reentry of returning migrants to the social and political life in the community or obstructs it, having to go through a trial period to prove his membership into the social group. Religious conversions acquired by migrants and non-migrants are also subject to renegotiation in communities where most professing other religious belief, and new religious affiliations are perceived as an act of destabilizing the system charges and parties

Recognition is subject to different intensity of transnational ties, Faist (1999) has emphasized at different levels of transnational institutions such as migrant Turks organizations and Kurds in Germany. Levitt (2001) has approached the same aspect but individually. How can we understand the continuity and sustainability of transnational community without alluding the embedded elements in the symbolic field? Why do we have to keep placing the construction process of membership only by structural factors such as remittances, and dissociating the



religious aspect? Going along this pathway that involves enormous risks, especially when the researcher on the subject of various dimensions of ritual and religions. In this sense, I would like to approach the existing symbolic dimension in building ownership whose most prominent features is the continuity of the ritual, but at the same time opening the analysis to the new practices.

Moving to new spaces and relations systems involves insertion in different labor markets and have been linked to other belief systems and symbolic constructions, linking the subject with the sacred and supernatural processes contributing to new religious affiliation in destination communities (Ramirez, 2003). New cultural baggage is inserted into the migratory circuits, which are eventually transferred to origin communities.

The Irish, Polish and Italian immigration played an important role a few ago; in the emergence and decades strengthening of the U.S. Catholic Church, which faced a strong weakening process. It was not until recent decades when called Hispanics have contributed its sustainability and territorial expansion. Two states are particularly important in this process, California and New York. In both states, the contribution is significant to the Lat. Am. J. Int. Aff. – Vol. 7 N°1 Art. 03, pp. 49 - 62 **López-Ángel, G.** 

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number of Catholics on the national scene: California has a percentage of 31% of Catholics, New York has a 39% Catholic population (Lugo, Luis; Stence, Sandra, Green, John, Smith, Gregory; Cox, Dan; 2008) and became the main religious denomination. Besides its enormous demographic importance of cultural elements are in the process of strengthening the Catholic church in the United States.

In an interview with the Chicago Daily Zenit Jose Gomez, then Priest (bishop) of the Diocese of San Antonio Texas, and named after the April 6, 2010 Coadjutor Archbishop of Los Angeles, mentioned the recovery of Christian values in the American culture thanks to the role played by Hispanic immigrants:

"This much has been lost by secularism. The values of the immigrants are very basic, where a deep Catholic faith, family, and expressions of piety, all that is part of our daily lives. "(Gomez, 2005)

Archbishop Gomez characterization expresses not only the numerical importance for Catholic hierarchy that has the presence of Hispanics inside, also refers to the transformation of the ritual process of



reterritorialization product of some religious practices in Mexico and Latin America. Actions that impact in the public sphere and politics of states like California and New York, ceasing to be an act of religiosity constrained to the private sphere, and individual beliefs (Martinez Novo, 2005) giving way to practice rituals of transnational court.

An example of this, is the marchpilgrimage of Guadalupe torch that part from southwestern Mexico to New York City as part of the new transnational religious practices put in place by both immigrants and by some sectors of the American Catholic Church. March which ends December 12 at St. Patrick's Cathedral Midtown in Manhattan which not only seeks to be a symbolic act of Hispanic migrants to emphasize its presence also has reasons of political mobilization, among which the claim of comprehensive immigration reform. The participation of the Guadalupe Torch has a deep change in the links between migrants and their home communities, where the prevailing are different rituals dimensions, which range from the transition to the purification ceremonies until posliminal rites and liminal phases of its participants. But the celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe is not Lat. Am. J. Int. Aff. – Vol. 7 N°1 Art. 03, pp. 49 - 62

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limited to the center of Manhattan; the various dioceses in Brooklyn and Queens have their own celebrations

In the aforementioned interview, Bishop Gomez refers to the launch of the celebration of Holy Week in the various dioceses of the Catholic Church in particular the representation of the *Vía Crucis*. Today is no surprise to encounter such religious manifestations. On the cover of newspaper New York *Press* is mentioned in April 3, 2010, the representation of the twelve stations by the members of St. Barbara in Bushwick, Brooklyn Borough. Activity developed twenty years by Dominican immigrants, Mexicans and Salvadorans. The previous examples illustrate a new reality in the construction of the religious market, while the figures show a collapse in the number of faithful Catholics. A study published by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, (Trotter, 2008) supported by interviews with 35,000 U.S. adults, shows that 31 percent of Americans were once defined as Catholics, but only 24 percent is expressed as such. That has become a serious concern for the American Catholic church hit by the problem of sexual abuse allegations among which the actions of pedophile priests. According to the PEW data, the rate



conversion to Catholicism is 2.6 percent of Americans, while 10.1 percent of those who once marched as Catholics have migrated to other faiths. About 10 percent of the U.S. population is former Catholics, as manifested by the survey data.

Global opinion, as described, seems fulfilled the prediction of Max Weber on the disenchantment of the world, but despite the collapse, the number of Catholics is still the same, one in four Americans is declared Catholics. Keeping as the main religious group in the United States. The continuity of percentage due to the presence of Hispanic immigration. It seems that the replacement cycle is repeated once initiated the waves of Polish immigrants, Irish and Italians, primarily responsible for the founding of the churches in New York, while in California the presence of Mexicans has been the main factor explaining from Century XIX. The Pew study found that half of all immigrants in the United States are Catholic, being mostly from Latin America. Hispanics represent 45 percent of Catholics, ages 18 and 29, but the figure drops to 20% when the age exceeds fifty years:

Besides, revealing the current U.S. religious settings and the description of the dynamic changes in religious affiliation, the

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Pew results also provide important clues about the future of religious affiliation in the United States. Showing in detail the age distribution of the different religious groups, for example, the results of the study show that 62% of Americans age 70 and older are Protestant, when the age group is between 18-29 collapses to 43%, and that same age group has a rate of 25% with no religious affiliation (Lugo, Stencel, Green, Smith, & Cox, 2008).

The cultural assimilation plays a relevant role in the catholic decrease, according to Mary Gautier (Gautier & Gray, 2006). However, the above is not an exclusive phenomenon of Catholicism, other faiths also go through the same situation. The Rev. Allan Figueroa Deck of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the United States, citing a lack of priestly vocations as part of that collapse, pointing also the need to work with minorities of African Americans, Asians and Hispanics as a strategy to overcome the loss, addressing their needs and respecting cultural diversity (Trotter, 2008) without seeking to impose American culture. The American Catholic church has not stood with cross arms against the background of multiculturalism: generating set instances and instruments to attract other



sectors of society to their ranks. That speaks about the interstices generated from religious institutions, which have enabled its

Unlike Mexico where, every time gets more sophisticate the variable religious in the census done by the National Institute of Geography and Informatics; in the United States the U.S Census Bureau since the late 50's had been prevented by law to collect any basic information from the religious affiliation of citizens. Two types of studies have sought to address the lack of census data about religion in the United States. One possibility is the overall statistics collected by each religious congregation. Some examples include the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, produced by the National Council of Churches and Religious Congregations: Glenmary Research Center, and the efforts of the World Christian Database.

> The collected information by this way is momentousness, however suffers failures: there's some no homogeneous judgment in methodological terms for the recompilation of information; some of the members of the religious groups don't have a very active life, and they stay off at the lifting time

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transformation and thus the religious ethos and pathos.

...Just a little part of the congregations is available to recollect the information; plus many Americans don't belong to any congregation, despite to keep their religious beliefs.

The second mechanism to collect data on religion in the United States is through surveys, instead of request information person by person. A survey, such as the raised since 1971 by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago and The Gallup Organization is to apply extensive interviews with a small number of Americans on a wide variety of topics, including religion. Another surveys, as American religious identification, conducted in 2001 by Graduate Center of the City University of New York, points in another direction. This survey is formed by questions about religion, it rose with a larger sample size: precluding conclusions, plus leave out small religious congregations, with large samples in contrast, usually have few questions about religion, which prevents a thorough overview of the specific beliefs and practices of religious groups (Lugo, Stencel, Green, Smith, & Cox, 2008).



Seeking to correct deficiencies in the two models of information gathering; the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, took on the task of combining both strategies, resulting in a formidable database, through its report titled: U.S. Religious Landscape survey that sustained on the experiences mentioned by combining the advantages of both instruments: depth surveys but with a small sample, and large samples with few points.

Not only major religious institutions have Trans nationalized; his followers are also part of this diffusion process. Moving to another place, it involves the establishment contact with otherness, (namely) is like with new life experiences and different ways of conceiving the relationship with the sacred. The previous data allow us to understand the magnitude of the complex phenomenon in American religion. At the same time, it makes clear the process of building the bridge between tradition and religious change in communities. Understand migrant various fields of action in the reading and analysis of transnational activity, involves leaving behind essentialist images and monolithic religious beliefs rooted in the origin communities: a sort of mechanical reterritorialization of practices and religious López-Ángel, G. Rodríguez-Suárez, P.

conceptions. The analysis of religious belief systems of migrant communities should incorporate the role of Catholic institutions in reshaping American beliefs and rituals. Mentioned as an example of transnational institution to the Catholic Church for its extension in the various corners of the world, accompanying him to this expansion a complex process of hybridization which the American Catholic Church is not indifferent, playing the ordeal is an example of it.

Another important element on the analysis of the diversity of practices and concepts in the field of transnational religion, is the interaction dynamics of beliefs, incorporated in the domestic and communal societies of origin: facing new forms of rituals and institutions of various Catholic dioceses in the United States.

As a final part of these issues; it is the playback and the creation of the belonging sense in the second and third generations of immigrants, which questions the authority, legitimating the tradition of their ancestors. Closing with a question; is tradition a counterweight to institutional changes in the Catholic Church in the receiving societies? This necessarily refers to modernization processes unleashed in societies like the U.S. and mega cities like New York.

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Among the tacit acceptance of church rules, and the possibility of rewording them, the pilgrimages and celebrations have special relevancies, being subverted spaces where institutions reveal the presence of popular religion as a mechanism of resistance; however, these processes of resistance, meaning the worlds of social actors are also modified.

This leads us to reflect the notion of reproduction of hegemony in receiving societies. To understand these dynamics, I suggest recovering the notion of Thompson's force field (Thompson, 2000) in particular to understand the dialectic of culture. Being that, the best expression of how the elements of indigenous societies become part of their new social space. Is necessary a processual multidimensional and reading for understanding the fields of social forces in which they operate mixtecos, and the mechanisms of resistance to hegemonic apparatus of the Catholic hierarchy? Subaltern social subjects does not form an agenda, with clear and precise objectives, but one thing is clear, they are unwilling to accept the new order implemented by the hierarchy.

From the perspective of Scott, the dominated know they are dominated, and they don't accept it, that's why they resist and

undermine the institutions, they confront inequality and power. For Corrigan and Sayer (1985) domination is not consensus via of the dominated but, in the forms and normative and coercive organs of the state to define subjects and identities simultaneously deny and exclude others. Gramsci overcomes this criticism by pointing out the complex unity between coercion and consent in a situation of domination employed Gramsci's concept of hegemony as more material and political. Second to him hegemony was fragile.

## Two Ethnographic contexts: Brooklyn and the Mixteca Poblana

Thomas Luckmann had noted the irruption of new universes of meaning in modern societies, understood rather like urban **Emphasizing** individual spaces. an construction of meaning from the various dimensions of experience: family, social, aesthetic, sexual, etc... Expanding the notion of "modern sacred" in parallel with the diversification of access to cultural symbols. Without requiring the mediation of religious or public institutions. Living a kind of hybridity that mediates between learned via, the historical religions, and incorporated through the insights of the self, free expression and movement. It is through collage or combination movements occurring



"large transcendences" linked to visions of other worlds, a kind of transcendence medium range, which places the individual in a new modern culture condition of the self, without let us involve the collective. The interesting thing is how you are opening the differences between the ethos and pathos of migrants, a field of disagreements and tensions with its previous universes of meaning.

It is May 26, 2007 and Angeles Martinez after two years of preparation, she will meet one of the main rituals of the Catholic Church: First Communion. The ceremony takes place in Brooklyn in the church of the Blessed Sacrament at number 200 Euclid Avenue, very close to the railway line Cresent J subway. The training process took about two years, every Saturday his parents took her to the talks given at the parish. His father had to modify his day off to accompany her for two years. It was a huge effort to Hermes, but especially for his wife Rachel, who speaks little English: the talks were conducted entirely in English, the perpetrators were women from the Irish Catholic community: the largest group ever in the neighborhood. It was a huge difference compared to previous methods of ritual in the birthplace of his parents: there, when

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someone dared to celebrate the First Communion of children, only went to two or three meetings a Petlalcingo parish, and a talk with godparents prior to the godson. However, times and dynamic church in Brooklyn are others. The presence of church within the migrant community involves the ritual field and providing material support: food and clothing. There is no face to face relationship between the head of the church and the Hispanic community of believers. In that sense there are no major differences with the pastor of St. James Church in Petlalcingo, the county seat. But we must understand the importance of playing for two years to call Angel parents. That allows the flock closer to the base.

But where things change is in the appropriation of space. In Micaltepec religious life is self-managed. Catholic Action is responsible for the organization of religious ideas and practices, has its own control system. They are actors who are in charge of organizing the masses and religious celebrations, unlike other processes where they have a leadership role agents or ministers of various religious institutions. That had been the predominant form of religious activity in the mixtecos people, while participating in the life of the Blessed



Sacrament Parish began the process of institutionalization.

Recognition of membership is built with the various discourses and practices of different actors, which do not always form a ideological body. coherent Supporting community projects is a strong indicator of its existence; the historical memory also plays a role in the collective perception. The role played by migrants in the conflicts that have affected the community, streamlines the reentry of returning migrants to the social and political life into the community or obstructs, having to go through a trial period to prove his membership in the social whole. Religious conversions acquired by migrants and non-migrants are also subject to renegotiation in communities where most are professing other religious belief, and new religious affiliations are perceived as an act of destabilizing the system charges and parties.

#### Conclusions.

Not only major religious institutions have trans nationalized, his followers are also part of this diffusion process. Moving to another place involves establishing contact with otherness, namely with new life experiences and different ways of conceiving the relationship with the sacred. Religious beliefs have a significant role in shaping the practicality of the existence of the actors in their daily lives. On the other hand, eligion is a particular cultural aspect because of its importance for identity. It may be more difficult to modify than other cultural elements such as eating habits or clothing

Religious congregations adopt various strategies for integration into the life of the faithful. Religious institutional structures play a distinct role in shaping the identity of the actors, a substantial part is related to the degree of participation in the processes of socialization. The Catholic Church, despite its transnational character in institutional terms do not have that ability, in the local terrain, coverage and interaction among its parishes on both sides of the border, each acting on their own schemes of work.

Parishes as the Blessed Sacrament in the 200 Euclid Avenue have faced a growing demand for religious services by Hispanic neighborhood: integrated by Puerto Ricans, Salvadorans, Dominicans. Guatemalans, Cubans and Mexicans. During the first communion of Angeles Martinez, overwhelming presence of Hispanics, the only non-Hispanic white presence was given by the priest and his assistants.



The Catholic Church in New York has not been immune to the strategies of other religious congregations to provide food, clothing and legal advisory services to immigrant communities, as part of a strategy to link and acquire presence. In the case of the Catholic Church apart from these benefits is undeniable the reaffirmation of the ethos of those who have joined religious activities in target companies, which involves conceived as different compared to the other despite sharing the same language.

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