

BREAKING BARRIERS: LATINA CATHOLIC IMMIGRANTS

by

Lorena Hillon
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
Sociology

Committee:

Mark D. Jacobs

Director

[Signature]

[Signature]

[Signature]

Department Chairperson

James P. Cooper

Dean, College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

Date:

December 3, 2014

Fall Semester 2014
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

Breaking Barriers: Latina Catholic Immigrants

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts at George Mason University

by

Lorena Hillon
Bachelor of Arts
Universidad de los Andes, 2011

Director: Mark Jacobs, Professor
Department of Sociology

Fall Semester 2014
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA



This work is licensed under a [creative commons attribution-noncommercial 3.0 unported license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/).

DEDICATION

To my grandmother, the first feminist in my life. Abuelita, desde donde estés, espero que sepas que sin ti no estaría donde estoy. Gracias por tu esfuerzo y por demostrarnos el poder que tiene una mujer. And, to the many grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers and fathers, especially those who immigrate to lands beyond their own, who break their own barriers and allow those of us who come after to get to where we are.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank the professors who guided me along the way. My undergraduate professors, Chloe and Gregory, whose words, support and even friendship guided me beyond the academic. I know that the journey in this thesis would not have existed without both of you. I would also like to thank my graduate professors, especially my committee members, Dr. Witte and Dr. Guagnano, who provided the framework for this research. My thesis Director, Dr. Jacobs, whose patience, words and guidance provided more than I expected. Without his support, I would not be where I am.

I am also eternally grateful to two very important people, who I will never be able to thank enough. Gloria, your words, guidance and friendship kept me going even when I felt like giving up on this whole endeavor. Mary, your kind support and willingness to listen to my thoughts and my endless political and personal monologues are the reason I could write and turn in a thesis. Without both of you, I would not have started, continued and even finished.

To my family, especially my cousins, who have always been supportive and set the bar high. I could not have made it here without either one of you. To the women who allowed me to include their stories, you inspire me every day. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my father, sister and mother. Nothing that I have been able to accomplish would have happened without your love, guidance and understanding. It is because of your sacrifices, your work and your values that I am who I am, and that I can do what I do. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Abbreviations	vi
Abstract	vii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: The Roots of the Tension.....	8
Feminists?.....	9
Chapter Three: Religion.....	15
More Than a Sense of Community	20
Chapter Four: Like Mothers, Like Daughters?	25
Catholicism.....	25
The Influence of Barrier Breakers.....	27
Conflicts	28
Mutual Influence	31
Chapter Five: My Story, Her Story, Their Story, Our Story.....	34
The Challenge of Being a Woman	34
Chapter Six: One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church?	38
The Church: A Place to Fight for Those in Need.....	41
Four Parishes, Four Priests.....	42
Defending Life, Defending Immigrants	44
The Breaks Are Created	53
Chapter Seven: Beyond the Personal: Larger Implications	56
References.....	61

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer LGBTQ

ABSTRACT

BREAKING BARRIERS: LATINA CATHOLIC IMMIGRANTS

Lorena Hillon, M.A.

George Mason University, 2014

Thesis Director: Dr. Mark Jacobs

This thesis describes the negotiations of tensions, contradictions and oppositions that exist when considering immigration, religion and gender. For Catholic Latinas in the U.S, immigrating creates not only new barriers but can, at times, augment their relationship with the church. Yet, Latinas are not the stereotypical traditional religious believers; they break those barriers and negotiate the differences between traditional and nontraditional beliefs. They negotiate these tensions through immediate experiences, such as their relationships with their daughters, but also through other means. Among them, the church, as the source of community and empowerment, becomes a place of negotiation. What goes on in the church itself allows for breaks that can lead to differences, to reconciling oppositions. This research is a first step in understanding how women reconcile the differences that come with being immigrants, Catholic and Latinas. Finally, what this also underscores is the fact that, through breaking barriers of tradition, Latinas are evidence of change.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“I think I could love both men and women”. What a harsh statement, for a devout Catholic mother, anyway. Never mind the attempt at explaining my non-heterosexuality in such terms of love, or the “I think I could”, even though I already had. Never mind that, in retrospect, love is really not the point of it all for me. The point, despite my fear of telling my mother and my father, was that I never expected the response I got.

It was October 6, 2009. My mother, father and I were in the middle of a video chat, which was a routine we started since I moved to Colombia in 2005. I do not know what it was about that night; I had not planned to say anything. In fact, I had not really said it out loud to anyone. Though the circle of people close to me most likely knew, and so did I, I had not officially come out. If I had planned it, there are about twenty people I would have “come out” to before my parents.

Whatever it was about the conversation we were having that night, I said it. The words came out of my mouth without permission and without a warning. They were shocked. I was shocked. Yet, after going through my own process for a year before that night, and after having endless conversations about equality, justice, gay rights and anything related with my mother, I did not anticipate her reaction. I did not expect joy –I

wish it were that way— but I did not expect silence, which, if I am being honest, was worse.

My mother and I spoke at least twice a day, and despite our tough relationship, we grew closer when I left home. She called just to say good morning. She was the one I turned to, the one I knew understood my fears and my anger before I did. She saw things in me before I did. And though I love my father just as much, it was the very tensions between my mother and me that drew us closer. In other words, though I had not even thought about saying anything to them, if I had, I would have expected my mother to be more understanding. Not because she loved me more than my father, but because in our endless conversations and because she knew me so well, I figured she already knew.

Beyond the personal relationship with my mother, I also knew she was a very outspoken, nontraditional, empowered and understanding woman. That is, as I went to college and began my own encounter with a much less conservative environment, it is as if she did as well. My conversations and new knowledge of feminism and the LGBTQ community made me realize that, all along, my mother had never been very traditional. She agreed with me, she was also angered when I talked about the prejudice against the LGBTQ community, and it seemed as if there was not a conservative bone in her body.

Even my childhood is a reflection of that. I grew up with a father/mother dynamic that was not necessarily traditional. Neither my father nor my mother reflected the normal gender roles expected of traditional couples. I grew up seeing my father and mother both cook, take care of my sister and me, wash dishes, do the laundry and seeing my father iron his own clothes. I grew up seeing my mother take care of the family finances and

have the final word in family decisions. I grew up knowing that it was because of their own personality, not their gender, that they had those specific roles. To a certain extent, even before I knew it, my parents raised me in a much less traditional environment than I realized. This is especially true considering their socioeconomic, cultural and religious upbringing.

Yet, from raising your daughters in a less traditional environment to having a non-heterosexual daughter, there is a big leap. And, even though both my parents were equally responsible in raising me to not think of traditional gender roles for myself, it was with my mother with whom I had those conversations. In retrospect, I know my father had, and still has, the same beliefs, but it was my mother who was more outspoken. I understood my father's silence on matters of sexuality as reflecting a traditional conservative stance on it, though that is just a reflection of his personality. I understood my mother's ability to hold those conversations with me as the equivalent of accepting it, though it is very different to say that you accept people from the LGBTQ community than to say that you accept the fact that your daughter, who you raised, is not heterosexual.

If I had understood that in 2009, perhaps my parents' very different reactions would have come as no surprise. As the words *love both men and women* came out, my heart filled with tears, I felt a hole in my chest, I felt emptiness, I felt an unexpected sense of confusion about something I was sure about. My mother's face, almost angry, filled with just as much confusion. My father's face remained very silent, very still, almost as if completely unsurprised. I cannot even remember what the exact words that followed

were, but at some point, my mother said she knew it was my attempt to test her, to see how she would react. Eventually, she left the room and left my father and me staring at each other. What followed was something that I still feel I imagined. My father's words, coming from someone who does not always speak up, who does not always make his opinion heard, struck me with such force that I was left speechless: "You are my daughter, and I still love you".

You are my daughter, and I *still* love you. I must have repeated those words in my head like a broken record. I must have questioned those words just as many times. I must have wondered whether it was really my father, not my mother, who said them. Even today, as I write and I read them, tears come out as if he had just said them to me; as if my mother had just left the room, as if the days that she did not speak to me had just occurred. What struck me was not even the troublesome *still* love you because considering the context, those words meant more than anything to me. What struck me was that it was my father who stood there, looking at me, and reassured me that, *despite that*, his love for me had not changed. It was also a reflection of the fact that my mother had not uttered those words, she had not reacted in the way I had imagined she would; in this very specific case, her silence spoke loud and clear.

The truth is, after days of silence, things went back to how they were before. For about three years after that, neither of us –not my father, not my mother, not even my sister–said a word of that night. We all acted as if I had never said both men and women. And if I am completely honest to myself, even after finally talking to them about it and them saying they are okay with it, I am not sure that they are ready to say that their

daughter has a partner who is not a man. I am not sure they are ready for others to know. I am not sure that they really believe it yet.

On a very personal level, that night has very significant implications. It was a kind of culmination of a coming out process that had taken me a year; although, truthfully, that process never really ends. More importantly, it was the first time I said it out loud, it was the first time I said it to my parents, it was the first time that I even said it to myself outside of my own thoughts. The words, that had made their way from being mere thoughts, made it real. That reality made me realize, if nothing else, that my father was right there with me, perhaps more of a feminist than I was, perhaps more accepting than even I was, perhaps his silence was really evidence of his love *despite* something he himself had not been raised to *deal with*. And though my father and I do not talk about it much, and I cannot say he is completely on board with it all, I will always remember his words.

Unfortunately, my father's words highlighted my mother's lack of words. The relationship I have with my father, and his own feminism despite being raised in a very traditional family, merits its' own space, and one day I hope to write and talk about it. However, at that moment in time, and even still today, what startled and overwhelmed me, more than my father's surprising reaction, was my mother's. As our relationship grew stronger, as I grew up, as I began to be outspoken, as I began to question religion and the Church, and I told her about it, I imagined it was she who would know. My father and I did not share those conversations as much as my mother and I, and so, on an

unconscious level, I had imagined that my mother had seen my coming out process and knew what was going to happen at some point.

Since that moment, since the silence that followed, I began to question what I knew about her. If she knew me as well as I thought, it did not make sense that she had been surprised or even angry. More importantly, if she was so understanding and agreed with most of what I said about the LGBTQ community and women's rights, then why was she not quick enough to say I love you too. If she was so liberal, so open, so nontraditional as I had grown to know her, then why did she suddenly become so traditional. I realize that agreeing with other people's sexuality is not the same as accepting your daughter's. Nonetheless, because my mother and I have such a close relationship, because I had felt that I could be my feminist self with her, because she agreed with almost everything I said, I was surprised that she was silent when my father was not. It did not make sense to me that someone who raised me the way she and my father had, who was one of the most explicit examples of feminism that I had in my own life, how she could have kept silent, how she could have left instead of saying I love you.

That is how this question began. It was, initially, nothing more than an attempt to understand how my mother could be so untraditional and yet very traditional at the same time. I needed to understand how those contradictions could coexist in one woman; how could I have expected an open I love you and had, instead, received silence.

Still, as I proceeded to uncover the contradictions, tensions and harmony in my own mother, I realized that they go beyond her. As I tried to reconcile my relationship with my mother, I found myself trying to reconcile much larger issues. It was no longer

just about the nontraditional/traditional contradiction occurring in my mother, but of the very nontraditional/traditional environment of which she is a part of. Although it begins with my mother, it becomes a question of the larger tensions between gender, immigration and religion. The question is no longer just about how my mother could be so nontraditional and at the same time have a hard time with the fact of having a non-heterosexual daughter. Very quickly, I realized that the same question of contradictions and tensions exist in the larger context.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROOTS OF THE TENSION

The evident tension of having traditional beliefs and, at the same time, nontraditional attitudes is not something new to my mother. On the surface, she was raised in a very traditional Colombian household: a Catholic, church-going, rosary-praying family that lived in a rural part of the country. Further, in line with tradition, her mother was in charge of educating her children religiously. Thus, it should be no surprise that my mom, following her mother and following her own culture, eventually became a very devout and practicing Catholic woman.

However, Catholicism was not the only thing that my grandmother passed on to my mother. In the same way that religion went from mother to daughter, so too did feminism. In other words, the fact of breaking the barriers of traditional gender roles expected of both of them was also passed down from one generation to another. In fact, given the characteristics I know in her, at times it seems as if feminism was a stronger force in shaping the independent, driven, empowered, gender-role-defying woman that my mother became. My mother, raised by a strong woman, became a strong woman herself.

Feminists?

Feminism is a term I now use to characterize certain traits, attitudes and beliefs that I see in my grandmother and mother. The truth, however, is that neither one of them would necessarily call themselves feminists. Given their background, feminism is, to a certain extent, a term they might reject. On the one hand, my grandmother might have rejected it out of lack of knowledge on the subject. On the other hand, my mother's own connection with Catholicism today might bring resistance to a term that some might associate with an anti-Catholic stance.

Evidently, the relationship between feminism and Catholicism, that is at times harmonious and at times full of tension, is a complex one. It is too simplistic to say that Catholicism or Catholics are, by definition, anti feminists. Nor is it true that feminism and feminists are anti religion. The truth of the matter is that, as it becomes evident in my mother and in other very religious and yet very feminist women, the two have a complex relationship. In every extent of the word, they break the barriers of both what is expected of them as Catholics and as feminists. In any case, the issue here is that despite their possible distance from the term feminism, they are, in my perspective, feminists.

The term feminism, as a theoretical concept, movement and way of life, is something I did not encounter until my undergraduate years. Although, in retrospect, it may have been there all along, it did not become a part of my thoughts until it became a part of my academic life. Of course, feminism is not limited to academia. However, *my* feminism, the one I later started using to characterize my mother and grandmother and even my father, is one that stemmed from getting a higher education.

That understanding of feminism, as an academic realm of thought, distances the possibility from my grandmother and mother. Education for them was not as accessible, much less higher education, especially given the general context in Colombia. First, women did not enter high school until 1933 and universities until 1937 (Giraldo Gómez, 1987). And, of those who did enter the universities, they were mostly middle and upper class women (Jaramillo Uribe, 1989). Thus, it seems plausible to say that education, and even more so, academic feminist thoughts of empowerment and gender roles, were even less accessible to women like my mother and grandmother who were from a lower class rural family. In fact, my grandmother did not go to school past second grade and could not read or write until later in her life. My mother only made it to seventh grade and, except for studying English in the U.S, never went back to school. Thus, considering the role of academia in feminism, it seems that, on the surface, this was not part of my grandmother and mother's context. Put simply, the feminism I encountered was not something my mother and grandmother had access to.

However, the existence of feminism in Colombia is not just the realm of upper class women. In fact, "the prototypical early Latin American feminist activist in many countries was a former radical student militant or *guerrillera* and hardly a self-obsessed bourgeois 'lady'" (Sternbach et al; 400). My mother was born in 1962, at a time when the guerrilla was making a presence in Colombia, and the class and agricultural fight from which they came into existence was not far from home. Nevertheless, she was never part of that "prototypical" feminist activist movement, nor was she part of the middle and upper class women who had access to higher education. In other words, considering the

different aspects of feminism that may have existed during my mother's early life, it does not seem probable that she had access to the environment or the movement suitable for thinking of injustices in such a way.

Another aspect of feminism in Colombia is that the ideas and questions were affected by the international fights for women's rights in Europe, Spain and the U.S.

According to Pardo Pedraza's analysis of Colombian women in the 1930s:

The international debates and discussions opened the door for these issues in Colombia and they facilitated, on the one hand, the adoptions of measures to improve women's conditions and, on the other hand, to legitimate the demands that began to sprout among Colombian women for social equality and for their political and civil rights (p. 22)

In addition to the international influence on women's rights, according to Uribe de Acosta, the point of departure for feminism in Colombia was the fourth International Feminist Congress held in Bogotá in December of 1930, led by Georgina Fletcher (Uribe de Acosta, 1963, p.187). Yet, the women who attended were mostly economically privileged. Thus, the debates and reforms discussed were a reflection of their positions of privilege (Pardo Pedraza, 201, p.63). Evidently, my grandmother, who was born in 1930, was neither part of the group of women who could attend these debates nor of the actual debates and reforms being discussed. She was not economically privileged, she was not educated and she was in the periphery, both literally and metaphorically, from the center. In the same way that Black feminism highlights the fact that white women's issues were not the same as black women's (Davis, 1981), so too did the new feminist movement in Colombia seem to exclude my grandmother's needs.

In any case, feminism was not well received in Colombia. In a country highly influenced by Catholicism and by conservative thinking, feminism was counter posed with femininity. To the extent that femininity represented the highly valued domesticity, feminism represented the negation of femininity. “Femininity was elevated with great virtue, while feminism was classified as the main threat to women... So, women opted for resisting the label of feminists” (Pardo Pedraza, 2011, p. 116). It seems, then, that my grandmother was neither surrounded by an environment that made feminist thoughts accessible to her, nor was the title of feminist even highly regarded. The same can be said for my mother.

However, they were no less breaking barriers, they were no less feminists. Feminism is not just an academic theoretical concept, nor the official movement, and feminists are not just those who have access to said concept, whether through education or activism. There is another aspect to feminism, one that allows for my mother and grandmother to be called feminists, one that Narayan says is not based on a simple influence of westernization. Rather, “...for many Third World feminists... feminist consciousness is not a hot-house bloom grown in the alien “foreign” ideas, but has its roots much closer to home”(Narayan, 2013, p. 6). In her case, closer to home literally meant seeing the gender disparity between her parents, her mother’s silence and the suffering that came from it. To that extent, my mother’s own feminist attitudes were drawn from similar views; it was not about foreign ideas but about practical needs and encounters in her own home.

My grandfather died when my mother was seven and my grandmother was left with ten children, four of which were still young. My grandmother, who had always been a strong person, who was not a passive woman, was left to raise four young children on her own. It was no longer about being the mother in charge of raising her children; she was left to support them economically as well. She took charge, like the real leader and powerful woman that she was born to be. She gave my mother and her younger siblings what she could; working in the fields and selling what she could in the market. She was the breadwinner. She was the mother. She was the head of the household. She broke barriers because she had to. In my mother's words "she had no other option. The love she had for us, for seeing us succeed –and God gave her the strength." In that sense, my grandmother's feminism was grounded in issues close to home. In her case, it was an economic need and love for her children, not a foreign idea.

Those types of situations drive women to break barriers and to become what is not expected or allowed of them. Speaking of Marie Curie's own driven spirit, Montero says that "The revolutionary environments have always favored women's advancement; the moments that are socially anomalous leave rifts in the conventional framework from which the freest of spirits escape...Repression [helped] break the sexist prejudice of the time" (Montero, 2013, p. 50)¹. Montero is speaking of larger social rifts: the repression suffered by Polish men and women. Even so, living as a widow, at a time and a place that highly valued the traditional family structure, is a rift. It was that "revolutionary environment" –if by revolutionary we understand counter to norms and traditions of a

¹ The translation, as with any text that is originally in Spanish, is my own.

very sexist and gendered environment– of breaking barriers, which allowed for my grandmother’s “free spirit” to escape.

That was the context in which my mother grew up; with a strong, empowered and independent role model that was nothing like the stereotypical one. My grandmother never taught my mother to be submissive, or to be the wife who accepted everything her husband said and who was not empowered. This was the case not just through how she raised her children, but how she exemplified her role as a woman. My grandmother, because of the circumstances “close to home” –necessity, personality and because she was a free spirit– became and embodied an independent, driven and strong woman. She broke barriers. She was a feminist.

Of course, it had everything to do with personality as well. My grandmother was always strong willed and had a strong personality. She was the “stronger” one, the one in charge of punishment even when my grandfather was alive. Despite that, it is not clear that my mother would have had the feminist role model she did if her mother had not been the free spirit that escaped through the rifts caused by a revolutionary environment. She would have been strong regardless, but it was because my grandmother was a widow with young children, because of what *she had to do*, that my mother grew up seeing what a woman could do and what women were not, by nature, limited to. And so, in the same way that Catholicism was passed down from mother to daughter, so too was the characteristic of breaking barriers, of being a feminist.

CHAPTER THREE

RELIGION

One of the earliest and most vivid memories I have is one with my mother; the image of my mother, my sister and me sleeping in a corner at the Miami airport, waiting for our next flight to D.C. Waiting for the flight that would take us to where my father had been for a year. I do not remember the flight, I do not remember the farewells, but I remember the feeling of comfort at a moment of great change. It was the comfort and tranquility by the mere presence of my mother; her existence was so important to me that I did not perceive, or do not remember, realizing what a significant life experience that day was. It is not irrelevant that my becoming an immigrant and Latina –which marked my life even to the extent of affecting what I do– is a journey I took with my mother. The day she became an immigrant, so did I.

We *became* the same day. Yet, our journey and what it actually means to be an immigrant and a Latina takes on different roads at that point. In my case, I arrived at an age young enough to start kindergarten, to learn English as if it was my native language and, to an extent, assimilate in the U.S culture, mentality and way of life. Although my own experience is filled with the feeling of not fitting in, and although I always had a strong family and Latino upbringing, I was able to belong in a much different way than she was. She did not know the language. She worked taking care of kids at home for the

first years, not leaving the house. And other than our immediate family, there was not much she could identify with or feel a connection with. Though we are both immigrants and Latinas, what that actually means is not the same thing for either one of us.

My mother's possibilities with regards to people, places and communities to connect with were limited. Although the Church took on that role in later years, it was not the case in the beginning. We were, of course, raised as Catholics; the morals, the values and the beliefs were there. However, apart from a few of the important Catholic celebrations –mainly Christmas and Easter– we did not attend mass or go to church often.

That all changed in 1994, after the death of a close family member. From that moment on, our lives changed. We began praying the rosary, going to mass every Sunday and going to Sunday school. My mother, who was a believing but not practicing Catholic, suddenly became the religious person she had never been. In the years that followed, she became a Sunday school teacher, a lector, a director, the treasurer and, eventually, vice president of a religious group; she was not only practicing, she became active. Although the tension and relationship between Catholicism and feminism had coexisted in Colombia, it was not until my mother was in the U.S, when she became an immigrant, that it took on a different strength.

Undoubtedly, the life changing event of a death in the family can have the effect of making a person turn to religion. It is not uncommon for people to rely on religion during times of crisis, of tragedy and trouble. However, although it took a very specific tragic event in my mother's life for her to become as devout, it is not clear that she would have done the same if she had been in Colombia, if she had not become an immigrant.

Though the event pushed her over the edge, so to speak, there was also an appropriate environment that allowed for that. In my mother's words, when asked whether she would have turned to religion in the same way if she had been living in Colombia:

[the difference was] having gone through that experience here. I could not go to the funeral, so I grasped onto religion. The way I lived [his] death was through prayer... [My devotion] increased because of being in a country that was not mine; Missing your country, family and roots. Prayer helped me.

Other interviewed women echo a similar sentiment. Though they would have been Catholic regardless, the relationship, the closeness and the way they became active mark the difference. My mother's younger sister, Ester², also lived the death of close family members from afar. Ester's experience with religion and immigration is similar to my mother's. She says that her mother's death, which hit her hard especially because she was not able to attend the funeral, pushed her to find strength in God. That gave her the strength to keep going, though she is not sure that it would also hold true if she had been in Colombia. When I asked her about this, she said:

I don't think so. Because here you live a world of more solitude, more with the family and less friends. While in Colombia, I would have had many friends, because that is where I went to school, that is where I met people... [Here], I don't have many friends. It's as if that pushes me to fill the void that I feel, which [happens] with religion.

For Ester, the death of her mother affected her religiosity. However, Catholicism also provided much more than a relief after the loss of a family member. It fills the void that immigrants often feel by virtue of being far from home. For Nívea, "Feeling alone, that helps you get closer [to the church]". It is clear that my mother, Ester and Nivea's

² The names are changed, and the ones used are borrowed from "The House of the Spirits", by Isabelle Allende. In it, the author does a cross-generational novel of a family whose central figures are women.

generation of immigrants face barriers in ways that women like me do not. There are cultural, language, education barriers and, most importantly, a lack of community feeling.

Catholicism provides for them what I found elsewhere. For example, with regards to Jewish and Muslim immigrants in the U.S, Norman says:

Religion is not simply a convenient entry point. For many immigrants, religion, as both a set of practices and beliefs as well as a source of community, provides order, meaning and dignity to their lives, offering assistance in both spiritual and secular matters. Religion may provide a way out of the unpleasantness of the immigrant experience. It might be a salve against the pain of poverty, the intolerable work conditions, and the dehumanization that seems to go hand-in-hand with being an immigrant in the United States. Or it may be that radically different worldviews, shaped by religious beliefs, cause resistance to dominant society in the United States, rather than acculturation and assimilation (p. 51)

The difference in immigrants' experiences across different generations is evident.

Immigration was not always pleasant for them and it was, at times, dehumanizing. Thus, in their case, religion provided order, meaning and community and even resistance precisely because their experience differed.

Inevitably, Catholicism takes on a different strength for women of an older generation. The very source of gender barriers that existed in their native country—religion and culture—is what they turn to in order to break the new barriers that come with immigration. The simple act of immigrating creates barriers, but it also allows for other barriers to be broken. Though my mother seemed to have been born into a feminist environment, following her mother's example, it became a more plausible existence in the U.S.

The existence of a context more suitable for feminist beliefs is evident in other families whose structure breaks the traditional dynamic. According to Clara's, Alba's

and Nívea's own accounts of their families, the structure is similar to the one in my own childhood; the activities are shared, the roles are not as predetermined and the dynamic is not the traditional one more evident in Colombia. It seems to be an environment where such roles are less stigmatized, which is not to say that the U.S is a completely nontraditional environment, or that gender roles are not marked and breaking them is not stigmatized. However, considering these women's backgrounds, there is a visible and drastic change that they themselves perceive. Further, similar to the necessity that drove my grandmother, these women are also faced with different economic situations. The very idea of being working parents, of "not having help and support of others"³, which Nívea contrasted to Colombia, and of having to share the house chores, establishes a different dynamic. For her, it seems that "[In Colombia] it is not well received to have a man doing the house jobs". Again, this is based on their own perception of gender roles and of what is and is not allowed in the household division of labor. In any case, though there are working women in Colombia as well, they end up with a double shift. In contrast to Nívea's and my mother's circumstances in the U.S, many of their own female family members in Colombia not only have a job but are, nonetheless, in charge of the house. For Nívea and for my mother, it is a much more balanced dynamic of sharing duties at home. In their case, immigration creates a different experience⁴ where having a double shift is not the inevitable outcome of having a job.

³In other words, unlike in their native countries, they did not have help from their family to take care of their children.

⁴ Although Nívea is a U.S citizen and my mother is not, and their education, level of English and jobs differ, they are both Colombian, both devout and active Catholics, who immigrated legally, and are more or less considered middle class in the U.S. Considering Latinas from other countries, whose immigration status and class differs, can contribute to a difference in gender roles. That is worth researching further.

More Than a Sense of Community

In the context of new and differing experiences, Catholicism provides community. Yet, it goes beyond that. As Norman says, it can guide even the secular aspects of one's life; a life that goes beyond the immediate effects of being a religious woman. That is, it does not solely imply church attendance, church participation or even adherence to religious doctrine and beliefs. Given the economic and cultural differences that arise from immigration, many women are faced with new difficulties in their identities as women and Latinas; for example, having careers, and, to a certain extent, embracing a sense of empowerment. Nahban-Warren, in her analysis of the connection between empowerment and religiosity, considers a Catholic community of Mary Ministries based in Phoenix. Through this group, many Catholic women find that religion, specifically the Virgin Mary, is the source that allows them to reconcile those contradictions. Ruiz, the matriarch of the ministries "...[emphasizes] women's duties to their husbands as partners in marriage, [and] defends the right of women to be educated and to succeed in their careers" (Nabhan-Warren, 2007, p.311). It is through the Virgin Mary that she finds the possibility of reconciling the fact of being a partner in marriage and, at the same time, a career woman. The women who participate "displayed a courage and conviction in the face of a history of racism and sexism, and they turn to the Virgin Mary for inspiration, hope and guidance. As faithful Catholics, they work with the church but also challenge it to better meet the needs of Hispanic Catholics" (p. 311) As the major female role model in the Catholic Church, the Virgin Mary is oftentimes seen as the example of motherhood, not necessarily of the empowered and career woman. Yet, it seems that the

Virgin Mary gives them the inspiration and hope that allows them to break the barriers of roles that are usually understood as opposing: mother and career. Further, as Nabhan-Warren says, they do not just work with the Church, but are also there to challenge it.

These women did not find the reconciliation of the tension outside of the Church but within it; their life outside of the religious institution is guided by it and, they are no less empowered or less willing to break from traditional roles for women. In my mother's case, for example, the contradiction of being traditional and nontraditional is not exclusively a consequence of the Church but, instead, one that is reconciled because of it. My mother's strengthened Catholicism in the U.S is not simply a result of the sense of community it provided. Rather, it became a way for her to reconcile the opposing tensions.

The reconciliation of being empowered, traditional and nontraditional is better understood through Diaz-Stevens' analysis of Latinas and the Church. Similar to the Mary Ministries, the source of reconciling tensions that arise from being empowered can be found in the Church. Furthermore, to take it one step further, Diaz-Stevens argues that "religion has oftentimes given Latinas affirmation as leaders, especially at grassroots level" (Diaz-Stevens, 1994, p.241). Instead of finding empowerment as leaders outside of the Church, some Latinas find it within the Church. Many times, the work environment –cleaning houses, for example– does not leave much room for empowerment, much less for leadership roles. Thus, the Church becomes the very source.

After doing field work in the Latino congregation of four Washington Archdiocese parishes –with socioeconomic status varying among them– it was evident

that women not only participate more, but are far more active and held higher positions of leadership than men – excluding, of course, priests and deacons. They were lectors, directors, Eucharistic ministers, choir directors, and visibly recognized by other church members. My mother’s participation in the church embodies this characteristic of leadership; during her time as Director of the Lectors, she was noticeably a leader and respected by other fellow parishioners. She is an empowered woman and a leader in the church, which could not have necessarily happened elsewhere. Given the nature of jobs available to immigrant women, who have limited education and English, leadership roles are scarce.

With regards to grassroot-level issues, it is also clear that when the time came to be advocates for traditionally Catholic issues –mainly pro-life marches and defense of traditional marriage– women were at the forefront. In Maryland, specifically, gay marriage was placed on the ballot in 2012 by advocates of traditional marriage, among them Catholic parishes. To that extent, they take on a role as agents of social change and they “play central roles in their communities, particularly in the religious cultural sphere where their influence has shaped religious practice and beliefs” (Peña & Frehill, 1998, p. 620). They are agents in that they are not mere passive believers, who stand back and only listen to the readings and the homily. They become active within the Church and, in this case, that agency becomes a political one that transcends the religious sphere.

Of course, some of these women also participate in pro-immigrant rallies. For example, Nívea was at both the pro-life march and the April 10th, 2013 immigration reform rally as an “educator for reform”, which shows that devout doctrine adhering

Latinas are not just focused on single interests. This makes the issue of agency that much more complex given that the two views, immigration and abortion, among other things, are not always harmoniously represented in one political party or candidate. In any case, when looking at the Catholic context specifically, it is essential to highlight that women are not just empowered in the Church, but they take on leadership roles and even become activists. This characteristic, beyond providing a sense of community, gives Catholicism that much more of a pivotal role in Latinas' lives as immigrants.

The fact that Catholicism becomes not just a source of faith-based influence but of influence beyond the institutional boundaries of the Church, strengthens the power it has into Latinas' lives. It becomes not a matter of compartmentalizing the religious and the secular but of how these two become intricately connected to the extent that both immigration and religiosity influence how a Latina lives. The power of this, though not exclusively a political one, is much more striking –and even measurable– during times of elections. It is no longer about voting either based on Catholicism or based on immigration, on what may seem to be a vote against their own interests, but the fact that the two are in constant coexistence.

It is important to understand how these apparent contradictions actually get negotiated and reconciled. For Latinas, religion and immigration mutually affect and strengthen each other. The very fact of being immigrants fortifies their connection with and the power of the Church and, at the same time, their faith affects their immigrant experience. Latinas do not necessarily compartmentalize the traditional and the nontraditional. The truth is, they coexist in one body –meaning in one person and in the

Latino group as a whole. Further, they do not take the nontraditional to work and leave the traditional at home. The barriers of these are broken so that home is not necessarily the stereotypical traditional dynamic, nor is the life outside of their house uninfluenced by the traditional aspects.

Thus, immigration intensifies the contradiction of being Catholic and, at the same time, of breaking gender roles, of being feminists. In a simultaneous way, these immigrant Latinas are breaking the barriers of gender roles and of their own faith, both by defying the roles and by becoming more devout than they would have been at home. They are nontraditional and traditional at the same time. The struggle between these tensions, that I saw through my mother's silence, is not one specific just to her. The very fact of being immigrants, of being Catholic and Latinas, creates and intensifies tensions in other women as well. These, which at times seem to coexist harmoniously and at times are dissonant, are influenced by and influence their life outside of Sunday mass.

CHAPTER FOUR

LIKE MOTHERS, LIKE DAUGHTERS?

Mother-daughter relationships, by their very nature, are not always harmonious. In my case, it was the very similarities with my mother that brought about tensions and, at the same time, those tensions brought closeness. Though my mother learned from her mother, she is not the same woman. I can say the same thing. Still, differences do not mean distance. In our case, given the difference in our experience as immigrants, our relationship with religion changed. Catholicism does not have the pivotal role in my life that it does, admittedly, for my mother. For my generation, for those of us who either immigrated younger or who were born here, there is not the same need for a community as there is for her generation.

Catholicism

For me, the relationship with Catholicism became a break from it. Of course, that is not always the case. For a variety of reasons, though the connection may be different than their mother, some women do go back to religion. However, the similarity in most cases seems to be the role that our mothers play in our early encounter with religion. Though both our fathers and mothers may be believers, it is what they do in their everyday life with that belief that differs.

It was always the moms who took on the leadership roles at the prayers. They were the ones who decided who did what...[My mom] was more passionate [about religion]... more focused... I remember my mom being in the kitchen, singing a religious song. I remember seeing my mom reading a book with the Virgin Mary on the front cover. I've never seen my dad sit down and do that.

In many cases, like it was for Alba in the example above, and it was for me as well, part of the memory of seeing our mothers in everyday activities was the simple fact of being around them more. The difference in gendered jobs available for immigrants –our mothers cleaned houses – *allowed* them to be more physically present than our fathers. In any case, Alba's memory of her mother's relationship with religion, and that of other family women, highlights two important aspects. On the one hand, women tend to take on the leadership roles with regards to religion. It is not about who is a stronger believer but, perhaps, who is more *passionate*. On the other hand, that tie with religion is visible in the daily routine outside of the Church. That specific way of living Catholicism is not unrelated to the fact that immigration creates a closer relationship to their faith, to the extent that it went beyond attending Sunday mass.

That is where we, the next generation, break from our mothers' relationship with religion. Whether we eventually come back to Catholicism, or break away, the reasons highlight the very difference in how we see the faith we grew up with. In Blanca's case, going to church "was a drag...[I] wasn't getting anything from it. Personally, [when in college], not going didn't mean losing anything". Alba has a similar connection with Catholicism, saying that "[it] has not done anything for me. It's just a custom, a tradition, there's no connection". What both Blanca and Alba say about religion underscores the difference in how they see and relate to religion. Unlike their mothers, unlike my mother,

they do not find community or a connection in it, nor is it the source of empowerment and reconciliation. For them, it is about not getting something from it. Their relationship with religion is a conscious decision based on the fact that they do have a community and a connection elsewhere. For our mothers, it is a combination of beliefs and a sense of belonging to something, in a country where they do not always feel at home. For Clara, who, like her mother, is devout and active, returning to her faith is about realizing “I can get something out of it, [it’s] not just about pleasing my parents”. Though both her and her mother share the same faith, and it can be a source of bonding, the journey that led them to that relationship with faith is not the same. The difference in generations, especially considering immigration, is part of the reason that their approach to religion differs. After all, we are not our mothers and, part of having a close relationship with them also means we, at times, have to break certain barriers.

The Influence of Barrier Breakers

What my mother saw in her mother affected who she became and the type of woman she taught my sister and me to be. My mother was able to break gender barriers because her mother did. Consequently, so was I. In the same way, Blanca’s mother affects how she carries herself as a woman and how she lives her relationships. She says, “My mom breaks barriers⁵. [She] doesn’t back down to anything. [I learned that] you

⁵ I derive the title from Blanca’s description of her mother as a woman who breaks barriers. It applies not just figuratively –to the breaks in gender roles– but also to the breaks in generations and those that come with immigration, geographically and culturally speaking. Further, it relates to the many barriers being broken that are evident throughout this research, even to the extent of crossing the nontraditional and traditional boundaries. Finally, it is a break from the traditional understanding of what it means to have religion influence one’s life.

don't *need* someone. Someone is there to complement [you]. That is something in [my] relationship that works so well because we're not dependent". Although Blanca grew up with other significant role models in her life, she seems to have a closer bond with her mother than even my mother and I have. More than anyone else, they had each other and, given the spatial boundaries of, at times, sharing a room, the bond was not only physical but emotional.

For Blanca, even more than for me, the significant importance of a strong female role model is pivotal. As she said, she learned that women did not, by nature, need someone. This idea helped create the independent personality that carries even into Blanca's adult life and relationships. The relationship she has with her partner is about recognizing their own role, their own independence; it creates a different dynamic of equals. Blanca's mother perhaps reflects what my mother saw in her mother; her barrier breaking attitudes were a combination of personality and necessity. Indisputably, the existence of strong female figures affects the way women understand their own role and how they interact in relationships. It affected my mother and it affected Blanca to the extent that their relationships are not hierarchical

Conflicts

In Narayan's analysis of the mother-daughter relationship, she draws the parallel with the motherland, saying:

I would argue that, for many of us, women in different parts of the world, our relationships to our mothers resemble our relationships to the motherlands of the cultures in which we were raised. Both our mothers and our mother-cultures give us all sorts of contradictory messages, encouraging their daughters to be

confident, impudent, and self assertive even as they attempt to instill conformity, decorum, and silence, seemingly oblivious to these contradictions. (p.8)

Though the issue of the motherland is equally important, in this case I would like to extend the analysis to the Church. That is, the similarity that Narayan finds in the mother-daughter relationship and the motherland relationship is one that I find with Catholicism as well. The Church is the source of contradictory messages; ones of empowerment and leadership, all the while continuing to highlight traditional gender roles and traditional beliefs of marriage. Thus, for those women who are raised and live in the context of Catholicism, of the “Holy Mother Church”, the contradiction is ever present. That is clear in the relationship my mother has with the Church. Those contradictory messages from the Church are ones I received as well.

When I came out to my mother, my difficulty with the reaction was precisely because it reflected the contradictions that came from the Church and from my mother. I had known her to be nontraditional, to encourage me to be empowered and yet, when the issue of my sexuality came to the forefront, I received a contradictory silence. However, as the research took shape and as I better understand my mother, I realize that what I perceived as a superficial contradiction that had no place in such a nontraditional woman as my mother, was really an example of much deeper contradictions she herself was living. This was not just about embracing her non-heterosexual daughter, but of reconciling the empowerment she received from the Church with the very messages that distanced her from me.

My mother has, in Narayan's use, a contradictory relationship with the Church, in the same way she did with her own mother –my mother did not initially follow the Catholic footsteps. In that same way, my relationship with her – which came to its pinnacle point of tension when I came out– was one of mixed and contradictory messages. However, that seems to be the very nature of mother-daughter relationships, in the same way that it is with the Church and its followers. It is a constant negotiation of tradition and non tradition; a negotiation of, in my mother's case, coming to terms with her daughter's sexuality and her own religiosity.

The existence of this contradictory and troubled relationship is not just evident in my own life. The same can be said of certain aspects of Clara's, Blanca's, Alba's and Ester's lives, reflecting a similar pattern to that of the Church and its faithful followers. Although on the surface it seems as if it is nothing more than a hierarchical relationship of power and even obedience, both are much more complex. The "mother" church acts in the same way that our mothers do; they are our structure, our guide, our source of rules and emotional connections. Evidently, however, Catholic Latinas are not just passive receptors of what comes from those above them; the religious relationship, discussed in the previous chapter, is also a source of empowerment and one where, at times, women challenge the norms. They may not challenge doctrine, but they do challenge what it means to be a Catholic Latina and empowered as well.

Mutual Influence

Nonetheless, the relationship is not just one full of tension. Whether it is in a family with a single mother, or one with two parents, there is an undeniable closeness in the mother-daughter relationships of the women whom I interviewed. The father, in cases when one was present, was equally important in providing an example of a balanced family dynamic. Yet, communication creates a different kind of bond between mothers and daughters. That bond, which highlights the influence that mothers have on their daughters, also allows for them to be influenced by us. The influence is mutual. And, given the difference in our experiences as immigrants and Latinas, it creates a dynamic give and take relationship. At times, our mothers get from us just as much as we get from them.

There is no doubt in my mind that my own coming out affected my parents and my sister's views on sexuality. However, the communication I have with my mother, which is the reason that her silence surprised me, is also the reason that I continue to hold those types of conversations with her more than with my father. The existence of that communication, the existence of conversations and maybe even discussions, means that she, more than anybody else, hears and reacts to my own thoughts and my own encounters outside of our home. Whether she agrees with me or not, at times I serve as the contrast to opinions she hears from more conservative people, whether it is a priest or fellow Catholics. Evidently, I am not the only non-conservative opinion she hears, but our bond allows for a more indepth encounter with those opposing views, both for me and for her.

This is true for other women as well and it became evident in Alba's case during the 2012 elections. Governor Martin O'Malley signed gay marriage into law on March 1st 2012, but it was placed on the November ballot as a result of mostly religious advocacy. It became Question 6 and, because of its electoral importance, the tension between the traditional and the nontraditional became a political one. There are many factors that contribute to that tension, but in Alba's case, it was her influence on her mother's opinions that resulted in her mother's vote in favor of gay marriage.

With regards to whether her mother's view on sexuality has changed, Alba says "I know for my mom it has. I know I've opened her eyes... 5 years ago, she was very closed minded. So for her, now she knows that gay marriage and gay relationships are a real thing and it comes from love..." In this case, the change occurred because of the mother-daughter conversations and, the opinions and the "eye opening" experiences of the younger generation. For Alba's mother, the issue of gay marriage was troublesome because it was not in the Bible, in other words, it was not something aligned with her traditional religious beliefs. Yet, Alba, whose background is in family science, provided that practical, family oriented look at the existence of gay families. It was Alba's influence on her mother that broke that barrier and, in turn, resulted in a vote for gay marriage. Perhaps her father agrees, perhaps her brother does too, but it was the very nature of her relationship with her mother that allowed for a mutual influence of opinions. Evident through that vote, Alba's mother, who is a devout and practicing Catholic, exemplifies yet another traditional and nontraditional Latina. Although it seems to be a political issue, the implications of this mutual mother-daughter influence carry far

beyond an election. Though the change in attitude became a vote in favor, in the larger scheme of things, it implies a different understanding and approach to human relations. Alba's mother did not just vote for gay marriage and forget about it after that. In my own conversations with her, it is clear that the attitude change is not just an electoral onetime occurrence.

Alba's example shows that our experiences as immigrants and as Latinas do not always overlap. We live in different social environments, and religion does not have the same role in our life as it does for our mothers. Even in the cases when Catholicism is still prevalent, the reason for such existence is not the same. We encounter worlds, people and different ways of thinking that our mothers do not. That is the nature of different immigrant experiences and of mother-daughter relationships. While they feel a closer tie to their home country and, at times, feel out of place here, some of us feel neither here nor there. Those differences that come from being Latinas and immigrants, but from different generations, affect the way we think, our attitudes, our beliefs and even what we do. To that extent, our experiences do not coincide. Yet, our ties as mothers and daughters make those divergent journeys overlap.

CHAPTER FIVE

MY STORY, HER STORY, THEIR STORY, OUR STORY

The intention to understand my mother's silence began as a personal endeavor. However, it turns out that, more than an individual story of breaking barriers, of trying to understand her nontraditional and traditional contradictions, the very nature of the Latina immigrant experience result in those ruptures and tensions. As I saw the existence of those contradictions in my mother in order to understand her struggle with my sexuality, I realize that this is not just about her. It is about Clara, Blanca, Alba and their mothers. It is about Latina immigrants. In reality, it is *my story, her story, their story, our story*. In that realization of this being more of an issue of our story, it also became evident that the Latina context is not just limited to the religious institutional environment. There are other encounters, other fights and other people who point not only to Latina empowerment but to immigrant solidarity.

The Challenge of Being a Woman

On Sunday March 25, 2012, Alba, her mother and I attended the first Latina meeting in the Metropolitan area, organized by Dr. Claudia Campos, a well known Colombian sexologist in the D.C area. Since then, there have been two more meetings with varying themes. Yet this first one captures the spirit of the meetings and the

subsequent ones have followed in their intention to empower Latinas. On that occasion, it was titled “The Challenge of Being a Woman” and the invitation said:

Dear Friends and colleagues, I want to invite you in a special way to the First Meeting of Latina Women of the area. “The Challenge of Being a Woman”. An event whose objective, apart from celebrating International Women’s Day, is to give the women of our region a space of dialogue, education and meeting as women; that from the feminine and from our knowledge we construct healthier lives and families and even more so in moments of stress and crisis for many of them...

The majority of Latinas who attended the conference were older, most likely immigrants, and they confronted my own preconceived notions of older Latinas being less likely to attend empowerment conferences. Instead, not only did they prove me wrong but the whole day was one of surprises. Although I do not have official information on the attendees, it is not an illogical conclusion to assume that many of them were religious, maybe even Catholic. Given the general demographic of older immigrant Latinas, the cultural and religious expectations are oftentimes limited. I assumed that the conversations on empowerment, of breaking barriers and of knowing our bodies were only for the younger Latinas with at least some level of education. The conference, however, proved that wrong.

The day was exactly one of breaking barriers, perhaps of my own preconceived notions, but especially of empowering a generation of Latinas who do not always have the tools to do so. In other words, the conference seemed aimed more for women of my mother’s generation. There was a wide range of panelists, from how to successfully run a small business, to financial guidance and even a panel on knowing our bodies. These are topics that are often left at a distance to this group of Latinas. In regards to this silence,

Dr. Campos said “since we were young, we were taught not to know ourselves, to focus on others and not our own well being. But my lovely ladies, you have to focus on you first” and extended to talk about needing to be sexually educated. Dr. Campos speaks to that cultural context in which Latinas are not only left in the dark with regards to their own bodies but also in the dark with regards to being empowered.

It is very significant that such a meeting took place, not only because it provides tools of empowerment but also because it reflects a change in attitudes and practices within the Latina community. Again, many of these women are most likely religious. Yet, these conversations on empowerment and especially the female body does not harmoniously overlap with religious teaching. In fact, with regards to the latter, it goes in direct opposition, but this evidently does not stop Latinas from embracing these new attitudes. It highlights the fact that Latinas, who may be devoutly religious, are not just confined to the institutional context of the Church. The truth is, they are breaking those barriers and negotiating these tensions. They do not cease to be religious, but what this conference shows is that they are also embracing empowerment and change.

In one example, an attendee asked one of the panelist “How were you able to succeed? How were you able to overcome if, for example, your husband didn’t approve of your action? Of your being so active and empowered?” The panelist was a woman who shared her story of crossing the border, spending three days in the desert but eventually succeeding with her business. Her story resonated with the audience; it was their story too. She answered, “I didn’t care!!! And I don’t. I never expect him to do anything, instead of expecting him to buy me dinner, I buy him dinner”. Her drive for

overcoming her situation as an undocumented immigrant broke barriers. It is empowerment, and feminism, at its best. More importantly, she did not talk of empowerment as relegating her husband to an unimportant role, but of not *expecting* him to act for her. Judging from her conversation, she has the personality to do so. Yet, it is also true that, like my grandmother's story and that of the many immigrant Latinas in the room, the harsh situations that she encountered drove her to break the traditional limits that Latinas face. Her story went beyond the personal; not only did it seem to reflect the story of many Latinas but it also called for a change in attitude as Latina immigrants. This is important considering that these are women that did not have the same access to tools of empowerment that I did, yet their story is not uncommon. Latinas are empowered, and this is not just the case for daughters but, evidently, mothers as well.

CHAPTER SIX

ONE HOLY CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH?

The breaks that allow for change, the rifts that allow for possible differences are not just found in the contexts outside of the Church. In fact, often times it comes directly from within. The very structure of Catholicism, which is not divided the way other traditions such as Judaism are –Orthodox, Conservative, Reform– implies that those differences exist under the same identity of “One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church”. Though the doctrine does not change from parish to parish, there are clear differences in demographics which, unsurprisingly, affect how Catholicism carries into other aspects of life. That is, under one same Church, even a specific parish, not only is there racial, generational and ethnic diversity, but there are also differences in socioeconomic and immigration status. These differences become rifts and are what allow for breaks in how Catholicism is lived, and how it affects other aspects of life.

The breaks come not just from the population of followers, but from the priests and the parishes themselves. The official Church stance on gay marriage and abortion is known, there are no differences there. Officially, in any case, none of the priests at the four parishes that I attended advocated for gay marriage or for any specific candidate or party in the 2012 elections. Again, doctrine does not change. Not even in the era of Pope Francis is this the case. Still, in the same way that Pope Francis changed the rhetoric and

approach to certain issues, mainly social ones, in contrast to Pope Benedict, the priests from different parishes in the D.C Archdiocese differed in what their focal point was. In some cases, without giving names, it was clear that the priest was stressing that, as a believer, Catholic consciousness meant voting according to who is “pro-life” and who was willing to defend, using the Church’s words, “the sanctity of marriage”. In other cases, the same message of voting according to Catholic consciousness could be understood as a vote for immigration reform.

Similar to Nívea’s case, Catholic Latinas do not just focus on single issues, and other matters are considered as well. In spite of this, the role of the priest and the parish in giving room for the Catholic vote to go one way or another is pivotal. Some seem to leave no room for doubt that defending life and marriage should be of utmost importance. Still, others focus more on the rights of those who are disadvantaged or lack a stable immigration status.

At this point, it is important to underscore that my mother, Alba’s mother, Ester and Nívea are all devout Catholic mothers. By devout, I mean that religion plays an important role in their life even outside of the church. This is a significant distinction because for those women who identify as Catholics, but are not devout, the relationship with the Church differs. For them, the oppositions to tradition, such as embracing gay marriage, do not create the same tension that it does for devout women. For example, for a woman who is not necessarily devout, coming to terms with using contraception and still adhering to Church doctrine does not present a tension in the same way that it does for someone who is devout. This is not to say that all devout women denounce

contraception, rather, that reconciling the contradiction brings on a different process than it does for those who give the Church doctrine little importance. Considering this sheds light into the importance of the parish and of what the priest may or may not focus on.

With regards to the importance of the priests and the parishes, though it seems that the breaks were heightened by the presidential elections- especially in Maryland where both in-state tuition for undocumented students and gay marriage were on the ballot- these have an effect beyond the vote. On a personal level, these breaks greatly affected my mother's and my relationship. When doing the field work at the four parishes, she accompanied me on most occasions and she herself, first hand, observed the differences from priest to priest. The fact that certain priests focused on the immigrant and not the need to "defend marriage" meant that my mother too could focus on other issues. Gay marriage and non-heterosexuality became less stigmatized for her. Though neither priest favored a change in doctrine, their own words left room for change. As in Alba's mother's case, she voted yes for gay marriage, all the while still being a devout Catholic.

Again, as with the change in rhetoric evident in Pope Francis, the point is not that Catholicism is now fully embracing gay marriage or even non-heterosexuality. However, Pope Francis has stressed the importance of other matters such as fighting for the poor and taking the spotlight off from gay marriage and abortion. To a certain extent, it allows for gay marriage and non-heterosexuality to be seen with less "sinful" eyes. This has been the case for my mother and for Alba's mother. In my mother's case, her own

process of accepting me has been one of coming to terms with her Catholicism and with understanding that embracing me makes her no less Catholic.

The Church: A Place to Fight for Those in Need

The Catholic Church under Pope Francis seems to be more focused on poverty and less on the theological matters that were so emblematic during Benedict XVI's papacy. Though this is true, it is also the case that the connection between the Catholic Church and the fight for those in need is nothing new. The idea of fighting for minorities has long been connected to Catholicism. In the U.S, for example, the Church has been pivotal in the lives of immigrants, especially those who may be undocumented. This is not just due to the sense of community and empowerment discussed in previous chapters. The Church has taken on a very material approach to aiding immigrants; through programs such as Catholic Charities and Hispanic Centers, they provide services that range from medical to legal. For immigrants whose lives are fragile, who may not find help elsewhere, the Church provides much needed relief. Moreover, it has also taken a key role in advocating for immigration reform; at least that is the case in some parishes and some priests.

Beyond the barriers of what is allowed within the Church, there is also a movement that took the fight against poverty a step further: Liberation Theology. Founded by father Gustavo Gutiérrez, Liberation Theology went beyond providing services to help those in need; Gutiérrez questioned the very foundations of poverty and injustices, and connected the struggle with religion. For him, the injustices in Latin

America were not just simply “a social situation, as though it were a state of affairs unrelated to the fundamental demands of the gospel message. Rather we are confronted with a reality contrary to the reign of life that the Lord proclaims” (Gutiérrez, 1984, p.10). For him, what Christians seek is “to assert their human dignity and their status as daughters and sons of God” (p. 1). His words and ideas were not without controversy, often being called Marxist and denounced by the official Church. But what Gutiérrez provides is the possibility to fight for injustices within the message of God, not outside of it. Further, for him the injustices themselves are ungodly and unchristian.

Gutiérrez is not the only one to fight within the Church; other popular priests led a similar struggle, among them, Oscar Romero, a priest from El Salvador. He was highly revered by those who saw in him the connection between their struggles and God. Not surprisingly, many of those who immigrate to the U.S due to the very injustices that Romero denounced continue to follow him. Similar ideas seem to be reflected in some of the priests and parishes I attended.

Four Parishes, Four Priests

In 2012, during the peak of the presidential campaigns, I began to attend four different parishes in Maryland that all belong to the Archdiocese of Washington. During this period, the conversations on “defending the sanctity of marriage”, “defending life” and “defending religious freedom” became much more prevalent and evident. President Obama issued an HHS mandate which the Church saw as an attack on life and religious

freedom. Further, gay marriage was signed by Governor O'Malley and later placed on the November 6th ballot, which triggered conversations on marriage.

Initially, I attended mass services at these parishes to better understand the environment my mother was a part of and to understand why it was such a big part of her life. Eventually, though, it took on a political tone and also became an attempt to understand what was being said on those matters and on other political issues such as immigration. The four parishes I attended have a Spanish-speaking community, although the demographics within that group differ, and a Spanish-speaking priest that serves that Latino community. Of the four priests, only Father Nicolás⁶ remains at the same parish given his role as Pastor. For that same reason, he was the only priest I was able to interview. Father Jean, Father Miguel and Father Pedro are no longer at the parish where I did the field work, and contacting them has been difficult because they have moved to different locations. Father Nicolás, Father Miguel and Father Pedro are all immigrants from different Latin American countries, while Father Jean, though not an immigrant himself, has Latino heritage.

My mother has a close relationship particularly with Father Pedro and Father Nicolás due to her own participation in the church. For that reason, I was able to hold conversations with them outside of the Church, some of which are used to understand their perspectives on immigration and religion in the U.S. More importantly, after seeing them preach and seeing their respective parishes, it became clear that the Church is not as homogenous as one might think. On many occasions, I attended more than one mass in

⁶ For purposes of confidentiality, the priests' names are also changed. The names used are also borrowed from "The House of the Spirits".

the same day in order to hear the different homilies and messages they gave about the same readings⁷. Evidently, they do not preach different doctrines, yet, the messages and the focus of each priest differ greatly in some cases. These are the differences, which I characterize as rifts and breaks, that allow for followers to go in different directions with regards to opinions, and even votes. Through the different parishes, it became clear that being Catholic did not necessarily mean “defending life” at all times, without regards for any other issue. In fact, it became clear that “loving thy neighbor”, which is a very Catholic message, could be applied to the struggle for immigrant rights. Although neither priest would necessarily adhere to Liberation Theology, it is clear that for some of them, being Catholic also means fighting for those in need, in a similar fashion that Gutiérrez and Romero did.

Defending Life, Defending Immigrants

Religion, especially in times of elections, often means an ultra conservative “pro-life” stance. In fact, my personal encounter with the Church had, up to that point, been limited to that. And, the truth is, many priests, including Father Jean, seem to embody this stance; one where being Catholic means that being pro-life is first and foremost. In fact, many practicing and devout Catholics, including Clara –who attends the parish that Father Jean preached at a few years ago–, adhere to this belief. For them, even despite considering other issues and even when they struggle with those, being pro-life becomes

⁷ The structure of the Catholic Church establishes the same readings across all parishes. In a Sunday mass there are two readings and a Gospel. Following that, the priest –or Deacon, with permission from the priest– gives a homily to reflect on the readings.

their ultimate guide. The intention is not to criticize their stance, after all, in the process of negotiations and reconciliations of opposing tensions –such as being pro-life and pro-immigrant– the outcome can be the understanding that abortion is the one that deserves most attention.

Basically, women and men who, like Clara, are heavily affected by their pro-life stance are being nothing more than good Catholics. They are being the Catholic person that some priests and parishes advocate for. For example, the Maryland Catholic Conference’s official stance for the 2012 Maryland elections was that people should vote “For 4, Against 6”. In other words, for the Maryland Dream Act which granted undocumented students in-state tuition and against allowing marriage for non-heterosexual couples. The message was clear with the extensive pamphlets, papers, brochures and bulletin publications. Although, certain parishes like Father Jean’s had only content on voting against “redefining marriage”. Father Miguel’s parish had mostly pamphlets and handouts that stressed voting for the Dream Act.

In Maryland’s case, it seems that Catholic voters did not have to negotiate the difference and were able to vote for both. However, the tension arises when considering that in the national presidential elections, most viewed the choice as either Romney, who better represented the “defense of life, religious freedom and the sanctity of marriage” or Obama, who better represented an intention to bring forth immigration reform. That perception of the national election meant that people did have to choose which stance was most important and, unfortunately for many of them, neither candidate embodied both sides.

Again, from my conversations and interviews with the Latinas whose stories I include, it is clear that neither are single issue voters. In fact, Nívea, who is an informed voter, said she did not vote for either candidate in a past election precisely because of the difficulty of choosing one candidate according to her Catholic conscience. For her, considering all issues was important and neither candidate merited a vote. In any case, though they may not be single issue voters, the importance of the Catholic issues –life, marriage and religious freedom– not only make them activists, but also give a certain candidate an edge over the other. The same can be said for those who end up favoring a candidate with a better platform on immigration even though they may not agree with his stance on life, marriage and religious freedom. Once again, for Latinas who have a close relationship with the Church, what the parish and priests say can have a great impact on their opinions, practices and even votes.

Some parishes and priests focused on defending life, religious freedom and marriage. The constant brochures, publications and even homilies made this clear. For example, Father Jean’s parish had nothing available on immigration or the Dream Act. Everything election related was about the “Catholic issues” and even the homilies reflected this. The weekend after Governor O’Malley signed gay marriage, there was also an incident at an area parish where the priest denied a woman communion at her mother’s funeral because she was lesbian. Father Jean made his opinion heard saying:

For example, now there are a bunch of people mad at the church. I told you before, and I was right, the attack on the church would come, and they’re here now. They’re mad because they were denied communion. Well communion is not a right, it’s something you earn and have to deserve. And you can’t deserve it when you’re living in sin. I know I’m preaching to the choir, that you all know what is right. But people are being sinful and making a scandal...

Father Jean's opinion on people who are not heterosexual is clear, and his focus on it can and does have a great impact to the people listening. Priests are highly revered and respected in the Church, and for those who are devout, their words can be a type of endorsement. In fact, on another occasion when Father Jean talked about voting against nontraditional marriage, Alba's mother mentioned having to vote for "what the Father said". Eventually, Alba's conversation with her mother changed the vote in favor of marriage equality. That highlights the fact that these Latinas are not just getting information from the Church, but at the same, it highlights that the priests' words do have a pivotal role.

In the many masses that I attended where Father Jean preached, he never mentioned immigration. On various occasions, he talked about defending life and defending religious liberty –which is a reference to the Affordable Care Act and its relation to contraception– and even mentioned that as a Catholic voter, "one must make our voice heard and let our representative know". To a certain extent, there is nothing wrong with urging people to exercise their right to vote or to make their voice heard. However, it is important to note that with regards to Father Jean, it seemed that the voice was only related to life, marriage and religious liberty. Again, he never mentioned immigration. This silence is meaningful, especially considering that the very congregation he served, which in his case was mostly middle and lower class Latinos, are not only close to the immigration struggle but might have been directly affected by reform.

Father Miguel, on the other hand, seems to go in the other direction. In his case, his silence also speaks loud and clear. However, his silence is with regards to issues of life, marriage and religious freedom. His homilies rarely mentioned abortion, and mainly focused on immigration. In the same weekend when Father Jean spoke of people living in sin, presumably as a response to the incident concerning a lesbian Catholic, Father Miguel said nothing of that issue. Instead, his homily was about loving thy neighbor. He talked about the fact that people tend to focus so much on laws, and forget that the most important thing is love. He went further, saying that people overlook loving thy neighbor and treat immigrants in a harsh manner, separating families and concluded by saying “the most important thing is love for God and for thy neighbor, all else follows”. Like Gutiérrez, for Father Miguel the connection between God and defending those in need is clear. More importantly, on a weekend that was so important with regards to marriage equality and when Father Jean explicitly mentioned sin, Father Miguel’s silence and actual words say a lot.

That, of course, could be a coincidence of readings and choice of words. However, Father Miguel’s homilies always had a similar tone and message, especially in the days leading up to the elections. The examples are endless; on one occasion he talked about the possibility of multiple interpretations saying that “There is truth: Love, God. But there are many ways to get there...Many times, *we* believe we own the truth, but we don’t...Buddhist monks, too, have access to truth”. When he says *we*, he could very well be talking about the Catholic Church consistently talking about being the sole truth. He talks not of sin, but of getting to the truth through multiple means; he talks not of the

usual idea that the Catholic Church is the only way to get to that truth. Again, he breaks a barrier of what the Church teaches, he allows for those breaks that, in turn, make difference conceivable. In all honesty, when my mother and I began attending Father Miguel's parish, our conversations changed. I could see that she was struggling less with my sexuality. Father Miguel's focus on love and "thy neighbor" seemed to open my mother to that possibility.

However, his words were never just theological or philosophical. In the same way that Father Jean had explicit comments on sin, so too did Father Miguel have explicit words on the inconsistencies that happen within the Catholic community. He commented on the Pastor's words the previous day regarding the need to defend children who had grown up in the U.S, which was a reference to the Dream Act. Father Miguel extended saying "Like some people who are pro-life are also the people that vote against the Dream Act. It's as if life is just letting babies be born. But as soon as their life begins, we take away all their rights. That's incoherent". It seems unrealistic that a priest from a Catholic Church would have such explicit words regarding the pro-life movement and its inconsistencies. But Father Miguel, a Mexican-immigrant himself, is just the priest to do that. The last words of his homily the weekend before the 2012 presidential elections was a verse from the Bible, "How can you love God whom you have not seen and not love your neighbor whom you have seen?". His choice of those words is significant.

Of course, Father Miguel's parish was the appropriate environment for this to happen. Not only is their welcoming phrase "All Are Welcome, Todos Somos Bienvenidos", but they also have a support group for Lesbian and Gay Catholics. Further,

the parish and the Pastor have a tone more of reconciliation than of division. In his weekly letter after the elections, published on November 11, 2012, he says:

Dear Friends,

[...] I have to confess that my first reaction was a sigh of relief, not because of who had been elected, but because an exhausting and overly expensive campaign was at an end. Spending six billion dollars to win an election seems way out of order when so many needy people could have been helped by that money. But it is unlikely that donors would have given such vast sums to help the poor, like the widow in today's gospel. There was a lot of talk during the campaign by both parties about the growing level of poverty in our nation, but very little was said about concrete programs to address their needs through the cooperation of government and the private sector. Yet Catholic social teaching, as articulated by modern popes, makes assistance to the poor one of the key tests of faithful discipleship

The election results show a nation divided by ideology. Catholics were also split fairly evenly, with 50% going for Obama and 48% for Romney. We have a choice here, either to let the divisions harden and worsen, or commit ourselves to a path of collaboration and reconciliation. As Catholics, we believe that Christ died that all might be reconciled to God and to one another, so we must strive for peace, while respecting the legitimate differences among us. We must act civilly even though we may strongly disagree with each other.

When we look at the problems that our country faces on the domestic and international scene, we should pray for our President and other elected officials, that they might have the wisdom and courage to do what is best for our nation and the rest of the world. And we need always to let our Catholic faith shape our stand on issues, remember we are both Catholics and citizens of the world's greatest democracy.

The pastor does not talk of the results with regards to life or gay marriage, which is a significant omission considering the results in Maryland where they both passed. Instead, he highlights the issue of poverty, of its connection with Catholicism, about being both Catholics and citizens, but most importantly, of collaboration. Neither the pastor nor Father Miguel advocate for gay marriage, but in a time and a context in which other priests like Father Jean specifically call homosexuality a sin, it is significant that at their

parish, there was no such message. The message was not about the problems with gay marriage, but about community.

Evidently, Father Miguel is very direct and clear, and is without a doubt a strong advocate for immigrant rights more so than anything. He is not the only one. Although the tone is different, Father Nicolás is also passionate about immigrant advocacy. On a weekend when the reading was about a widow giving more than she had, not just what was left over, Father Nicolás talked about his own mother. He said that even though he did not grow up with many resources his mother always shared their food with their neighbors. The homily was about generosity and he related it to the previous week's "love thy neighbor" message, saying that the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives you are not to keep for yourself but to share with others. In this case, it seems to go hand in hand with the idea of immigrant solidarity. More importantly, he does it within the teachings of the Church. When I interviewed him, he mentions that part of the reason he stresses immigration rights and focuses on the Latino community is precisely because he can relate. For him, we are not to keep to ourselves but share, and we are supposed to be aware of other people's struggles, which is what his mother did. In that, it becomes clear that advocating for immigrants is part of Catholicism.

Father Nicolás is the type of priest that serves his community, in the full extension of the Catholic meaning of serving. His role goes beyond preaching on Sunday, and he puts his own needs second, driving long distances and doing whatever he can to provide for his community. Whereas Father Jean seemed to resemble Pope Benedict's theological approach to Catholicism, Father Nicolás reflects Pope Francis' more practical approach.

His role as a priest is better defined as one who focuses on action, not just on words. He mentions going to pro-immigrant marches and sponsoring sessions on the issue. Most importantly, echoing Father Miguel's words, he said that "defending life also means defending immigrants". Due to his own experience as an immigrant and to his proximity to the immigrant community, he is closer to their struggles. It is clear that he sees advocacy as almost a duty, a Catholic one.

In Father Pedro's case, although he did not use the same tone, almost of urgency, as Father Miguel, he too had a completely different message than Father Jean. One specific case comes to mind; a Sunday reading which talked about unity. Father Jean's homily to reflect that reading focused on the unity with the Church, saying "we have to be united with the Church, with the Pope, and not manipulate what goes on in the Church". Pope Benedict XVI was still Pope at the time, and Father Jean's words seem to point to the idea of adhering strictly to the Pope who was very traditional and conservative with regards to social issues. In this understanding of unity, there is no room for "different ways to getting to the truth" and he speaks to a more institutional understanding of unity. In a completely different perspective, on that day Father Pedro's homily was about unity through the Church, but as an immigrant community:

Look at us, we are all very different. We come from very different countries. Each of us brings something that makes us distinct. Yet, here we are, united because of our faith. It is about bringing our differences together, and being united. Especially for immigrants here in the U.S who struggle so much to have a voice, sometimes through the church. Nevertheless, it is only through being united that we can succeed.

Father Pedro's message is a direct response to the struggle that immigrants face in the U.S; a struggle of differences that, through faith, is overcome by unity. He does not speak of unity with Church doctrine, or with the Pope, but of being an immigrant community who accepts what everybody brings to the table. Further, he stressed the connection between the immigrant struggle and the Church by saying that, many times, immigrants find a voice in the Church. In this understanding of Catholicism, not only can we find a place for the immigrant struggle, but the Church becomes the actual source to overcome it. The difference in focus and in choice of words speaks for itself. Taken without interpretation, the varying perspectives of unity is evidently a break.

The Breaks Are Created

These breaks create great change. Given the nature of the political system in the U.S, it seems that Catholics are forced to pick between their choice as Catholics and their choice based on other issues. If, as Father Jean does, one focuses on the strict definition of defending life, then the choice is limited. In that sense, voting based on immigrant rights –among other things– means going against one's interests as a Catholic. However, as the previous chapters exposed, the problem is not about single issues or about going against one's own interests. The truth is much more complex. Further, as Father Miguel and Father Nicolás show, it may be that the very Catholic thing to do is actually to think of immigrants, to think of those in need and to extend what life means.

They never advocated for abortion or for gay marriage, but, in the same way Pope Francis does, they seem to see the importance of prioritizing the same struggles that

Gutiérrez and Romero saw. The injustices that communities such as immigrants suffer are not very Godly. Thus, fighting them is not counter-Catholic, but very Catholic. In that case, fighting gay marriage and abortion take a secondary role. The issue is not about changing doctrine on those issues, but of seeing that one cannot disconnect the Catholic Church from the class struggles and injustices of the poor. This becomes not a break in doctrine, but a break in focus. Further, the foundations of immigrant solidarity, which carried even into the elections, are within the Church, not just outside of it.

These breaks, as I previously stated, had a personal effect. My mother could not vote, and thus the effect in her case is beyond a political one. Yet, the fact that priests such as Father Miguel, Father Pedro and Father Nicolás focus on things other than gay marriage are part of the reason that my mother's own process of negotiation changed. When I came out five years ago, her understanding was far more traditional. The Church she attended, Father Jean's, focused over and over on the sins of homosexuality. With a change in focus came a break that brought her closer to me without distancing her from the Church. Evidently, this is something that she still struggles with, but because of those breaks, and more so since Pope Francis, our conversations have become much more open and embracing.

In addition to my mother receiving nontraditional messages outside of the Church, she has received them within the Church itself. Her relationship with the Church reflects the mother-daughter relationship; in this relationship, there are tensions and negotiations, mutual influence and contradictions. Most importantly, like she did with her mother, like I did with her, we broke a barrier. In her case, both in spite of the Church and also

because of it, she broke a barrier that allowed her to further embrace her non-heterosexual daughter.

In any case, this personal example serves only as a glimpse of an otherwise existing trend. My mother is not the only one embracing the nontraditional with the traditional, although in her case it is an immediate and personal one. Father Miguel, Father Pedro and Father Nicolás are surely not the only ones who extend the Catholic message to struggles beyond the traditional ones. My mother and those priests are examples of something happening in the Latino community and the Catholic Church, especially since Pope Francis' papacy. From the Church's perspective, doctrine is unchanged. However, the focus and spotlight is no longer the same.

These changes allow for people's negotiations and tensions to go in different directions, not just the traditional ones. In this kind of Catholic context, it is much more possible to extend the meaning of pro-life beyond an anti-abortion stance and, furthermore, to take away the ever present limelight on "defending the sanctity of marriage". Though doctrine is unchanged, and that may always be the case, though my mother may never fully embrace gay marriage, the process of negotiating these tensions takes on a different tone. It is no longer about being un-Catholic but about redefining and refocusing on what *is* Catholic. In that understanding, and much closer to Gutiérrez and Romero, the Catholic fight is not one that looks to stop gay marriage, but one that wants to end poverty and injustices⁸.

⁸ As this is written, Pope Francis demoted a conservative U.S Cardinal who critiqued the Pope's stance on these issues.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BEYOND THE PERSONAL: LARGER IMPLICATIONS

The research at this point has focused on the qualitative aspect of the tensions. In other words, through the field work at the four parishes, the Latina conference and the interviews to mothers and daughters, the research has highlighted the depth of the contradictions and negotiations that exist when considering immigration, religion and different generations. Guided by the mother-daughter relationship, it is clear that the immigrant experience, by virtue of its generational differences, affects Latinas in very different ways. This has implications in the Latino population and its beliefs and practices. More recently, however, it was evident in the 2012 presidential elections.

In the campaigns leading to the general election, the issues of gay marriage, abortion and immigration were significant. In a much more direct way, however, these had an effect in the elections in Maryland, where both gay marriage and the Dream Act were on the ballot. For Catholic Latinas who are devout and have a close relationship to the Church, these issues are important when considering a candidate. With regards to immigration, Romney had a negative rhetoric while Obama had failed to achieve his 2008 campaign promise to Latinos. Voting for either candidate, in addition to considering other issues such as the economy, foreign policy and health care was made that much

more difficult when considering the pro-life and the pro-immigrant beliefs of each candidate.

The various dimensions of the immigrant experience exposed in previous chapters shed light into the background of these tensions. The fact that women are not single-issue voters, that they have a close relationship to faith which affects even the secular aspects, that they are empowered and are embracing new attitudes, all of these begin to unveil why Latina Catholics break barriers and go beyond the traditional and nontraditional. However, much of the research is but a scratch on the surface of what is underneath. Ideally, interviewing many more women, from varying backgrounds and immigration status, would help to further understand how Latina Catholics negotiate the tensions that exist when becoming an immigrant. This understanding sheds light not only into electoral practices but also into general tensions that exist for the immigrant population. Further, it begins to explain why the Latino population is embracing more and more different nontraditional positions. If nothing more, it serves as another dimension in feminism, religion and immigration.

Nonetheless, the 2012 presidential elections had a very material effect and were affected by these very tensions that are present in the Latino community. According to the analysis by Pew Religion and Politics of the 2012 elections and religious voters, although the vote for Romney and Obama was more or less evenly split for Catholics, there is a big change when considering white Catholics versus Latino Catholics. White Catholics voted for Romney by a margin of 59% to 40 %, while Latino Catholics voted for Obama by a margin of 75% to 21% (Pew Religion & Politics, 2012) Evidently,

including Latinos into the equation of religion and politics has a very different outcome. This possibly speaks to the issue raised by Father Miguel and Father Pedro themselves, where one's duty as a Catholic faithful is to defend immigrants as well. This, using the percentage of votes for each group, seems to be a message closer to Latino Catholics than to white Catholics.

With regards to the Latino voting demographic specifically, although the top three issues considered were foreign policy, health care and the economy, exit polls revealed that 77% of Latinos said immigrants should be offered a chance for legal status while 18% said they should be deported (Lopez & Taylor, 2012). Again, though immigration was not the only issue or even the top issue considered, it is clear that a large part of the Latinos who voted favored immigration reform. That points to why, perhaps, Catholic Latinos voted for Obama. More revealing yet is the fact that Latinas voted for Obama by a margin of 76%, versus 65% among Latino males. Further, Latinos with an income lower than \$50,000 voted for Obama by a wider margin than those whose income was higher: 82% versus 59% (Lopez & Taylor, 2012) All these speak to the issues raised in the previous chapters, regarding the possibility of immigrant solidarity, of its connection with Catholicism and of changing attitudes, perhaps more so among women than men.

Yet, the analysis has to go further in looking at the variables and actual issues that resulted in an overall vote for Obama. The field work points to variables of stance on gay marriage, abortion, immigration, religious devoutness, age and immigrant generation. Evidently, through the four parishes and the interviews, it is clear that all these are in constant interaction and are, at times, harmonious, at other times, in tension. The way that

Latinas negotiate affects the general Latina beliefs and attitudes. Specifically, it affects the electoral outcome. For that very reason, it is pivotal to understand how these variables interact in a larger scale national analysis of Latina Catholics in the U.S. Preliminary research done on previous elections indicated that when immigration is considered, electoral outcomes change. That is, when considering only stance on gay marriage and abortion, Latinos seem to be closer aligned to a conservative vote. However, when the immigration variables are considered—in other words, what the voter and the candidate believe- the outcome was not as clear cut.

Unfortunately, due to the specificity of the group –older generation devout Catholic Latinas- the sample size is too small for anything to be significant. But this highlights the need for future research on this very specific population. Although research done by Pew points to this analysis, it is necessary to look at the interaction of these variables. It is of great significance to understand how, politically speaking, one variable affects another, and how they interact. This gives yet another dimension into the interactions of religion, immigration, gender and even feminism in the U.S, which has an effect beyond the political. Evidently, especially considering the increasing physical and social importance of Latinos, this is that much more urgent.

Fights for immigration reform, for marriage equality, for gun control, for marijuana legalization, for broader national implications such as economic ones, they all go beyond the initial barrier of a single-issue voting group. They are interconnected, and it is by the very nature of immigration, that can both increase religiosity and nontraditional attitudes, that these are not just a straightforward linear “evolution”. Our

mothers influenced us, but, we influence our mothers as well; it is no longer a one way street but a mutual relationship of influence. In that same way, immigration to a foreign country does not just mean a unilateral influence that results in acculturation. If Catholicism is any indication – and, to an extent, its survival rests in the hands of Latinos– then the country as a whole is in the midst of a cultural, social and even economic barrier breaking. Immigrants, Latinos, Latinas, first generation and beyond, we are breaking the barriers.

We no longer just stay in silence at the sound of unexpected issues such as sexuality or other injustices; we were present at the march for immigration reform, we were present at the march for marriage equality, and we were present at the pro-life march. They do not always coincide. Yet, we are in the midst, like my mother, of our own process of acceptance, and of coming out and realizing what our role is.

My grandmother broke a barrier, because she had to. My mother broke barriers, because she had to. And as a whole, Latinas are breaking barriers because as immigrants, that is what the very revolutionary environment that we are a part of, the one that creates rifts and spaces for escape, is leading us to. This is not just a warning to Republicans, or even to Democrats. This is, rather, a call for those of us who are part of the barriers, to break free, to recognize our potential and to accept our power. As feminists, as immigration reform advocates, as marriage equality activists, as defenders of civil rights, as theorists and activists of different and more just economic and political systems, it is our duty to break those barriers. And that we are doing.

REFERENCES

- Díaz-Stevens, A. M. (1994). Latinas and the Church. In *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S: Issues and Concerns* (pp. 240–277). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Giraldo Gómez, A. (1987). Los Derechos de la Mujer en la Legislación Colombiana. *Repertorio Histórico De La Academia Antioqueña De Historia*, 38(250).
- Gutiérrez, G. (2003). *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Anv edition.). Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books.
- Jaramillo Uribe, J. (1989). La Educación en los Gobiernos Liberales 1930-1946. In *Nueva Historia de Colombia* (Vol. IV, pp. 87–110). Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana.
- Lopez, M. H., & Taylor, P. (2012, November 7). Latino Voters in the 2012 Election. Retrieved from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/11/07/latino-voters-in-the-2012-election/>
- Montero, R. (2013). *La Ridícula Idea de No Volver a Verte*. Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral.
- Nabhan-Warren, K. (2007). Little Slices of Heaven and Mary's Candy Kisses. Mexican American Women Redefining Feminism and Catholicism. In *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (pp. 294–317). Univ of North Carolina Press.
- Narayan, U. (2013). *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*. Routledge.
- Norman, J. (2005). Muslims and Jews, Moving with God: Re-thinking the Relationship between Immigration, Religion and Theory. *Institute for the Study of Social Change*. Retrieved from <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/4n29880d>
- Pardo Pedraza, D. (2011). *Them and Us: Struggles and Contradictions in the Ways of (self)Representation of Women (1930-1932)*. Bogotá: Prometeo Collection, Universidad de los Andes.

Peña, M., & Frehill, L. M. (1998). Latina Religious Practice: Analyzing Cultural Dimensions in Measures of Religiosity. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37(4), 620–635. doi:10.2307/1388145

Pew Religion & Politics (2012) How the Faithful Voted: 2012 Preliminary Analysis. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/11/07/how-the-faithful-voted-2012-preliminary-exit-poll-analysis/>

Uribe de Acosta, O. (1963). *Una Voz Insurgente*. Bogotá: Editorial Guadalupe.

BIOGRAPHY

Lorena Hillon graduated from Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School, Bethesda, Maryland in 2005. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Languages and Sociocultural Studies from the Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia in 2011. After living in Bogotá for five years, she moved back to the U.S in 2011 and began her graduate studies. She received her Master of Arts in Sociology from George Mason University in 2014.