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From “Black-Eyed Girls” to the MMU (*Mujeres Metodistas Unidas*): Race, Religion and Gender in
the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD Program

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Adriana P. Nieto

June 2009

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Title: From “Black-Eyed Girls” to the MMU (Mujeres Metodistas Unidas): Race, Religion and Gender in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands
Advisor: Luis D. León
Degree Date: June 2009

ABSTRACT

This study places the stories of Mexican American Methodist women in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands within the context of the organizational history of the United Methodist Women of the Rio Grande Conference of the United Methodist Church: Mujeres Metodistas Unidas, or the MMU. It focuses on the experiences and memories of women who came into contact with the ideals imported by Anglo Methodist missionaries to the U.S. southwest immediately following the conquest of the northern half of Mexico in 1848.

In order to understand the experiences of Mexican American women in relation to the history of Methodism in the southwest, this study explores the most salient and relevant themes found in Methodist missionary activity beginning in 1869 and continuing through 2008. The origins of the Methodist missionary work with Mexican women lie in the Women’s Foreign Mission Society founded in 1869 by a group of Anglo women in Boston, Mass.

By placing the missionary documents into conversation with Mexican women’s voices, memories and experiences, this study shows the ways in which Mexican American women adapted to, resisted and reshaped Methodism to suit their educational, social and religious needs.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation could not have been completed without the support of many different people. The generous support in the form of the Hispanic Theological Initiative Dissertation year Grant in many ways made completing this project within one year possible. Joanne Rodriguez, director, and to Ulrike Guthrie my editor, who made the process less bumpy than it needed to be and much more kind. I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee, Albert Hernandez, Bernadette Calafell, and the chair Luis D. Leon. Thank you all for your support and encouragement and patience.

To my many students and colleagues at Metropolitan State College of Denver, Dept. of Chicana/o Studies. To Audrey Harris for the writing sessions and the invaluable time at your family's cabin.

I want to thank my mother who taught me to have compassion for those around me, even total strangers and to stand up for myself. I have not written a single page without the spirit of my grandmother within and throughout these words. Josefina Alma Gutierrez Smith continues to be a source of strength, encouragement, warmth and comfort as much now as when she was still on this earth. To my father for teaching me to change my own tire so as not to "have to depend on some man to do it". To my grandmother Natalia Venegas Nieto about whom I remember when I think motherhood is far too difficult. To Doctoras Mariela Nuñez Janes and Belisa Gonzalez, for forging the path and never letting me give up even while they may have been considering it themselves, humor, friendship and respect and reminding me that there are larger reasons

we do this work. To Betsy, for keeping me on task, reminding me of the importance of the project, and conversations to work out the kinks, in the writing and otherwise. To my brothers Art, Armando, and Yuzo, and to my sisters Libby and Lindsay.

And Sofia for introducing me as a ‘mom, teacher and student’. To Cyrus for the gentle reminders of the importance of playing. And to my partner, best friend, and biggest supporter Matthew Jenkins. Thank you for believing in me all the times I forget to, for being an amazing father, cook and listener.

And of course, this project would not have been possible without all the women who gave me so generously of their time and memories and stories from the *Mujeres Metodistas Unidas*. This is dedicated to you and all those who came before us...Mrs. Carmen Lujan, Minerva N. Garza, and Josephine G. Smith.

The day before I turned in this draft, I found out that Minerva N. Garza passed away on April fourth. I regret that I was unable to interview her in October, but I am so grateful to her for recognizing the value and importance of keeping records of the mujeres.

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But when they drove across the arroyo, the driver opened her mouth and let out a yell as loud as any mariachi.

Sandra Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek*¹

Chapter 1

Pilgrims of Faith and their Travesías/ Peregrinas de Fé and their Crossings

In October 2008, the women's division of the Rio Grande Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, commonly known as *las Mujeres Metodistas Unidas* (MMU) celebrated their 75th Anniversary in San Antonio, Texas. During this gathering, Rosa Munguia told the story of her grandmother Marianita's conversion experience in order to explain how she came to be part of the *Mujeres Metodistas Unidas*. Marianita Ramos Garcia used to beg for permission from her husband Rumaldo to go to the neighbors' homes from which sounds of *la palabra de Dios* (Word of God) and *cantitos* (little songs, or verses) emerged every night. He himself went out every night to gamble, but whenever Anita asked him for permission, he always retorted, "You aren't going anywhere. You are going to be here when I get back." Yet Marianita persisted, until one night, after he had started to drink, he replied, "*Anda Anda*, if it means you will stop asking me. *Ya*." And off she went with her kids in tow. At the home of one of her neighbors, Marianita Ramos Garcia "*escuchó la palabra de Dios y ella recibió al Cristo*" ("heard the word of God and received Christ"). When she returned home much later, she went "*derechito tirando todos los santos*" ("straight into the house and started to throw out the [statues of] Saints [from their household altar]"). Marianita's daughter, Anita,

¹ Sandra Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (New York: Random House, 1991), 55.

later traveled across the border to the U.S. after the flu epidemic took her parents. Anita, her brother, sisters, and aunt eventually settled in the Rio Grande Valley region near Brownsville, Texas.²

Rosa Munguia cannot explain her role in the MMU without referring to the journeys of her grandmother Marianita, and her mother Anita. So the story begins at the same place that it ends. Rosa's remembering and re-telling of the story exemplifies the centrality of genealogy in the histories of women who make up the MMU. But in truth the story does not have only one beginning and one ending; instead the story is made up of many stories that are linked together by a series of *travesías*. In other words, a genealogy takes the stories of Mexican-American Methodist women living in the early twenty-first century MMU and looks at the paths that have led them to where they are today.³ The *travesías* narrated in the stories were crossings from Mexico to the United States, from border to borderlands, from being Catholic to Methodist, and from being voiceless to outspoken. Out of these stories lessons that emerge show that from some struggle comes strength, out of domination comes resistance, and out of pain comes faith. Rosa's telling of Anita and Marianita's story is only one of many that exemplify the resiliency and creativity that emerges from oppressive conditions.

² Rosa Munguia, interview by the author, tape recording, Austin, TX, 13 October 2008.

³ Emma Pérez, *Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas Into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), xiii describes a genealogy as a "case study in which a specific discursive field is produced and analyzed as 'things said' come into existence to imprint the historical body of Chicanas." M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty suggest genealogy be thought of as "an interested, conscious thinking and rethinking of history and historicity, a rethinking which has women's autonomy and self-determination at its core" *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge), xvi.

Thesis

Because of their need and will to survive and thrive, those most oppressed by the exercise of power tend to be those persons who are the most resourceful and adaptable. Mexican-American Methodist Women, or MMU (*Mujeres Metodistas Unidas*) women exemplify ways in which identity is shaped not only by powerful ideological and historical circumstances, but also by the personal and collective agency with which women of color engage their world. The MMU embody the tension between agency and ideology, between subjectivity and discourse in the Mexican-American and Chicana experiences of the borderlands.⁴ This project unearths the ways in which their bodies have been inscribed by the legacies of colonialism and missionary zealotry and how these women transform that inscription into faith and empowerment.⁵ I am tracking this inscription on at least three levels. First, I look at the discursive formations of *Mexicanidad* as it is linked to Catholicism, the Virgen de Guadalupe, and *machismo*. These formations take shape primarily during the Colonial period (1521-1821), and evolve into Mexican national identity from 1821-1848, when the northern half of Mexico comes into violent contact with the Anglo-American Protestantism, namely Manifest Destiny. Second, I look at the discursive formation of Methodist missionary work with

⁴ I use the term Mexican-American to describe the majority of the women who were interviewed, as it is the most common choice of self-identity. Norma Alarcón asserts “The name Chicana is not a name that women (or men) are born to or with, as is often the case with ‘Mexican,’ but rather it is consciously and critically assumed as serves as point of redeparture for dismantling historical conjunctures of crisis, confusion, political and ideological conflict, and contradictions of the simultaneous effects of having ‘no names,’ and being someone else’s ‘dreamwork.’ “Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of ‘the Native’ woman,” in *Living Chicana Theory*, ed. Carla Trujillo (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1991), 371. I also use the term Chicana in order to emphasize the importance of placing these stories within the historical and intellectual context of Chicana Feminist Studies.

⁵ Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary Writing Chicanas Into History*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999),xvi.

Mexican and Mexican-American women. Resentment, distrust, discrimination, and violence characterized relations between Mexican and Anglo residents from 1846 to 1900 and it is within this political and social climate that Anglo Methodist missionaries began interacting with Mexican-American residents.⁶ The missionary work featured in this research was no exception to this and was most definitely a product of its time.⁷

From “Black-Eyed Girls to the MMU” therefore tells the (her)stories of how the *mujeres* of *las Mujeres Metodistas Unidas* became makers of their own subjectivity. It marks the ways in which the Mujeres came into contact with the discourse that attempted to freeze their identities. The interplay between the imposition of values and culture, and the conscious choices that Chicanas/Mexicanas made in response to those impositions is what makes up the third level of tracking. Upon becoming part of the U.S. Southwest, many Mexican communities were resistant to Anglo-American efforts to convert to Protestantism. They perceived Americanization Programs, boarding schools, settlement houses and other institutions sponsored by mainline Protestant denominations as an affront to their Mexican religious and cultural heritage, a blatant attempt to strip them of their religious freedom guaranteed under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.⁸ Since women were considered to be the keepers and transmitters of culture, most of the

⁶ Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: The Chicano's Struggle toward Liberation* 3rd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); David Weber, *Foreigners in Their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973).

⁷ See Paul Barton, *Hispanic Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006); David Maldonado Jr., ed., *Protestantes/Protestants: Hispanic Christianity Within Mainline Traditions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999); Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gende on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁸ George J. Sánchez, “‘Go After the Women’: Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman, 1915-1929,” in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, eds. Vicki Ruiz and Ellen DuBois (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Americanization programs were geared toward attracting young Mexican-American girls and women with the goal of converting them from Catholicism--signaling a full acculturation into accepted standards of American femininity.

The first and second generation of the MMU, who converted between 1900 and 1940, came to Methodism through a variety of means including schools, health clinics, and settlement houses, or as in the case of Marianita, by hearing the *cantitos* from a neighbor's home. The Mujeres both resisted and adapted to those very structures through a series of *travesías*. The subsequent generations of Mujeres, having already straddled U.S. and Mexican-American cultures for a couple of generations likewise made series of *travesías* that were unique to their historical, political, and social contexts that ranged from post WWII, to the Chicano/a Movement of the 1960s and '70s through the contemporary period. What becomes clear in these stories is that their genealogy is not "a frozen or embodied inheritance of domination and resistance" but something living, changing, and malleable.⁹ So while as a scholar it is tempting to quickly codify what constitutes feminist practices, Chicano politics, liberation theologies, and so forth, in fact there is a benefit and truthfulness to simply holding and not assigning these stories and statements to particular positions. For example, when Rosa Munguia was asked how she came to be part of the MMU, she began with the story of Marianita, her grandmother's initial *travesía*, and placed her own story within the genealogy of her grandmother. The crossings made by the Mujeres, the *peregrinaciones* or pilgrimages of faith on this journey shaped their religious, ethnic, and gender identities.

⁹ Jacqui M. Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1997), xvi.

This dissertation shows by listening to women, by hearing their stories, and by asking them to remember, that women played and continue to play a role in choosing what they and their families need for material and spiritual sustenance. Through such tracking of the discursive formations of race, religion, and gender as they intersect with the individual and communal agency of women in the MMU, these women emerge as exemplary in the ways in which those from the most marginalized, segregated, and misinterpreted communities negotiate and transform those positions into ones of faith, action, and empowerment. Let us accompany these twenty-one women on their journeys.

Primera Travesía: Tirando los Santos, From Catholic to Protestant

Marianita's conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism in general and Methodism in particular took place in Aldamas, Mexico around 1903¹⁰. It was only a beginning, only one of the crossings that she made that night and that would inspire her to make with her children in the months ahead. And she was only one among many women who dared make such crossings or *travesías* that comprise the stories of these *peregrinas de fé*¹¹, of borderlands women who collectively make up the MMU. *Travesía* refers to going beyond, to crossing over a boundary marker. In addition to simply crossing over a border, *travesía* is also related to the term *traviesa*, or mischievous

¹⁰ I say *around* 1903 because Marianita's story was retold to me by her granddaughter Rosa Munguia who is 87 years old. Based on her memory of birthdates and death dates, and my piecing together when the flu epidemic took place in that region of Mexico, I am estimating that this event took place between 1900 and 1905.

¹¹ It is important to use the Spanish word, *peregrinas* because it is both the Spanish language and the feminine form of pilgrims. See Angie Chabram-Dernersesian on the importance of language and gender, "I Throw Punches for My Race, But I don't want to be a Man. Writing as Chica-nos (girl-us) Chicanas into the Movement Script" in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, & P. Treichler. Eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge 1992).

behavior, as in: “she’s just being a *traviesa*” --stepping out of line, acting out of her place, crossing accepted boundaries.¹² Marianita in our opening story was prevented by her husband and by social and cultural expectations from going beyond familiar religious boundaries. As a woman, she crossed the boundary of acceptable behavior when she challenged her husband’s control. *Travesía*, or crossing, in and of itself is not a political act. But when Mexican women do the crossing, and in the process challenge power relations, they become *traviesas*.

Marianita simultaneously crossed imposed boundaries in terms of religion and culture by choosing a faith tradition that in many respects symbolized the United States, the giant to the north.¹³ *Peregrinas de fe* are made up of all those women who, like Marianita’s daughters, granddaughters, and great-granddaughters, have made cultural, religious, or gender *travesías* and wound up as part of the *Mujeres Metodistas Unidas*, the United Methodist Women of the Rio Grande Annual Conference of the UMC. Of course, not all the women in this study crossed over to Methodism in the same way that Marianita did. Some inherited Methodism from grandparents and parents, some were sent to boarding schools established by the church without even knowing the difference between Methodism and the Catholicism they grew up with. Regardless of the details of the conversions (which will be discussed in depth in later chapters), the conscious choice

¹² There are striking parallels between my conception of *traviesa/travesía*, and the analyses of Womanist thought and ethics that emerge from African American women’s experiences in the U.S. Alice Walker’s important definition of womanist “womanish, you actin’ womanish,” comes to mind. Another project of mine engages in a comparative study of womanism and *Mujerista* theology versus Black feminism and Latina feminist theology is something that would shed new light on both the efficacy and limitations of those theoretical models and methodologies using the MMU as a case study.

¹³ Barton, *Hispanic Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians*; Sarah Deutsch *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Randi Jones Walker, *Protestantism in the Sangre de Cristos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991).

to remain in the Methodist Church, specifically the MMU, represented challenges and rewards that the women weighed.

What are the implications of Mexican women choosing Methodism over Catholicism? To understand these implications one begins best by exploring first what Catholicism meant within Mexican history and culture, and only second, what it meant with regard to U.S. Protestantism. That all Mexicans and Mexican-Americans are Catholic has been a false assumption upon which the framing of the religious and cultural history of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the U.S. Southwest has often relied. Mexicans are after all not *by nature* Catholic, but are Catholic and Mexican due to a long complex process of conquest, contest, and negotiation for those identities.

Mexican Catholicism began with a *choque*, a crashing together of Spanish and Meso American worldviews. The Spanish Catholic worldview was made up of Muslim (Moorish), Jewish, Christian, and pre-Spanish influences.¹⁴ However by the time Spain ultimately seized Al Andalus from the Moors in 1492, it had crafted its identity in terms of racial purity (white/European) and religious purity (Christian). Mesoamerica likewise was made up of a long history of diverse peoples such as the Chichimeca, Tolteca, and many others who, at the time of the Conquest were at the mercy of the Mexica Empire. Of course, the two worlds had radically different conceptions of the divine and of

¹⁴See Raúl Gómez-Ruiz, *Mozarabs, Hispanics, and the Cross* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007); Gómez-Ruiz's "Ritual and the Construction of Cultural Identity: An Example from Hispanic Liturgy," *Perspectivas* 12 (Fall 2008): 9-32; and see also as responses to Gómez-Ruiz' work Alberto Hernández, "Response to Raúl Gómez-Ruiz: Hispanic Cultural Identity and the Recovery of Lost Memory," *Perspectivas* 12 (Fall 2008): 41-54; Peter Casarella, "Response to Raúl Gómez-Ruiz: The Mozarab Cross and Latina/o Spirituality: Are they Walking the Same Path?" *Perspectivas* 12 (Fall 2008): 33-40. For an overview of Spanish diversity before conquest see Manuel G. Gonzales, *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 113-138.

humans' relationship to it. But in crafting a myth of cultural homogeneity combined with a divine mandate to rule, the Aztecs (the name the Spaniards gave to the Mexica) were involved in a similar endeavor as the Spaniards.¹⁵

The history of Mexico has been shaped by a complex set of relationships between the diverse and heterogeneous indigenous populations living in Mesoamerica, and the Roman Catholicism imported by the *conquistadores*. Luis D. León aptly describes the Spanish-Indian contact as “akin to a collision of planets.”¹⁶ León identifies the period from 1512 to 1836 as “Manifest Destiny Zero: The Mission,” during which the social and political hierarchy imposed by Spain and its colonial institutions was based on racial markers such as skin color, language, and place of birth and served an important role in establishing the colonial ordering of power and resources. In order to ensure full compliance with the new order, Spanish overseers were responsible for acculturating the native peoples into the colonial order. This they did by various means, including by the *encomienda* system, which assigned land and the labor of the native people who inhabited that land, to top colonial officers. In return for the native peoples' unlimited labor given to the *encomenderos*, they received the “Word of God.” Each *encomienda*, or tract of land, was assigned a priest charged with Christianizing and therefore appropriately “civilizing” the conquered population. If the indigenous folks complied with the labor requirements and convincingly converted to Christianity, they were supposedly guaranteed a spot in heaven. The resulting cultural, racial, and religious

¹⁵ See David Carrasco's *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition, revised Ed* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2000); Miguel Leon-Portilla *Aztec Thought and Culture* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1963).

¹⁶ Luis D. León, *La Llorona's Children: Religion, Life, and Death in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 31.

structures are characterized by *mestizaje* and ‘syncretism’, both of which warrant further discussion to illuminate the ways in which Mexican culture and Mexican religiosity have been conflated both before and after contact with North American Protestantism.

In *Galilean Journey*, Virgilio Elizondo asserts that Mexican-Americans can articulate a theology based on their *mestizaje*, or racial blending, by relating it to the experience that Jesus had as a *mestizo* from Galilee.¹⁷ This framework provides a powerful reading of the Bible for marginalized communities in the U.S. Southwest by giving priority to the experience of colonization and oppression by Mexicans first from the Spaniards in 1492 and then again by the Anglo-Americans in 1848. Ada María Isasi-Díaz has similarly argued that the category of *mestizaje* along with *mulatez*, can serve as a starting point from which to articulate a theology that is rooted in the everyday experience of Latinos/as in the U.S.¹⁸ Both Elizondo’s and Isasi-Díaz’s invocations of *mestizaje* have been critiqued for being essentialist, and more importantly for the potential they have for erasing the experiences of indigenous communities. The construction of a positive community, pan-latino or pan-hispanic identity, has been at the expense of the most marginalized. Problematizing both *mestizaje* and *mulatez* leads to a more productive discussion of the impossibility of Mexicans being a pure racial or ethnic group, and also avoids glorifying the cultural traits of the colonizer at the expense of the colonized.

‘Syncretism’ is often used to describe the nature of the religious practices that have emerged as a result of contact between European and Amerindian or Afro

¹⁷ Virgilio Elizondo, *The Galilean Journey: The Mexican American Promise* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983,2000).

¹⁸ Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 64-66.

Caribbean peoples during and after conquest. And similar to *mestizaje* and *mulatez*, syncretism implies that there was and is an egalitarian way of combining the two, whether religiously or racially. Critics of both concepts are right when they argue that syncretism and *mulatez/mestizaje* must be problematized so as not to present a misleading picture of a balance of power between European and indigenous peoples. Lara Medina and Inés Hernández-Ávila among others assert that the indigenous have been and continue to be demeaned and negated within the *mestizaje/syncretism* framework. Miguel De la Torre similarly argues that an uncritical invocation of *mulatez* can result in the perpetuation of the myth that intra-racism does not exist among and within Latino/a communities.¹⁹ As far as the specific context in the Mexican case, scholars have advocated for the use of an indigenous concept to more aptly describe the interaction between European and indigenous racial categories and by extension, religious categories as well.

One such indigenous term is *nepantla*, from the Nahuatl language meaning “in the middle, or the middle place”. Leading scholar of Mesoamerica Miguel Leon-Portilla interprets *nepantla* as a place of confusion and ambiguity brought on by the violence and chaos of conquest. Lara Medina suggests that *nepantla* “presumes agency, not confusion.” Moreover, there is a “duality within *nepantla*, a transparent side where there is clarity and self-determination, and a shadow side, where diversity confuses and creates disorientation.” In addition, “*nepantla* is a multifaceted psychic spiritual space composed

¹⁹ Miguel de la Torre, “Re-thinking *Mulatez*” in *Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity*, eds. Miguel A. De La Torre and Gastón Espinosa (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 158-175.

of complementary opposites: obscurity and clarity.”²⁰ By going beyond the understanding of *nepantla* as merely “torn between ways” into a place of “in-betweenness,” it becomes a place from which peoples and communities can reconcile fundamentally conflicting cosmologies and epistemologies through spirituality. *Nepantla* was first recorded as a term after the Spanish conquest of Mexico; in that case it referred to people being “torn between” Catholicism and Indigenous conceptions of the divine and humans’ relationship to it.

The concept of *nepantla* is not limited to describe the moment of contact between European and indigenous worldviews, but is also useful as a theoretical model from which feminist theologies and methodologies emerge. For example, Michelle Gonzales examines the work of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in “Finding Beauty Within Torment” and argues that by reading through a “hermeneutics of suspicion,” Sor Juana’s sixteenth-century plays document the earliest form of *nepantla* spirituality. By placing Sor Juana in both the chronological context of the early colonial period and by reading her through a Latina feminist lens, Gonzales demonstrates the flexibility and applicability of the notion of “nepantlism” while simultaneously problematizing mestizaje and syncretism. Another approach utilizing *nepantla* looks at Chicana literary and visual artistic production as in Laura Pérez’ work on spirit glyphs and Chicana artists as *tlamintinime*. Additionally, Pérez provides evidence that syncretism does not accurately represent religiosity, especially when applying it in cultural studies. Instead, *nepantlism* better describes conditions in which colonial structures dictated that one religion had to be

²⁰ Lara Medina, “*Nepantla* Spirituality: Negotiating Multiple Religious Identities among U.S. Latinos,” in *Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity*, eds. Miguel De la Torre and Gastón Espinosa (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 253-254.

superior to the indigenous; we, as scholars are called on to recognize/rescue that which has been silenced.²¹ This project on las *peregrinas de fé* is a recognition of the multiple factors that contributed to the religious options available to Mexican women in the borderlands at the turn of the nineteenth century.

The place of religious practices in the formation of cultural identity in modern Mexico is important because Catholicism and Mexican national identity have often been used interchangeably. Even while Mexico the modern nation-state based its independence from Spain on the separation of Church and State, and despite the tumultuous relationship between the State and the Church, Mexico is still commonly referred to as a Catholic nation.²² The religious and cultural roles of the Virgin of Guadalupe are especially pivotal to understanding issues ranging from popular religious practices to the gender roles ascribed to men and women.²³

The *Virgen de Guadalupe* serves as one of the most obvious symbols of the contact between Spanish Catholicism and indigenous religiosity post-conquest. Her image was used from Mexico's national history beginning with her mythical first appearance to Juan Diego in 1531, to the call for independence from Spain in 1810. Gloria Anzaldúa, Jeanette Rodríguez, and others have argued that the assimilation of

²¹ Laura Pérez, "Spirit Glyphs: Reimagining Art and Artist in the Work of Chicana *Tlaminime*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 40, no.1 (Spring 1998): 37-76.

²² See David C. Bailey, *Viva Cristo Rey!: The Cristero Rebellion and the Church-State Conflict in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974) on the ambiguous relationship between Mexico's desire to be seen as a modern nation, and its relationship to its religious history.

²³ See Ana Castillo, ed., *Goddess of the Americas, La Diosa de las Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996); Jeanette Rodríguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment Among Mexican American Women* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); Jaques Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531-1813*, trans. Benjamin Keen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

Guadalupe into the practices of Nahua/Mexica peoples has served to continue a combination of the Euro and Indian religions.²⁴ Feminist analyses of the Virgin of Guadalupe have provided critiques of the ways in which patriarchal interpretations of her have negatively impacted women's lives. Anzaldúa views Guadalupe as just another apparition of pre-conquest female deities Tonantzin and Coatlique. She argues that, while on the surface, Guadalupe was forced into the Catholic structure to fit the colonial project, even to this day those who honor and develop relationships with Guadalupe are in fact continuing a relationship with indigenous goddesses. But Mexicans' relationship to her is not limited to somehow appropriating her apparition to Juan Diego, but also strongly shapes the cultural expectations for women. Thus Anzaldúa says regarding Chicana/Mexicana motherhood:

*La gente Chicana tiene tres madres. All three are mediators: Guadalupe, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, La Chingada (Malinche), the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and la Llorona, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two.*²⁵

These three archetypes of women in Mexican culture have often dictated what women are allowed to be and not to be. *La Chingada* is the essentially sexual woman who slept with the conquerer of the Aztecs and was subsequently viewed as a traitor to her people precisely because she had sexuality. La Llorona is the mother who, because she couldn't handle the responsibilities of motherhood, killed her children and is neurotically still looking for them. She's "the crazy one" because she was unable to fulfill the maternal role dictated by the cult of the

²⁴ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987, 1998); See also Jeanette Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

²⁵ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 52.

Virgin. Mexicanas are left with Guadalupe as the guide and stabilizing power in the culture. Yet she is impossible to emulate because she a mother who is also a virgin. Chicana feminists suggest that this signifying process leaves them in a position of powerlessness, asexuality, and heterosexual maternity.²⁶

Sandra Cisneros says of the Virgen de Guadalupe, “She was damn dangerous, an ideal so lofty and unrealistic it was laughable. Did boys have to aspire to be Jesus?”²⁷ Cisneros questions the presuppositions of the theological interpretation of the Virgen as well as the social and familial expectations associated with the image of the Virgen as a signifier of ethnic and cultural pride and identity. This framework would suggest that no matter how much time passes, the colonial process is never complete, but there is always contestation and negotiation, conscious or not. These various interpretations of the significance of the Virgin of Guadalupe also indicate that women’s relationships to her have the potential to be both oppressive and liberatory. These dynamics must be taken into account when considering Mexican and Mexican-American women’s choosing Methodism over Catholicism because their crossing suggests that the religious poetics found in devotion to Guadalupe was not sufficient to manage struggles of everyday life. León asserts that “Guadalupe devotion is a border tradition, straddling and blurring lines of religious demarcation,”²⁸ wherein religious poetics gets enacted. Devotees of Guadalupe nurture their relationships with her according to their material and spiritual needs. Acknowledging the link between the unique religious history of Mexico and the

²⁷ Sandra Cisneros, “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess,” in *Goddess of the Americas, Writings on the Virgen de Guadalupe*, ed. Ana Castillo (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 46-51.

²⁸ León, *La Llorona’s Children*, 63.

contemporary stories of Mexican-American women is a necessary step in developing a critical dialogue about how Mexican nationalism, Roman Catholicism, and culture have created a context in which religious options are limited for Mexican women. Perhaps the needs for which religious poetics worked in some Mexican communities were different for those who chose the religious poetics of Methodism.

The first crossing for Marianita Garcia Ramos was from Catholicism to Methodism, a crossing over to a different religious tradition. This *peregrinación* to Methodism was more than just a religious conversion. The Catholicism that Marianita crossed over from is not reducible to which building she went to for Sunday services. As discussed above, religiosity is never a closed system in isolation but is always interconnected with other systems and beliefs.²⁹ For Marianita and her children then, what might Protestantism have represented that she found oppressive in Catholicism?

If, as her great-granddaughter has conveyed, her husband was overbearing, a compulsive gambler and drinker, a symbol of an old way of being, how is it possible to distinguish her association with her husband's destructive habits from her and his identity as a Catholic? Was it Mexicanness that she was throwing out along with the statues? How do we know what it was she was destroying when she came home and threw out the saints and the candles? Did that destruction signal a clean break with past practices? Which practices are aspects of culture? Which were related to Mexican cultural practices and values? How do we know the difference? Is there is a difference between Mexican

²⁹ See for example Clifford Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture: 20th Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1988). Luis D. León's, *La Llorona's Children: Religion, Life, and Death in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

culture and the Mexican religious tradition of Catholicism? If so, what might the differences be, and how are they recognizable? Was Marianita able to completely extinguish a lifetime of praying the Rosary, for example, and trade it in for practices of the Methodism imported by U.S. missionaries?

This leads us into the second aspect of the *travesía* from Catholic to Protestant: the relationship of Mexican Catholicism as regards American Protestantism. In the important collection edited by David Maldonado Jr., *Protestantes/Protestants: Hispanic Christianity within Mainline Traditions*, he asks rhetorically, “Hispanics? Protestants? How can we speak of Hispanic Protestants? The two terms almost seem contradictory or incompatible.”³⁰ The authors interrogate issues of identity as it relates to race, ethnicity and religion. The seeming incompatibility of “Hispanic” and “Protestant” is the result of several important socio-historical factors. The U.S.-Mexico War, the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, and the racial discourse with which Methodist Missionaries conducted their projects all influence the perceptions that communities have about the meaning of religious identity and its relation to cultural and racial subjectivity. Important to the experience of Mexican-American Protestants is the powerful role of race and racism in the history of the U.S.-Mexico border and in the regional history of the Southwestern U.S. Ideological underpinnings of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, in particular, relied on the categorization of Mexicans, shifting from referring to the nationality before 1846 to that of a “race” or “racial” group during and after the U.S.-Mexico War.³¹ León describes this period as “Manifest Destiny One: The Protestant/Capitalist Mission,”

³⁰ David Maldonado, Jr. “Protestantes: An Introduction,” in *Protestantes/Protestants: Hispanic Christianity within Mainline Traditions*, ed. David Maldonado, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 9.

“Manifest Destiny Two: The Mission (continued),” and “Manifest Destiny Three: Home Missions,” in chapter one of *La Llorona’s Children*. The Protestant/Capitalist Mission was predicated on both racialized and gendered colonization.³² Racial formation theory argues that, “Race is neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing, plastic process subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions.”³³ The U.S. was in a position of political power that fostered the climate in which the identity of Mexican-Americans transformed into a racial group, rather than a nationality. The discourse of racial and religious superiority buttressed by the violence of the war shaped intercultural relationships that followed.

Racialized literature of the 1840s depicting Mexican women as Spanish, and Mexican men as “slothful”³⁴ helped constitute the social relations of race, gender, and class by depicting Mexican men as dishonorable and Mexican women as in need of American chivalry. These processes not only helped to justify the U.S.-Mexico relationship, but also informed the stereotypes that influenced the gendered and racist assumptions of Anglo Methodist missionaries who came to the Southwest on the heels of the U.S.-Mexico War. Mexican-Americans were viewed by Methodist missionaries as lacking the disposition to be educated, and as being useless and unrefined, character traits that were attributed to the “Roman” church’s over-reliance on the implied irrationalism of

³² León, *La Llorona’s Children*, 40-41.

³³ Ian Haney López, “The Social Construction of Race,” in *Critical Race Theory, The Cutting Edge, 2nd Ed.*, eds. Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 165.

³⁴ Haney-López, “The Social Construction of Race,” 170.

the Pope and idols. Late nineteenth-century Methodist missionaries referred to Mexican girls and women as “black-eyed Mexican girls” whose destiny would be “the homemakers of the future.”³⁵ This framework provided the rationale for focusing Protestant missionary efforts on young women.³⁶ That Mexicans were unilaterally designated as superstitious and naïve homebodies by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century missionaries paralleled the discourse of the Spanish conquistadores and most Roman Catholic friars 300 years earlier.³⁷

The racial discourse as it was developing in post-1848 United States dictated that Mexican was a racial category, automatically inferior to White or Anglo. This meant that anything identified as ‘Mexican’ was defined as inferior to anything associated with white culture, and thus Catholic was to Mexican as Protestant was to White. Since many Mexican communities faced hostile relations with the white and Protestant world, they often relied on their tight-knit religious communities from which to draw strength, and mutual support. Thus, Catholicism, the source of their oppression, also became a resource for those communities.

In addition to creating the context in which Protestant and Hispanic are incompatible, these factors have created conditions in which Mexican and Mexican-American women have been prevented from defining themselves. If Mexican women

³⁵ Harriet Kellogg, *The Life of Mrs. Emily J. Harwood* (Albuquerque: El Abogado Press, 1903), 129, Annie Norton, founder of Harwood School for Girls discussing the significance of the naming the school after Emily Harwood.

³⁶ Sanchez, “‘Go After the Women’: Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman, 1915-1929” in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History*, eds Vicki Ruiz and Ellen DuBois (New York: Routledge, 1994).

³⁷ Thomas Harwood, *The History of New Mexico Spanish and English Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1850-1910 in Decades*. Vol.1. (Albuquerque: El Abogado Press, 1910).

were to remain loyal to their ethnic communities, and Mexican Americans were quintessentially defined in terms of a Catholic religious identity, then a conversion to Methodism, a quintessentially Anglo American religious identity, was understandably viewed as a betrayal.

Not unlike the *choque* that occurred when the Spaniards arrived in Mesoamerica, the U.S. takeover of the Southwest was also a moment in which people had to negotiate, resist, and accommodate in order to survive a hostile environment. Marianita's conversion to Methodism took place before her children migrated to the U.S., but other stories of conversion took place within the context discussed above. The racial, political, and social relations that characterized the Southwestern U.S. was a setting in which stark divisions were made based on race and religion.

Segunda Travesía: Mexican to American/ Border to borderlands

Less than a decade after Marianita's conversion to Methodism, she and her husband died of the flu. Amidst the turmoil both of this flu epidemic and of the Mexican Revolution, their children were left to make some difficult decisions. Marianita Garcia's conversion to Methodism represents the first such major crossing for her and her family. Her children crossed the border into Nuevo Laredo, Texas shortly after Marianita and her husband died. Her daughters decided to travel to Nuevo Laredo because their mother had told them that if they ever made it to *el otro lado*, they were to go and find the Methodist Church there. She promised them that the Church would take care of them. Their crossing into the United States was made possible by the initial religious crossing that Marianita had made years earlier when she had heard the music, received an invitation from her

neighbors, wrangled permission from her husband, and consciously and decisively chose Methodism over Catholicism. Although Marianita was no longer with her children, it was her actions, her faith and her initial *travesía* that would begin a tradition of future crossings. What did the crossing the border have to do with Marianita and her family's crossing? What did the border do to race, religion and gender?

The racial discourse in the United States before and after the 1848 signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe shaped both Anglo, particularly Methodist missionary attitudes toward Mexicans, and also shaped the views Mexicans held of themselves. Laura Gomez's important work, *Manifest Destinies, The Making of the Mexican American Race* provides valuable analysis of the ways in which the racial order in the Southwest was constructed through the legal system in one way, but contradictorily socially constructed in another, "The central paradox was the *legal* construction of Mexicans as 'white' alongside the *social* construction of Mexicans as non-white and as racially inferior"³⁸ (italics in original). The experience of the MMU further complicates this paradox because, as I will show, the *social* construction of Mexicans as non-white could not have taken place without the *religious* construction of Mexicans as not only non-white, but also as non-Protestant. The Catholicism that Marianita converted from came with its own set of cultural expectations for women. The Protestantism imported by Anglos into the Southwest also came with a set of expectations for women: Mexican women and Mexican men were racialized in different ways.

³⁸ Laura E. Gomez, *Manifest Destinies, The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 4.

Marianita's children, Anita, Tomás, and Celestino García, along with their Tía Julia made their way to the Nuevo Laredo in the first decade of the twentieth century. That they migrated to the United States during this time period was not what made them unique, as over 1 million Mexicans migrated to el Norte between 1900 and 1930³⁹. What does distinguish their *travesía* to the U.S. from that of so many others is that once they arrived in Nuevo Laredo they had nowhere to go except the Methodist Church. Upon arriving, La Trinidad Methodist Church took them in and provided them with a room in exchange for some maintenance work in and around the church. Would they have migrated to the U.S. like almost 1 million Mexicanos did to escape the violence of the Revolution if they had not had a Methodist Church as their destination? Without the support of the Methodist Church, would Marianita's children have been forced into situations such as those of other migrants? Did Marianita suspect that membership in the Methodist Church would ensure her children easier access to resources they would need in the U.S. than they would have as Mexican Catholics? How much of such calculating did Marianita do upon her conversion? Did Marianita merely act on faith by converting to Methodism, responding to "*la palabra de Dios*"? Perhaps the answers can be found in the stories of other families who converted to Methodism and remained committed to it. These came to it through diverse avenues. A family of five sisters from Placitas, New Mexico, for example, may seem to have little in common with Marianita's family who crossed the border, but they are united as *peregrinas de fé* through a common experience

³⁹ For more on "Great Migration" of the early 20th Century, see Manuel Gonzales *Mexicanos*; Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America*; Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968); George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

of the racialization of Mexicans. Whether crossing the border like Marianita's children into the United States, or crossing the threshold of a Methodist boarding school for girls, leaving Placitas for the big city of Albuquerque, both sets of peregrinas were at the crossroads between Catholic Mexican gender ideologies and the racialization of Mexicans in the context of late nineteenth-century Manifest Destiny.

Anglo American legal systems, social relations and white missionary attitudes marginalized Mexican-American communities. Segregation in schools, churches, neighborhoods, and of job opportunities was a way of life for most Mexicans in the Southwest. In fact, many Mexican American communities found safety and comfort within the walls of their Catholic faith communities. But even Mexican Americans began to rely on the framework of defining Mexicans as Catholic over and against Protestants who were white. Mexican American Catholics were sometimes just as guilty of conflating race and religion, which helped push along the naturalization of race. If Mexicans were a Catholic 'race' and were discriminated against on that basis, perhaps it was only 'natural' to resist racism, discrimination, and segregation on those terms as well. This is what made it harder for *peregrinas* (and their brothers) to negotiate religious choices without feeling like they had somehow betrayed their 'race'. I certainly don't mean to imply that Mexican men who converted to Methodism somehow had an easier time negotiating the various identities within the complicated racial and social structure. But with each system that orders who gets access to which resources, those privileges are as much divided along gender lines as racial and class lines.

The borderlands experience is best understood within this context of the constant negotiation for power. The *Mujeres Metodistas Unidas* as an organization was born out of

the circumstances of the borderlands. The borderlands are not limited to the geographical space surrounding the U.S.-Mexico border, but include what Luis León calls the Mexican Americas, and José Limón calls Greater Mexico.⁴⁰ Neither side of the border is completely Mexican nor completely American, but instead a combination of both nations, cultures, and religions, which themselves are made up of multiple influences. There are also psychological and spiritual spaces born out of borderlands experiences and constituted by the border, “A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary.”⁴¹ These are spaces in which ambiguity resides and which are “in a constant state of transition.”⁴² These spaces also represent the possibility of re-birth, described best by the concept of *nepantla* discussed earlier. In the case of the “Black-Eyed Girls to the MMU” however, the *ways* folks were *torn between* was Mexican Catholicism, a result of the initial *nepantla*, and Anglo-American Methodism. The emotional residue resulting from the *choque* between Spanish and native worlds intersected with the *choque* between American Protestantism and Mexican worlds.

The MMU’s history as an organization and the personal stories of the members illustrate the resistance and adaptability of a community. In the midst of a culture that relies on the construction of, and enforcement of rigid boundaries to demarcate power and the distribution of resources, the *peregrinas de fé* embody the impossibility of maintaining those boundaries. Their very existence challenges the naturalization of race

⁴⁰ See Luis León’s *La Llorona’s Children: Religion, Life, and Death in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); José Limón, *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States, and the Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998)

⁴¹ Anzaldúa, 25.

⁴² Ibid.

and religion. Their genealogies testify to the resilience of women navigating post-colonial contexts. The religious poetics of the MMU point to the agential possibilities made available to them through choices and negotiations.

Tercera Travesía: from object to subject, or From Black-eyed Girls to the Mujeres Metodistas Unidas

Spanish Colonialism, Mexican nationalism, the U.S annexation of the vast Mexican territories that became the American Southwest, and the making of Mexican Americans into a racial group have all served to construct the image of Mexican-American women as powerless victims of large structures. As already outlined, Mexican women have been marginalized in multiple ways: Mexican society and its particular forms of sexism and *machismo*; mainstream U.S. society which includes racialized sexism, or gendered racism combined with the presumption of Protestant superiority or the doctrine of Manifest Destiny; Mexican Catholic communities who discriminated against Mexican Methodists; the Anglo Methodist Church's structure that marginalized Mexican Methodists, particularly women; and also male leadership in the Methodist Church who came from the same Mexican communities as the MMU. It would seem that through all these various social, economic, political, and religious structures, Mexican American Methodist women would have virtually no power, no agency, and no choice in the way that they live their lives. Yet, they do.

This family's religious and border *travesías* were motivated by a myriad of interrelated factors. The influenza epidemic, the Mexican Revolution, and U.S. economic development are among the most obvious reasons why the García children crossed to the United States. However, the story of this family doesn't begin with the conversion experience, nor does it end with Marianita's death. From Black-eyed Girls to the MMU is just the beginning of a tracing of the impact of Marianita's *travesías* and those of her

daughters, granddaughters, and great granddaughters. A long line of women continues to maintain the connection to the faith in the Methodist Church. Those women in turn have come to be part of the community of women who make up the *Mujeres Metodistas Unidas*, and they continue *peregrinando en fe* (journeying through faith).

Description of Chapters

Chapter 2 discusses the theories and methodologies that have informed the project, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of the work which draws from History of Religions, Cultural Studies, Ethnography and Chicana Feminist Theory. Applications of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Emma Pérez's *Decolonial Imaginary*; and Luis Leon's "religious poetics" from *La Llorona's Children* and other works will make up most of this chapter. Gender and race will occupy a primary place as inextricably linked to the identity formation for Mexican-American women. Genealogy will also be discussed as it relates to my relationship to the project, my own participation in, and critique of ethnography.

Chapter 3, *Tentacles and Branches*, will examine the nature of Anglo-American Methodist missionary work and its relationship to Mexican and Mexican American women in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands region. The first part of the chapter outlines a broad historical timeline of mission activities that specifically targeted Mexican women. This period, 1869-1933 makes up what I call Phase One of missionary work. Brief histories Harwood School for Girls (1896) and, Houchen Settlement House (1912) be discussed including the major areas of emphasis: education, social service, health care and mission. The chapter then weaves in stories of Mexican American women who came

into contact with the early phase of missionary work in order to fill in the gaps left by the missionary documents. When reading history exclusively through the lens of the missionary records, their activities resemble tentacles, yet when listening to the stories of the women themselves, the missionary work resembles branches.

Chapter 4: ‘Emancipatory Migrations’: *Peregrinas en la Misión* discusses the politics of historical periodization and focuses on the documents produced by, about and for the women who make up the MMU. The period from 1933 to 1958 is Phase Two. Phase two began with the founding of la *Sociedad Misionera Femenil Conferencial* – *SMF* (Women’s Missionary Society), renamed *la Socieded Femenil de Servicio Cristiano* in 1940 (and then in 1973 changed names yet again, *Mujeres Metodistas Unidas*). Phase Two ended in 1958, with the founding of the first Rio Grande Conference School of Missions. 1958 ushered in yet a new era in which mujeres of the Rio Grande Conference adapted and adjusted to the work in Phases One and Two of the MMU. This chapter integrates the documents produced by the MMU and the ethnographic interviews I conducted with twenty women (and one man).

Toward Hope and History is the final chapter and will discuss some implications of this project within the fields of Latino/a Theologies; Chicano/a Studies; Religious Studies and Women’s Studies and History. I offer some thoughts regarding the nature of race and religion as it intersects with gender and memory. I suggest that the herstories presented throughout this dissertation provide us with a glimpse into what Chicana subjectivity says about identity, power and love.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Points of Departure

This study is an interdisciplinary project combining critical perspectives and methods from various academic fields most central are: historical studies, the history of religions, ethnography, Chicana and Latina feminist theory, and cultural studies. In order to examine the interdisciplinary questions and themes raised in my main thesis and its related sub-theses, this dissertation project's methodological approach draws from the theoretical frameworks of Latina feminist theology, feminist historiography, borderlands theory, and cultural studies.

María Pilar Aquino identifies a key feature of Latina feminist theological methodology informed by Chicana/Latina feminism as being “*mestiza* theory, method, spirituality, and praxis.”⁴³ Central to the work of Latina/Chicana feminism is the focus on the “daily-life plural experiences of excluded Latina women as the starting point of critical reflection” and that any method must acknowledge that the particular context of a community shapes the methodology.⁴⁴ This dissertation project relies on the framework set forth by borderlands and Chicana/Latina feminist theorists that takes into account the historical context of the borderlands region including the socio-political and religious aspects. In addition, of course I locate the MMU within their specific context as suggest

⁴³ María Pilar Aquino. “Latina Feminist Theology: Central Features” in María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, Jeanette Rodríguez, eds. *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 136. She refers particularly to Anzaldúa’s work.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 140.

how that context has affected the options available to the women. I suggest that the religious poetics of the MMU point to the daily lived experiences of the MMU. The significance of their stories, however can not be fully appreciated without exploring generally, the historical circumstances of their communities. It is precisely because I am placing the daily lived experiences (in the form of memories and stories) in conversation with the historical documents that this project is interdisciplinary.

Historical documents

This category consists of several types of primary sources typically used in a straightforward historical study. My primary sources are official church records which are housed in the buildings of several important United Methodist Churches in the Rio Grande Conference. The most valuable for the purposes of this project are the official church histories compiled by church historians throughout individual churches.

To identify the attitudes, goals, and motivations of early missionary work in the region, I rely both on previous work done by historians in the field of history of religions and Chicana/o history that critique and analyze the racial and class implications of early missionaries. I analyze the primary historical documents from the Harwood School for Girls in Albuquerque, New Mexico and the Houchen Community Center in El Paso, Texas, all documents ranging from 1880 to 1930. These consist of correspondence between the Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Harwood and the Church, school records and archives such as yearbooks, photographs, curricula, and programming materials.

Several important published works have already delved into some of these documents and have provided valuable analysis of missionary attitudes, presumptions, and motivations, among them Paul Barton's *Hispanic Methodists, Presbyterians, and*

Baptists in Texas, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006); David Maldonado's important edited collection *Protestants/Protestantes: Hispanic Christianity within Mainline Traditions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999); also Maldonado's autobiographical account *Crossing Guadalupe Street: Growing up Hispanic and Protestant* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001); *Of Borders and Margins: Hispanic Disciples in Texas, 1888-1945* (American Academy of Religion Academy Series) by Daisy Machado; Juan Francisco Martínez' *Sea la Luz: the Making of Mexican Protestantism in the American Southwest, 1829-1900* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2006); and Randi Jones Walker's *Protestantism in the Sangre de Cristos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991). These excellent studies deal with the histories of specific mainline denominations in Mexican and other Latino communities, and offered some analysis of racial and political circumstances. However, none of these important studies focused exclusively on the role of gender ideologies prevalent in those communities.

For valuable dates, names and organizational tendencies, I rely on Jean Miller Schmidt's *Grace Sufficient: A History of Women in American Methodism 1760-1939* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999). Miller Schmidt's work serves to fill in some of the gaps in the institutional history of the American Methodist Church, in terms of women's participation. Miller Schmidt highlights ways in which the United Methodist Church was especially affected by women's efforts in missionary endeavors. Anglo-American Methodist women's missionary societies came in direct and sometimes intimate contact with the Mexican-American women who make up the MMU, and to some degree this project could be a study of inter-racial, or inter-cultural communication.

I am as interested in the historical moments that have been left out of the above mentioned documents as I am in what they include. The Mujeres Metodistas Unidas have their own sets of histories that have been passed down with each successive election of officers, and the historian of the MMU is responsible for storing all the material that has been collected from each 'unit'. Every church in the Conference is asked to submit their records to the District level (of which there are three) and each District president is to submit that collection to the Conference historian. The Conference historian shared with me all the documents that had been handed over to her since she began her position in 2004. This collection is invaluable to this project, as the information contained in it has never been recorded outside the MMU at the Conference level. These documents, which the historian, Rosa Aldape, stores in her own home in San Marcos, Texas, includes minutes from MMU meetings dating back thirty years; programs for events such as annual meetings at the church, district and conference levels; budget reports; mission project descriptions; reports from district presidents regarding membership numbers, district level budget reports; and "Cinco Estrellas" reports (discussed in subsequent chapters). The MMU have also compiled their own "yearbooks" marking the 30th, 50th, 60th, and 75th anniversaries of the founding of the organization. These '*historias*' contain correspondence that the compilers felt was important to the development of the organization, photographs dating from 1933-2008, and records of events, especially those pertaining to the annual "School of Missions" to which many women attribute their participation. These documents are a precious resource for researchers; my dissertation project just scratches the surface of the possibilities for recovering women's religious history, borderlands history, and Chicano/a history in general.

I am informed by Gastón Espinosa’s “*nepantla*-based ethno-phenomenological method” that “blends race, class, gender, and phenomenological analyses that are grounded in their historical, social, theological, and political contexts in order to identify, recognize, and interrogate religious leaders, structures, traditions, movements, and experiences on their own plane of reference.”⁴⁵ In “History and Theory in the Study of Mexican American Religions,” Espinosa provides an excellent overview of the literature mapping the linkages between early written accounts of colonial church histories ranging from sixteenth-century Catholic Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries to the most recent studies done in Chicano/Ethnic Studies perspectives, as well as some Chicana feminist works which have shaped discourse. Espinosa’s articulation of this method are applicable to this project, specifically the race, class, gender component “grounded in their historical, social” contexts, precisely because so many methodological frameworks ignore the contexts in order to promote the method. Building on Espinosa’s method, I analyze the materials from the MMU from within their own plane of reference.

In fact, while I was looking at the documents, the MMU Conference historian, Aldape spent the whole time with me in order to explain anything that I had questions about. She determined in which order the material would make the most sense to me, beginning with the material that documented her own Methodist roots and the history of her family in the borderlands region. Like Rosa Munguia began with the story of her grandmother converting to Methodism, Rosa Aldape, the conference historian also

⁴⁵ Gastón Espinosa, “History and Theory in the Study of Mexican American Religions,” in *Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity*, ed. Miguel De la Torre & Gastón Espinosa (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 70.

depicted her involvement with the MMU in the form of a genealogy. As a result of these intersections, I am not only required but in fact obliged to seek out methodologies from diverse disciplines.

I am not an historian. This project is not a historiographical essay. What I am doing, is telling stories. I approach this as a genealogy. I am looking at the present, specifically what kinds of beliefs, values, practices, memories, songs are important to the MMU today. I see a genealogy as starting right now, and looking backwards towards the interactions, intersections and experiences that shaped the present. I am not looking at every aspect of these women's lives. But I am looking at how they see themselves fitting into their faith communities. They all begin with stories.

Amanda Cobb fittingly observed that there are no right words to end a story, but that "listening to stories and telling them is a matter of continuance."⁴⁶ Listening to and telling the stories of the MMU has given me an opportunity to honor the importance of their stories, to acknowledge the politics of storytelling, and to claim my place in those stories.

At various points during the writing of this dissertation, I felt a deep sense of connectedness to the project, the sense of continuance to which Cobb refers. And I think that is not only because I was raised within this community of women, but also because I felt something powerful taking place when I read and studied the missionary writings. I felt as if I was channeling the spirits of those women who came before me. I felt as if my great-great-grandmother Soto was telling me that everything was all right, that she knew

⁴⁶ Amanda Cobb, *Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1852-1949* (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln & London, 2000).

that Emily Harwood was just confused, that the Anglo missionaries didn't really mean what they said in the documents. I also felt as if she told me that the choices she made to send her daughters to Harwood were somehow to benefit me.

Ethnographic Interviews

I conducted twenty one in-depth personal interviews with women affiliated with the Rio Grande Conference of The United Methodist Church, and one interview with a man. I asked a series of questions that elicited biographical information on the women, as well as on their relationships to the Methodist Church, and how they identify ethnically. I also asked the women how they had come into contact with the MMU specifically, and the Methodist Church more generally. I developed questions regarding how they see their religious identity in relation to their ethnic identity, and how they perceive their gender in relation to their religious lives. The interviews are all in compliance with Denver University's Human Subjects Review Board.

I am not an ethnographer. In fact, I have been reluctant to even name these interviews as ethnographic precisely because of the pitfalls of ethnography as a field. If the goal of an ethnographer is "to extract meaning from experience, rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived" then I do not fit that category either.⁴⁷ I have known many of these women through personal familial relationships, as I am a product of the MMU as much as I am a researcher/ scholar. I am interested in extracting meaning from the experiences of these women, but when I dictated the direction I wanted the interviews to go in, the stories ceased being stories, and instead, the women told me what they thought I wanted to hear. What occurred when I just listened was that the women were

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fully capable of extracting their own meaning from experience. The fact that I, a product of the MMU, the grand daughter of a well-known preacher's wife, Natalia Nieto, wanted to know about their experiences for a doctoral dissertation encouraged many of the women to touch on topics that an "ethnographer" would not know to ask about. I know that ethnographic studies rooted in Anthropology and Comparative Religions are steeped in colonial foundations. I am aware that there is a negotiation of power taking place during my exchanges with the women. Many of them did not believe what they had to say was valuable, particularly the daily lived experiences that Latina feminist theologians commit to placing at the center of analysis. Had I not had my own daily lived experiences of being silenced, misunderstood and spoken for, I might not have picked up on the body language and tones in voices that indicated they were censoring themselves. Had I not picked up on those signs, I might have missed some of the stories.

This personal relationship presents both challenges and benefits when placed in the context with methodology. As an "insider" or "participant observer" I enter the conversations with the MMU already having a body of knowledge thanks to having grown up with two grandmothers, several aunts, cousins, and family friends who have played a significant role in my religious life. These relationships have been beneficial; many women were willing to submit to interview simply because they knew who I was, or they knew my grandmothers, and therefore felt they knew and could trust me. I was granted special attention at the 75th Anniversary celebration in San Antonio by some of the leadership. At two of the events, namely the opening event and the closing banquet, I was introduced as "one of our own" who is working on a doctorate on the Mujeres Metodistas Unidas. Those who introduced me were sure to place me within my own

genealogy; this, they told me, would ensure that people would be more comfortable talking to me.

My conception of this project and my methods are informed, in part, by a piece by Mónica Russel y Rodríguez entitled “Messy Spaces: Chicana Testimonio and the Undisciplining of Ethnography.”⁴⁸ Russel y Rodríguez explores the “untidy” practice of ethnographic method and develops the themes of “messiness and undiscipline” in order to problematize ethnography and come up with a new way of doing research through a Chicana feminist lens.⁴⁹ Ethnography is described as a “volatile genre” in that it claims to represent experiences of specific communities, yet due to the disciplinary constraints, it can also prevent us as researchers, from “considering other vantages.”⁵⁰ It is precisely for this reason, I want to consider other vantage points besides what an exclusive historical study would make room for, or what an exclusively ethnographic study would make room for. The stories I have been told are part of a multi-vocal context of the Protestant borderlands. By applying testimonio defined as “personal narratives connected to larger group experiences, with elements of the narratives shifted and emboldened to make those political interpretations” to my own work, I am able to locate the personal narratives within the larger context of Methodism among Latinas in the U.S-Mexico borderlands region.⁵¹ As I mentioned briefly already, I see these narratives and their connections to larger group experiences as genealogical. The MMU all begin their narratives with

⁴⁸ Mónica Russel y Rodríguez, “Messy Spaces: Chicana Testimonio and the Undisciplining of Ethnography,” *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social* 7, Issue 1 (Fall 2007): 86-121.

⁴⁹ Russel y Rodríguez, “Messy Spaces,” 87.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

memories and knowledge's about their ancestors. Russel y Rodríguez sees *testimonio* as a genre that can remedy some of the ills of ethnography, not because it is more “authentic” but because it “uses its retelling as a means to connect with a collective.”⁵² The interviewees are situated firmly with the collective of the MMU of the Rio Grande Conference, and the telling and re-telling of their stories in and of themselves are examples of how productive “undisciplining” can be in uncovering silences on history and in exposing the gaps in discourse.

I interviewed women I identified as important leaders in the history of both the Rio Grande Conference in general and the MMU specifically; women who had direct contact with the Methodist missionary institutions mentioned above: Harwood School for Girls in Albuquerque, New Mexico and the Houchen Community Center/Newark Maternity Hospital in El Paso, Texas. I also interviews people who other people told me I should talk to. For example, I met a former teacher at the Harwood School, Marion Crissy only because a Harwood graduate, Amy Costales accompanied me to her home and introduced us. Also, I decided to interview Erasmo Lujan, a man, after five different women suggested that he would know everything I would need about his mother's role in the MMU. Lucy Burciaga of El Paso, insisted that I interview Dorothea Muñoz, a former nurse at Newark Maternity Hospital. Dorothea is an Anglo woman who first moved to El Paso for work at Newark and Houchen Settlement House. By suggesting I interview certain people, the women enacted their own agency in crafting with me, their experiences. That two of the women were Anglo also suggests that perhaps Amy Costales

⁵² Ibid.

and Lucy Burciaga believe that excluding interviews with women on the basis of racial classification would be somehow less truthful or less accurate.

Cultural Studies

In addition to interviews with members of the MMU, I examined aspects of religious practices that may or may not have come directly from the women, doing so from my own observations and interpretations, using a cultural studies approach. Latina biblical scholar Leticia Guardiola-Saenz argues that as a point of departure, “culture in cultural studies is not defined aesthetically, but politically, as the texts and practices of everyday life”⁵³ and for my project, that includes cultural artifacts such as cookbooks, important iconography found at women’s meetings and gatherings; songs composed and sung by members of the MMU; prayers that children are taught; and other types of material culture that during interviews, or at gatherings, women identified as important objects. The material cultural objects range from family Bibles passed down through generations, service pins given to them to honor their commitment to the mission of the MMU, and the “Cinco Estrellas” buttons.

These artifacts contribute to what Luis Leon defines “religious poetics” as “performed and narrated discourse, *tactics*, and strategies, whereby social agents change culturally derived meanings and, indeed, the order of the phenomenal world by rearranging the relationships among symbols and deftly inventing and reinventing the

⁵³ Leticia Guardiola-Saenz, “Reading from Ourselves: Identity and Hermeneutics Among Mexican-American Feminists” in María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, Jeanette Rodríguez, eds. *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 86.

signification of symbols--especially those held sacred.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, Leon writes, “In sacred poetics, religious actors can manage the often harsh and potentially overwhelming conditions they confront-the battle for survival and more, dignity, love, freedom-by deploying the most powerful weapons in their arsenal: signs, myths, rituals, narratives and symbols.”⁵⁵ By reading the practices of the MMU as examples of religious poetics, this dissertation unearths the significance of the practices of Mexican-American women in the borderlands as survival strategies. The “signs, myths, rituals, narratives and symbols” that the MMU draw upon in their “battle” include the narratives they have crafted regarding their grandmothers and great grandmothers’ choices to convert to Methodism. The *travesías* embarked upon by founding mothers of the MMU could have only taken place within the context of the borderlands and indeed were “effective means to manage the crisis of everyday life.”⁵⁶ Access to educational opportunities was limited for Mexican-American women due to the heteronormative gender expectations that women were to benefit from education only insofar as it would make them into better mothers and wives. For example, the Harwood School was originally founded in order to meet the growing need of educating New Mexico’s Mexican and Mexican American women, referred to by missionaries as “modest ‘black-eyed’ girls” to become the future homemakers of America, ensuring the growth of a racially Mexican, but culturally Anglo population. However, as León reminds us, “poetic, creative religious practice does not occur only at the boundaries of institutions, but within, parallel to, and sometimes in

⁵⁴ Luis D. León, *La Llorona’s Children: Religion, Life, and Death in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 4.

⁵⁵ León, *La Llorona’s Children*, 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

direct conflict with established traditions” and in the case of the MMU, their creative religious practice took advantage of what the missionary institutions were offering and “‘redirected,’ ‘reinterpreted,’” the meanings of those symbols and transformed them into places of negotiation of power and resources.⁵⁷ The MMU’s practice has occurred at the boundaries of women’s work within the Methodist Church at the same time as they are at the boundaries of the Hispanic Methodist community. At the same time, their practices occur parallel to both the Anglo women’s Latino Methodist activities.

I touched on the significance of borderlands theories in chapter one as it relates to the *travesía* from Mexico to United States, from crossing the border to living in the borderlands. By combining historical, ethnographic, and cultural studies in this project, borderlands theories and methods are critical to framing these stories.

Borderlands theory begins by acknowledging the critical role that the U.S.-Mexico geopolitical border plays, a border that is the result of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo following the war in 1848. Partially in response to modes of analysis informed by Enlightenment concepts such as the mind-body split, subject-object dichotomy, colonizer-colonized, and sacred-profane, borderlands theorists seek to uncover and excavate the ways in which those categories are constituted through discourse and power relations. Borderlands theories seek to reveal the possible motivations for setting up such distinctions, but also question the possibility that the binaries are “natural” in the first place. Borderlands theory resists notions of pure, original, or natural religious and racial identities, and instead posits that borderlands experiences are characterized by ambiguity, or *nepantla*.

⁵⁷ León, 5.

Gloria Anzaldúa's influential work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, excavates the effects of the U.S.-Mexico border defined as an unnatural boundary, "*una herida abierta*" (an open wound) used to separate "us from them."⁵⁸ Anzaldúa's work seeks to de-naturalize binary categories, which had been imposed by the dominant culture on the women in this study, binary categories such as Mexican-Anglo, Catholic-Protestant, and civilized-superstitious.

The main theorists of borderlands theory are Gloria Anzaldúa, Chela Sandoval, Emma Perez, and Cherrie Moraga who are responding to and in conversation with thinkers such as WEB Dubois, Homi Bhabha, and Franz Fanon. The former highlight the inextricability of race, class, sex, gender, and nation, as inscribed upon bodies in particular ways at particular moments in history. These Chicana theorists push the boundaries even further than some of their intellectual predecessors by articulating the ways in which they as embodied subjects are both objects and subjects of their inquiry. For example, the MMU and their religious choices speak to their own understandings of power, race and gender. Throughout the research, there has been an underlying tension between privileging the women's stories and legitimizing the more 'legitimate' sources. The archived, meticulously documented histories tell us what they believe took place and why it was important. The sources which are harder to verify as so-called truth, the memories, writings, and stories of the MMU, are not in and of themselves more authentic. What is powerful about this project happens when the two sources are put in conversation together and interpreted through the theoretical lenses of post-colonial, Chicana feminist, liberationist theologies, and politically progressive scholarship. The

⁵⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1989,99), 21.

MMU have embodied the borderlands experience, they have already constructed their own hermeneutical lens of suspicion.

A Borderland is the “emotional residue” caused by an unnatural boundary that defines what is “us” and “them”. The border is “una herida abierta”, where the “third world grates up against the first and bleeds.” Although Anzaldúa was not the first theorist to comment on the destabilizing, subaltern experiences of marginalization, her work has nevertheless been groundbreaking and invaluable for the theorizing of issues of identity in terms of class, race, gender, sexuality, nationalism, and religion. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza*, the reader is confronted with the multifaceted dimensions of life in the geographical space of the U.S.-Mexico border as well as the psychological, emotional, spiritual and sexual margins, and subsequent crossings that emerge as a result of the border. Anzaldúa destabilizes binary categories of Mexican-American; black-white; queer-straight; male-female; sacred-profane; history-myth, pushing the reader to interrogate the ways in which the binaries have distorted our lives. In the first pages of the book, we are told that the border “me raja, me raja (it splits me, it splits me)” referring to the body of the narrator.⁵⁹ This image serves to push the theory out of the realm of the intellectual and into the real lived embodied experience of border dwellers. Cherrie Moraga also invokes the embodied knowledge of the borderlands by arguing that poetry and art represent “theory in the flesh” that links the historical realities of the geopolitical border; the imposition of dichotomous epistemologies, onto colonized peoples

⁵⁹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 24.

and their physical bodies.⁶⁰ Chela Sandoval writes that Moraga's theory in the flesh "allows practitioners to live with faith, hope, and moral vision in spite of all else" The assertion that theory comes from the body, that the body knows the realities of living in the borderlands becomes one of the foundations to the theoretical framework. Anzaldúa journeys through the lived experiences of those in the border region of U.S. and Mexico, providing examples of the marginalization of Mexicans from the U.S. The narrative about her cousin running when the *migra* came to the fields in south Texas, then being deported farther into the interior of Mexico than he had ever been, exposes the irrationality of U.S. racism and immigration policy. But the story tells also of the buried, unconscious level at which identity formation is naturalized by the border. The cousin knows he's Mexican in the context of the U.S., yet when he gets deported, he has to contend with the ways in which he is not Mexican within the borders of his own "homeland".

Other borderland/border examples from Anzaldúa include those of sexuality, religion and language. The virgin-whore dichotomy that characterizes the "culture" of Greater Mexico is interrogated through Anzaldúa's situating Malintzin as having been sold out by her people, not the other way around. Of course, the re-construction of the Malintzin-Guadalupe paradigm had been done prior to *Borderlands*. However, the genealogical project connecting pre-Aztec feminine deities served to disrupt seemingly stable categories of indigenous vs. European religious systems. This same framework is useful, as discussed in chapter 1, for understanding the interactions between Mexican –

⁶⁰ Cherríe Moraga, "Theory in the Flesh," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1981).

American Catholic and Methodists; Mexican-American Catholic and white Protestants; and Mexican-American and white Methodists.

The new mestiza consciousness then makes way for the development of methods and practices taken up by other theorists. Chela Sandoval, for example, relies on the new mestiza consciousness to enact the “methodology of the oppressed” utilizing differential consciousness, semiotics and a hermeneutics of love.⁶¹ Borderlands theory then becomes not only about decolonizing geopolitical boundaries, but also decolonizing epistemologies. Sandoval places the work of Anzaldúa and the new mestiza consciousness; Audre Lorde’s *Sister/Outsider*, Roland Barthes, and others in conversation with each other in order to highlight the ways in which academic production of knowledge has taken place in the form of apartheid. By delving into the interstitial locations of knowledge production, Sandoval relies and pushes forward the borderlands theoretical framework in the highlighting of bridges between forms of knowledge. The invocation of concepts such as “double consciousness” “la facultad”, the “decolonial imaginary” and “third space feminism” puts into critical conversation with one another methods and models for knowing and being in oppositional consciousness.⁶²

Similarly, Chidester theorizes contact zones or frontiers as places where power is negotiated and contested and suggests that in this context, religions get defined by those in power. What is most compelling for my work is his proposal of an understanding of

⁶¹ Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000)

⁶² Sandoval’s work places multiple theorists, from African American feminist communities, to European male philosophers in conversation with each other. Audre Lorde, *Sister/Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984); Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972);

religions as not “bounded cultural systems” but “intra-religious and interreligious networks of cultural relations.”⁶³ Because although Catholicism was the prominent religious affiliation and practice for Mexicans in the Southwest, the missionaries nevertheless considered it a false religion, and concluded that religion was missing from the lives of the indigenous and Mexican communities they encountered.

⁶³ Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 259-260.

Chapter 3

Tentacles and Branches of the Missionary Discourse

“And what we know, what we discover as we venture into other worlds, is that we can only repeat the voices previously unheard, rebuffed, or underestimated as we attempt to redeem that which has been disregarded in our history.” Emma Pérez

“I had never cried so hard in so strange a place as a library aisle before.” S. Lily Mendoza, “Tears in the Archive: On Creating Memory to Survive and Contest Empire”

“I thought I’d come to a different country” Dorothea Comer Muñoz, Head nurse (1939-1969) Newark Maternity Hospital, El Paso, Texas.

Tentacles or Branches?

This chapter looks at the ways in which missionary discourse with Mexican American women developed through the four avenues of education, health care, social services, and evangelism or mission. These relationships began to take shape within and through a particular historical and political context of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands between 1869 and 1933. The common context is comprised of three intersecting and overlapping ethos⁶⁴: anti-Catholicism, American Patriotism, and middle-class white femininity or “New spheres of usefulness” for women.⁶⁵ The set of three overlapping ethos make up the body out of which the tentacles grew.

⁶⁴ Paul Barton suggests that Mexican-Americans, los Protestantes, “have developed their religious identity through internalization of the religious worldview and ethos originally presented by Anglo-American Protestant missionaries” *Hispanic Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 2, 176, n.3. Barton relies on Clifford Geertz’ definition of ethos and worldview: “A peoples’ ethos is the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects. Their worldview is their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order,” “Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 127.

⁶⁵ Miller Schmidt’s work identifies a shift from proper middle-class white femininity needing to be limited to the domestic sphere, to a new “ideal of true womanhood” which beginning in the 1860s

There are two major goals that guide this chapter. The first is to identify the nature of ‘early’ (1853-1933) Methodist missionary work with Mexican-American women in New Mexico and Texas. The second is to mark the points at which Mexican-American women come into contact with the missionary work, and how those interactions were affected by, and affected missionary work.

The first goal is relatively easy to get at thanks to a wealth of records and documents produced by the Methodist missionaries, WHMS, and the institutions themselves. By looking at a sampling of the prevalent discourse throughout missionary documents on Houchen and Harwood, this chapter identifies the nature of the early work. I ask the following: What were Anglo missionary attitudes towards Mexican women? How did the theological influences on Methodists shape those attitudes? In other words, what were the tentacles that emerged from the body of missionary work between 1869 and 1933? How far did those tentacles reach? And how did those four mission emphases transform and change over time? I suggest that what I call Phase One of women’s work in the borderlands, between 1869 and 1933, was particularly tentacle-like. Tentacles can twist and turn in sudden and unexpected ways. Tentacles belong to a body of an octopus, for example, and as such are responsible for serving the needs of that body. In our context, the body is the discourse of anti-Catholicism, U.S. patriotism, and white Protestant femininity. In this context, the tentacles represent the missionary work of education, social service, health care, and mission. These emphases, or tentacles, provided Mexican and Mexican American women and their families with access to one or more of the four offerings of healthcare, education, evangelism, or social services. Yet

created conditions of “the movement of middle-class Protestant women into larger spheres of influence” which “came primarily through their creation of organizations ‘for women only.’” (151).

more insidiously tentacles can also grab onto prey, squeeze life out of it, and feed it to the body. Reading the documents produced by the missionaries, one can easily interpret the tentacles negatively, seeing them as representing the needs of the body of Protestant, white, American superiority. The tentacles of white Protestant supremacy, U.S. nationalism, and heteronormative middle-class femininity that are embodied in the discursive production of the missionary institutions could easily have squeezed the life out of the ‘modest black-eyed Mexican girls’ by transforming them into clones of Anglo missionary women. Fortunately the story does not end with the documents produced by the missionaries. For the purposes of this project the story begins with the interactions between those tentacles and the prey they touched.

Missionary institutions sponsored by the Women’s Home Missionary Society provided the spaces through which the tentacles were able to reach Mexican female populations. Brief histories of Harwood Industrial Home and School for Spanish American Girls (1893), and Houchen Settlement House-Newark Maternity Hospital (1912) offer glimpses of how the tentacles stretched from 1893 through the years and generations into 2008, and how they were instrumental in creating today’s branches of MMU membership.

While Harwood and Houchen were not the only two institutional projects set up in the region, they nevertheless represent a vivid picture of how matters of race, class, gender, and religion intersected and overlapped, and these two still remain the missionary-sponsored institutions that most consciously focused programming on women. In the 21 interviews I conducted, these two were the most commonly mentioned places in which Mexican women’s first exposure to Methodism occurred. Many of the

women I interviewed either themselves had direct experiences with Harwood School or Houchen Settlement House/Newark Hospital, or knew of their mothers' or grandmothers' experiences there. Of course, several other similar institutions were established in Texas and New Mexico. These are either no longer in operation, or are more difficult to situate within the stories of the MMU and have therefore fallen outside the scope of this study. If one were to make a chart that mapped out the influence of WHMS institutions from 1869-1933, to this day one could draw direct lines connecting the women involved in the MMU and those institutions.

The goal of tracking where Mexican-American women came into contact with these early institutions is difficult, and requires the genealogical research to which I have referred in earlier chapters. Because this project is committed to privileging the perspectives of Mexican-American Methodist women, I have through ethnographic interviews sought out the ways in which the tentacles reached those women still living today. But the fact remains that the Mujeres of the MMU are essentially absent from the historical record from 1869-1933. Though they are occasionally referred to in particular ways, for the most part they are lumped together as a homogenous group of “modest black-eyed Mexican girls.”

So to find evidence of Mujeres' agency during the encounters with missionaries that took place between 1869 and 1933, one is forced to search for their voices in the gaps of history.⁶⁶ These interactions, these conversations that took place are only accessible to us through memory and oral histories of women alive today, women with whom I was able to speak. I wanted to know what the interactions were like between

⁶⁶ See Emma Pérez's *Decolonial Imaginary*; Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed*.

white missionary women who worked at Houchen and Harwood and Mexican women who used the services of those institutions. The impact of the early period on the women today has been passed down through generations, and the fullest way I know to get at the nature of the initial contact is by putting their descendants' memories in conversation with the documents. The perspectives of those touched by the tentacles are absent from that record. The stories of MMU and their memories, however, reveal the inherent flaws in a method that exclusively privileges primary documents. The stories tell us that at some point the tentacles ceased being tentacles at all, and were perhaps never tentacles to begin with. The stories reveal more complex relationships than those generally assumed of colonizer and colonized. They reveal as much, if not more, about history. The stories fill in the gaps which that discourse created; they break the silence of unheard voices.

Yes, the missionary programming was reactionary and was a product of its historical context. Missionaries defined their success via dialectical relationships between white Protestant femininity and Mexican Catholic womanhood. But the women I interviewed in these last three years (2006-2009) were not alive in 1869 when the Women's Foreign Mission Service was founded, or when the Harwood School was founded in 1896, and only a few were already alive in 1912 when Houchen Settlement House was built. The women whose stories fill these next pages did not remember their encounters with missionaries as negotiations of power and resources.⁶⁷ They did not

⁶⁷ Emma Pérez suggests that "historians have participated in a politics of historical writing in which erasure---the erasure of race, gender, sexualities, and especially differences--was not intentional, but rather a symptom of the type of narrative emplotment unconsciously chosen" (27). She admits that she arranges the events and makes arguments that "suit me, arguments that I am pleased to excavate from the text of the documents as I create a Chicana history in which I can believe." *Decolonial Imaginary*. I too am emplotting. I interviewed women who had contact with the missionary institutions which "othered" them, but who are still part of the faith community that emerged from that contact. I did not seek out women who had terrible experiences, or women who felt othered by their interactions with missionaries, for that would

consciously reveal to me that they thought of the Harwood School or the Houchen Settlement House as tentacles of the body of white Protestant male supremacy. Instead, they simply shared their memories and experiences.

This chapter briefly discusses the missionary institutions founded during the first phase of Methodist Missionary work (1869-1933) with women in the borderlands. It will also weave in brief biographies of women who attended Harwood School for Girls, and who utilized services provided by Houchen Settlement House and Newark Maternity Hospital.

A Note on Origins: Between Methodist Women and Mexican Methodist

So how did this all begin? We know that a severe storm on March 23, 1869 in Boston made it difficult for any more than six women to attend the first meeting to organize a Women's Foreign Mission Society "but you know Methodist women, they just rescheduled the meeting."⁶⁸ Mrs. Clementina Rowe Butler and Mrs. Lois Stiles Parker were the featured speakers. Having lived in India with their Methodist missionary husbands, they convinced the attendees at the Boston meeting that the "gospel could only be brought to the women of India by women."⁶⁹ The following year two women left for India sponsored by the Women's Foreign Missionary Society: Isabel Thoburn founded and ran a school, and Dr. Clara Swain established a hospital that now carries her name.

be a different research project altogether. I spoke with women who have very fond and positive memories-- at least the ones they shared with me.

⁶⁸ Lucy Burciaga, interview by the author, tape recording, Sacramento Methodist Assembly, Sacramento, NM., 3 July 2007,

⁶⁹ Miller Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, 160.

⁷⁰These events are recounted in at least three different sources with relatively minor, yet significant differences. Lucy Burciaga began our interview by telling the story of “two pastors’ wives in India [who] decided to come to the U.S. to get mission outreach going. It was in Boston and a snow storm hit and only six women showed up.”⁷¹ Minerva N. Garza authored “Repasando Las Páginas de la Historia: Ésta es tu vida” (Reviewing the Pages of History: This is Your Life) published in the pamphlet provided to all attendees of the 75th Anniversary of the *Mujeres Metodistas Unidas Conferencia Rio Grande*⁷². Like Burciaga, Garza dates the origin of the MMU to this first meeting in Boston at which they founded the Women’s Foreign Missionary Society. However, in a different piece by Garza entitled “The Influence of Methodism on Hispanic women Through Women’s Societies,” she says: “The beginning of missionary work by our church among the Hispanics is connected with the names of Bishop C. Keener, Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Howard, (Mrs. Howard is the married name of Isabel Thouburn of New Mexico),

⁷⁰ In Garza’s “Influence of Methodism”, 79, she reports that Isabel Thouburn (not Thoburn, as it is spelled in Miller Schmidt’s book) was married to Dr. Thomas Howard. However, the only references to Thouburn/Thoburn in Miller Schmidt’s study of the documents, lead one to believe that Thoburn’s story ended after she returned from India to live in the first Deaconess House in Chicago in 1887 on furlough from being principal of Lucknow Women’s College in India. There is a chance that Isabel Thouburn and Isabella Thoburn are two different women, but there is also a chance that she moved to New Mexico later in her life and married Dr. Thomas Howard, pages 160, 175, 200, 326 (n33), 328 (n75).

⁷¹ Lucy Burciaga, Interview by author, tape recording, Sacramento, NM, 3 July 2007. Lucy recalled that the storm which prevented a larger turnout as being a snow storm, but accounts written by Clementina Butler report that it was a rain storm.

⁷² *Mujeres Metodistas Unidas, Peregrinando en la Misión-Journeying Through Mission: Celebrando 75 Años en Misión*, 2-4. October 2008.

Alejandro Sutherlands, Alejo Hernandez (the first Mexican Methodist preacher), and Frank Onderdonk.”⁷³

In Jean Miller Schmidt’s meticulously documented *Grace Sufficient*, she recounts the same meeting: “The Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church had a rather inauspicious beginning: only six women braved torrential rain in Boston on the afternoon of March 23, 1969.”⁷⁴ While the details of the origins of the Women’s Foreign Missionary Society may seem insignificant, such details nonetheless draw our attention to at least two important elements.

First, the fact that Lucy Burciaga and Minerva N. Garza, two important women from the Mujeres Metodistas Unidas, situate their stories as members of the MMU in relation to the first meeting of the WFMS in 1869, points to the value they place on their relationship to the national structure of the Women’s Division of The UMC.⁷⁵ Their placing themselves as Methodist women, as members of the MMU, and as Hispanic Methodist into a genealogy with the Women’s Foreign Missionary Society shows that they consider themselves as belonging in the genealogy despite being absent from the WFMS’s own historical record. Moreover, their acknowledging their place in the general Methodist women’s genealogy points to an unspoken understanding that Mexican

⁷³ Minerva N. Garza, “The Influence of Methodism on Hispanic Women Through Women’s Societies” in *Methodist History*, 34:2 (January 1996) 78-89. “Alexandro” Sutherland is named in other sources as Alexander, however.

⁷⁴ Miller Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient* (158-159). Miller-Schmidt’s account is primarily based on two sources which I have not read, *Mrs. William Butler: Two Empires and a Kingdom* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1929) by Clementina Butler and Mary Isham’s *Valorous Ventures, A Record of Sixty and Six Years of the Women Foreign Missionary Society, Methodist Episcopal Church* (Boston: WFMS, MEC, 1936).

⁷⁵ Lucy Burciaga, the first Hispanic to hold a national office of the Women’s Division in 1996, and Minerva N. Garza, arguably the true historian of the MMU and the source for most of our knowledge of women’s work in the Rio Grande Conference.

American women see themselves and are seen by Anglo women as early recipients of foreign missionary work.

A second important aspect of their interpretation of history in relation to the WFMS reflects the ambiguous relationship between white middle-class women and Mexican American women. By situating themselves within the narrative of the WFMS, did Mexican American women see themselves as foreign? More explicitly, did Mexican American women see themselves as the missionized or as the missionaries? The WFMS was established in 1869 to respond to the needs of women in places such as India, China, Japan, and Africa, to help those women act upon their “sacred responsibility as women to evangelize and uplift their ‘heathen sisters’.”⁷⁶ However, the Women’s Home Missionary Society of the MEC, the body that would direct its attention toward women within the United States, did not form until 1880 (and 1886-87 in the MECS.) What does it mean when Minerva N. Garza looks back from 1996 and 2008, and Lucy Burciaga looks back from 2007, they date their Methodist origins as women to 1869 and the advent of the Women’s Foreign Missionary Society rather than to the 1880s and the Women’s Home Missionary Society? Does it indicate that the MMU women are more likely to identify as women *in* mission than as recipients *of* mission? If so, what does that mean for their identification with their ethnic group? Are they closer in faith to their white Methodist sisters or to their Mexican brothers?

Yet another source of ambiguous dates of origins for the MMU is the shifting between 1869 and 1880. The difficulty of dating the origin of the MMU is compounded by the complicated history of The United Methodist Church. Miller Schmidt explains:

⁷⁶ Miller Schmidt, 177.

In 1939 three bodies of Methodist, the Methodist Episcopal Church (1784), the Methodist Protestant Church (1830), and the Methodist Episcopal church, South (1845), reunited to form The Methodist Church. In 1968 The Methodist Church joined with the Evangelical United Brethren Church, itself the result of the 1946 union of the Evangelical Church and the United Brethren Church, to form The United Methodist Church.

To take just one example, anyone wishing to study the twentieth-century history of women organized for mission in this tradition would have to look at the histories of no fewer than twenty-one separate women's organizations.⁷⁷

The majority of the work with Mexican American women done by the Women's Home Missionary Society began in earnest with the establishment of institutions for "Spanish American girls" such as the Harwood Home and Industrial School (1895) in Albuquerque, the Houchen Settlement House in El Paso, Texas (1912), and Newark Maternity Hospital (1931). Methodist missionary records indicate that it was between 1895 and 1931 that real inroads to the homes of Mexican women were made. If this is the case, and if this work was directly supported by the WHMS, why do members of the MMU virtually ignore these as important moments in the history of the MMU?

One possible answer could be that many members of the WFMS came back from foreign mission fields only to realize that there were just as many opportunities to save "heathen" sisters in the U.S. as there were abroad.⁷⁸ Of course details varied depending upon whether one is describing the MEC or MECS, but for the most part, white missionary women shifted at least part of their attention toward domestic mission fields including the newly acquired borderlands region of Texas and New Mexico.

Another possible reason that the MMU's histories focus on the 1869 meeting in Boston as a point of origin could be that this date is less painful to them than the

⁷⁷ Miller Schmidt, 23.

⁷⁸ Miller Schmidt: *Heathen Woman's Friend*, the name of the journal produced by WFMS changed its title to reflect a more respectful attitude toward foreign women.

alternatives. The rhetoric that guided women's foreign mission work focused on the otherness of women from far away places, to which even Mexican women may have had a hard time relating. This could point to a sort of selective memory that omits the tentacle-like opinions that white Methodist women had of Mexican women. It makes a certain kind of sense for Mexicanas to see themselves as belonging to the Women's Foreign Missionary Society. After all, they were part of the United States and the American femininity that was being exported, and they themselves were not foreign. Regardless of why women such as Garza and Burciaga chose to date their involvement with the MMU to 1869 rather than the 1880s, what remains consistent is that their history gets formed in the borderlands between Methodist femininity and Methodist Mexicanness.

The beginning of the history of the MMU lies somewhere between that of the Women's Division emerging from the above mentioned transactions on the national level of The United Methodist Church, and the Rio Grande Conference which is itself the result of a series of equally complex mergers and name changes. A sermon by ex-Catholic Priest, Benigno Cárdenas in the Santa Fe Plaza on November 20, 1853 marks the beginning of the Rio Grande Conference. Virtually all of the primary sources produced by and about Hispanic Methodism define 1853 as the key moment from which contemporary Rio Grande Conference membership emerged.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ The opening celebration of 150 years of the Rio Grande Conference of the UMC in August 2003 was marked by a procession through and around the Santa Fe Plaza. See also Paul Barton's *Methodists, Presbyterians and Baptists in Texas*. Also in Juan Francisco Martinez's *Sea La Luz* he said Cárdenas had traveled to Rome in 1851 to try and get the Pope to reinstate him to the priesthood which had been suspended by Mexican bishop Zubiría "for reasons not completely understood" (57). When this was not successful, he was attracted to Methodism and to an extent, but less documented, to the Baptists as well, "though it is not clear whether he ever intended to be baptized. He was never ordained as a Methodist minister, although he seems to have baptized infants and performed other rituals usually reserved for

In New Mexico, Rev. Thomas Harwood was the superintendent of the New Mexico Mission in 1872, later renamed the New Mexico Spanish Mission in order to meet the needs of the Spanish Speaking population. The work of Harwood then merged with the work of Rev. Alexander H. Sutherland and Robert Paine Thompson in Texas and eventually became the Mexican Border Mission District in 1874. Here, Paul Barton explains,

The Spanish-speaking work of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) in New Mexico was restructured several times between 1907 and 1939, when the Spanish-Speaking congregations of the MEC in New Mexico united with the Spanish-speaking Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) congregations in Texas and New Mexico.⁸⁰

After the merger of the above two in 1939, the Southwest Mexican Annual Conference was formed, and then changed its name to the Rio Grande Annual Conference in 1948.⁸¹

So far, I have summarized the roots of the MMU in relation to both the Women's Division of The UMC and the Rio Grande Annual Conference of The UMC. Mexican-American women never fit completely within either organization, but instead identify their roots or origins as being with one or the other depending on the context in which they are discussing their organization's history. Now I will describe the four areas of missionary emphasis: Education, Social Services, public health and mission/evangelism, and within each category will identify corresponding missionary institutions that provided one or more of those services to Mexican and Mexican American women.

ordained clergy. According to Thomas Harwood, most of the work accomplished by the Methodists in the 1850s resulted from the Cárdenas ministry" (58).

⁸⁰ Barton, 147-149.

⁸¹ Ibid.

The two main institutions I have identified are Harwood School and Houchen Settlement House, both of which were founded between 1869 and 1933. These were intended to focus on Mexican women's needs, and have consistently been the most influential institutions in the majority of my interviewees' lives. Yet they are not the only institutions founded in this era; others include community centers such as The Holding Institute in Laredo, Texas (1886) that was originally founded for young boys and later converted into the first co-educational elementary school in south Texas; Wesley Community Center in Robstown, Texas (1941); and Good Neighbor Settlement House in Brownsville, Texas (1953).⁸² The abovementioned centers were founded by, and funded through, the Mujeres Metodistas Unidas, but were not exclusively designed to be for young women.

Phase One 1869-1933

The years 1869-1933 correspond with what I identified in chapter one as *la primera travesía*, the crossing from Catholic to Methodist. We have noted that the founding of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society in 1869 marks the beginning of what ultimately became the Mujeres Metodistas Unidas of the Rio Grande Annual Conference. The MMU mark their anniversaries beginning with 1933, the year that La Sociedad Femenil Para Servicio Cristiano⁸³ met and elected the first home-grown president from the Mexican American community, Señora Carmen J. Lujan. Thus, 1869

⁸² Alma Navarro, "The Community Centers" October 5, 1996 for the MMU de la Conferencia Rio Grande Archives. Mission, Texas. Unarchived collection. See also Miller Schmidt's section on Kentucky-born missionary Nannie E. Holding, 250.

⁸³ The name changes are reflections of the various changes and mergers outlined early in this chapter. Between 1930 and 1933, the name changed twice, however, 1933 consistently remains the beginning of MMU.

to 1933 is essentially the period of mission work in which Anglo women (and men) directed their attention to Mexican American women and 1933 marks the moment at which Mexican American women began to exert more autonomy in their own missionary work.

When the WFMS established the Women's Home Missionary Society in 1885, one of the areas of concern was the borderlands region. Primary official documents produced by the Methodist Church, particularly by Anglo clergy, the Women's Home Missionary Society, missionary teachers, nurses, and settlement house workers emphasize that one of the keys to successful mission programs would be the Americanizing of the Mexican "Romanists," and that the most effective way to Americanize them would be to "go after the women."⁸⁴ Since the New Mexico Territory in 1850 was "intellectually, morally and religiously one of the darkest corners of Christendom,"⁸⁵ it was thought that it would be difficult to pull Mexicans out of darkness and into the light of American culture. Moreover, T. Harwood believed that, "While the march of civilization had taken great strides almost everywhere else, New Mexico had fallen behind. Why? For want of Bibles, schools, and proper instruction. These wanting,

⁸⁴ George I. Sánchez, "'Go After the Women': Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman, 1915-1929," in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Du Bois (New York: Routledge, 1994), 284-297. Sanchez argues that Americanization programs established after the U.S. conquest of the southwest were designed to effectively acculturate Mexicans into American culture and society. He identified Protestant missionary projects as among those most aggressive programs that would focus on teaching Mexican women how to be Americans so they could in turn teach their children. I agree with his assessment that these programs targeted such women. However, his conclusion that the programs were unsuccessful relies on essentialist assumptions regarding American and Mexican cultural characteristics and does not take into account the agency of Mexican-American women who chose to internalize aspects of the Americanization programs, i.e. choosing Methodism over Catholicism.

⁸⁵ T. Harwood, 19.

there could be but little advancement on any lines of material progress.”⁸⁶ Vestiges of Spanish Romanism, Harwood believed, impeded Mexicans’ progress. While Thomas Harwood’s success for establishing a solid foundation for Mexican-American Methodism in New Mexico in general would become known, it was the WHMS and Thomas and his wife, Emily Harwood, who took up the call to focus efforts on Mexican American women. A sampling of missionary discourse typical in the post-1848 borderlands illustrates the complexity of the body of U.S. patriotism, anti-Catholicism, and middle-class femininity out of which the tentacles of education, social services, public health, and mission grew and adapted. To understand the nature of early missionary goals related to education of Mexican women, one must know at least a brief history of Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Harwood. For it was his wife, Emily Jane, who was considered to embody the quintessential American Christian femininity to which all women, particularly Mexican women, should aspire.

The language of the biography does not necessarily reflect a spiritual or religious tone, however. Very few references are made to Emily Harwood’s witnessing to Mexicans under her influence; instead the authors write of how different the Mexicans were after she taught them compared to their state of ignorance before she came into their lives. These descriptions are steeped in gendered meanings, with double standards measuring success for boys and girls.

Two events in Emily Harwood’s biography speak volumes about prevalent attitudes towards Mexicans and double standards towards girls and boys at the school. The first event occurred with the revelation that Mexican children were capable of

⁸⁶ Ibid., 20.

innocent play: “these little Mexicans actually played ball, marbles and black man. The boys played with tops and kites and rode wooden ‘Ruminants;’ and the girls played with dolls”.⁸⁷ Immediately following this observation, Emily Harwood notices that the girls were “going through a regular Roman Catholic baptism, the candidate being a beautiful doll...It was a very proper and solemn occasion, for little Mexican girls are very devout, and are a credit to the old church of Rome, that teaches her children reverence for the ceremonies of her ritual and respect for the house of worship.”⁸⁸ Something in the behavior evidenced by a Mexican girl’s “reverence for the ceremonies and her ritual and respect for the house of worship” the missionaries find promising for their goals of making useful, refined women out of the girls. But that the teachers note first of all that Mexican children play just like American ones suggest they must have been expecting some kind of unchildlike behavior to come from the kids. The behaviors of Mexicans are always described in terms of their difference or otherness from Anglo counterparts. Harwood and Kellogg make reference to the girls’ obedient and respectful behavior, and yet they do not consider the girls quite refined enough. Emily Harwood “thought it best, after a while to call in these little neophytes and talk to them about the sacredness of baptism, and that it was not right to baptize their dolls.”⁸⁹ Let us remember that these “neophytes” were children. In the book, there is no acknowledgement that the girls are only mimicking behavior they have seen in other contexts. Instead, the authors draw

⁸⁷Harriet Kellogg, *The Life of Mrs. Emily J. Harwood* (Albuquerque: El Abogado Press, 1903), 74.

⁸⁸ In *The Life of Mrs. Emily Harwood* written by Mrs. Harriet S. Kellogg, it is at some points difficult to discern whether the stories are being told to the reader directly by Emily Harwood, or are being relayed by Kellogg. In this case, I am quoting directly from the author, assuming that the stories came from Harwood herself. The use of “these little Mexicans” could be coming from either the author or Mrs. Harwood (74-75).

⁸⁹ Ibid.

attention to how Emily Harwood stood back and watched benevolently, and then, when the girls' practice had gone on too long, how she stepped in and showed them the error of their ways.

This story causes me to question some of the motivating factors underlying the establishment of the educational centers that the Harwoods and other missionaries founded and oversaw. Apparently since the young Mexican girls were already respectful of the house of worship and of rituals such as baptism, the missionary educators' focus shifted towards teaching proper behavior, meaning behavior that more closely resembled Anglo-American standards of femininity.

For example, these excerpts from Emily Harwood's biography point to the intersection and conflation of Mexicans' presumably naïve and immature understanding of rituals. It seems that the evangelism that takes place comes in the form of 'training'. How does all the behavior modification and character development fit in with the need to spread the Word? How does one measure the need for young women's characters to be molded and shaped into "noble womanhood"? It seems that crucial to the missionaries' ability to detect whether they are effective at their work is first, their comparing Mexican girls with the Roman Catholic counterparts who have not been enlightened by missionary education; and second, their comparing them to the models of noble womanhood—white Protestant missionary women. Having done that, and having educated them, one could easily discern the difference missionary education makes:

Look yonder in that little adobe house. It is a Christian home. The little mother is training a large family, and sending them out into the world, Christian men and women. Mrs. Harwood trained that

mother. In yonder school house is a teacher, whose very influence rings true for 'God and home and native land'.⁹⁰

But if the space within a home is "Christian" as a result of the training of Emily Harwood, then what was it before she spread her influence? Does Mexican equal Roman Catholic and therefore uncivilized, whereas Anglo equals Protestant which is therefore Christian and civilized? Which "native land" are the Mexican converts to choose? Presumably in the "school house" teacher it is Anglo female influence that is considered to be seminal for Mexican girls (and boys). This is the point at which U.S. patriotism, middle-class femininity, and anti-Catholicism all become conflated.

However, missionaries' successes were measured differently when it came to the boys in the care of the educational institutions. Emily Harwood recollects some young Mexican boys under her care at school playing a game they called "branding". This game consisted of choosing a freshman to the school and touching hot nails to his arm, thus branding him: "The first game of this sort that Mrs. Harwood ever witnessed filled her with amazement and mild indignation, but remembering some stories of 'hazing' in the universities of the civilized east, she held her peace and secretly watched it 'through to the finish.'"⁹¹ Keep in mind that in the same context, the girls who were baptizing their dolls were corrected. Even though the boys' game of branding "savors of the wild and woolly west,"⁹² Emily Harwood justifies non-interference in what seems to me to be violent and abusive behavior toward one's peers because "these innocent little 'brands'"

⁹⁰ John F. Kellogg, "Introductory Note IV" in *History of Missions*, 9.

⁹¹ H. Kellogg, *Life of Mrs. Emily Harwood*, 75.

⁹² *Ibid.*

“can be compared quite favorably with the ‘black eyes’ of Yale.”⁹³ The moral and behavioral standards to which Mexican boys were held she measures against the Anglo masculinity of the so-called “civilized east.” Meanwhile, the standard for Mexican girls is measured against the behavior and attitudes of the missionary women who were determining the successes of their own work. These stories give us insight into the standards to which Mexican youth were held. Anglo American masculinity and femininity were used to guide and transform what the Harwoods and other missionaries believed were flawed characters of “little Mexicans”.

⁹³ Ibid., 75.

Education

Harwood Industrial Home School for Spanish American Girls

It is impossible to speak of the history of education in the southwest, especially in terms of Protestant efforts, without referring at greater length to Thomas and Emily Jane Harwood. Any scholarship regarding New Mexico's educational system, Methodist work in New Mexico, and Mexican-Anglo relations in New Mexico refers to Thomas Harwood, for he produced two volumes of *History of New Mexico Spanish and English Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1850 to 1910 in Decades*.⁹⁴ However, to gain insight into the ways in which Emily Harwood influenced the work with young women more specifically, one must turn to her biography compiled by Harriet Kellogg in 1903. *The Life of Mrs. Emily J. Harwood* is written in the language that was used to frame the value of education for Mexican women. Emily Harwood, her biographer Harriet S. Kellogg, and the missionary Annie Norton, who founded the Harwood Home and Girls' Industrial School in Albuquerque, no doubt saw themselves as representative of the era's women by exhibiting their new sphere of influence. It was a common assumption that women were the centers of their household and that they used their influence in the domestic sphere to shape and mold their families. Missionaries assumed that Mexicans did not in the same way attribute sanctity to the home and did not consider their women to be the keepers of the domestic space. Consequently missionaries

⁹⁴ For more detailed discussions of T. Harwood's role in missionary work see Paul Barton *Hispanic Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists in Texas*; Francisco Martínez *Sea La Luz: The Making of Mexican Protestantism in the American Southwest, 1829-1900*; Randi Walker *Protestantism in the Sangre de Cristos*; and, David Maldonado Jr. *Protestantes/Protestants*.

considered Mexicans to be flawed for not looking like or behaving like Anglo American women. The Harwoods' biography suggests they were of the opinion that once Mexicans display proper American behavior, they can then participate in their newly acquired nation of the United States. Towards these ends, education at Harwood was defined in terms of 'training' and not just teaching the young women. In this vein, the author writes that Annie Norton and particularly the Harwood Girls School,

...is an institution of remarkable power and Christian force. It is the bright jewel of Methodist woman's effort in the southwest; and with judicious management will ever be an institution of far-reaching influence and will transform the character and mold and develop into noble womanhood these sweet, modest, black-eyed Mexican girls who will be the home makers of the future.⁹⁵

Beyond instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic, education there was also about transforming black-eyed Mexican girls into "noble" or ideal women. The core curriculum was important in itself, but it was also a medium through which Annie Norton and other female missionaries could exert their "new spheres of usefulness" in their homes and beyond. The core curriculum included literacy (in English), math, sciences, and home economics. To be literate in English would enable the young women to read the Bible. It's hard to know how literacy was framed within the classroom when Anglo missionary teachers and Mexican girls were interacting. Certainly the emphasis in E. Harwood's biography was on rescuing the Mexican girls from the "darkness" of Romanism within which literacy in general was discouraged, and reading the Bible was outright forbidden. So, the WHMS considered literacy in and of itself a valuable asset for young women, but it was also an important symbol of successful breaking away from Catholicism. Since

⁹⁵ Harriett Kellogg, *Life of Mrs. Emily Harwood*, 129.

the priests had a monopoly on education in the southwest prior to the arrival of the Protestants and were known for charging exorbitant fees for educating children, the Harwood School for Girls was one of the very few educational opportunities available to Mexican girls, at a low cost, however no girl was turned away for lack of money. Women's Home Missionary Society missionaries, Annie Norton and Margeret Tripp were diligent in their efforts at securing funds from various sources, particularly from money raised by the WHMS from East Coast Methodist congregations.⁹⁶ The trade-off would be that they could work off the tuition. One of those Mexican girls who took advantage of that education at the Harwood School was Josephine G. Smith.

Influence

Josephine G. Smith

Josephine was born in 1918 in Las Cruces, NM, to Leva Soto Gutierrez and Albert Gutierrez. Her mother, Leva, was one of nine siblings in the Soto family. Leva's mother was Francisca Delgado Soto (married to José Maria Soto). Francisca Soto took in laundry for Presbyterian missionaries in Las Cruces, to help subsidize the household income. Francisca and Jose had 10 children born between 1885 and 1907. Around 1903, Francisca Soto with her daughter Zenaida, born 1891 (Leva's older sister), visited Harwood Industrial Home in Albuquerque and met Emily Harwood.⁹⁷ I have not been able to confirm whether or not Zenaida (misspelled "Senaida" by E. Harwood) stayed in Albuquerque and attended Harwood, or whether Mrs. Soto was visiting Emily Harwood

⁹⁶ Eve Ariel Carr, "Missionaries and Motherhood: Sixty-Six Years of Public Health Work in South El Paso"(PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2003), 90-94.

⁹⁷ In the *Life of Emily Jane Harwood*, E. Harwood recalled, "Mrs. Soto came up from El Paso today with her daughter Senaida."

for some other reason. What I do know is that the Soto family--or at least Francisca-- first converted from Catholicism to Presbyterian, although the circumstances of that conversion are unavailable to me. I also know that Zenaida was described by Josephine as the “one of my aunts who really kept us together, with the faith. She was the one who ran the Sunday school, she managed to make sure everyone was involved in the church.”⁹⁸ I keep that detail of the quotation as “my aunts” because Zenaida was in fact my great-great-aunt, as Josephine was my maternal grandmother.

Regardless of whether or not Zenaida attended Harwood, the “far-reaching influence” to which Harriet Kellogg predicts Emily Harwood will have access seems to have made its way to my grandmother, Josephine, via her aunts. The Soto women exhibited the type of womanhood which Harwood’s teachers wished to inspire. They were actively engaged in the political process. Zenaida married Richard Triviz and supported his campaign for the first Democratic Sherriff in Doña Ana County, New Mexico. Zenaida also served on the Board of Trustees for El Calvario UMC, taught Sunday school, and was the Sunday school superintendant. Zenaida expressed willingness to engage in the political process, the commitment to providing Sunday school for children, yet had no children of her own. Zenaida may not have been exactly the type of homemaker Kellogg had envisioned, since she had no children of her own, but she certainly adopted the desired qualities of valuing “God, home and native land” which white missionary teachers were described as having. She worked outside the home in an acceptably feminine capacity by participating in her husband’s political career and by supporting women’s efforts in the church such as Sunday School. Zenaida also exhibited

⁹⁸ Josephine G. Smith, interview by Gerald M. Smith, video recording, Las Cruces, NM., October 1999.

a characteristic she could have easily picked up from female Anglo missionaries like Annie Norton (of Harwood): according to her sister, Leva, she was assertive, “always bossing people around.”⁹⁹

I do not remember my grandmother, Josephine, referring to her aunt Zenaida on a regular basis, but I know she was close to her and referred to her as Aunt Sadie. Zenaida or Sadie’s activities obviously had an impact on Josephine, for she too became politically active as an adult and was instrumental in supporting the women’s work of Sunday School classes for children. Josephine also co-founded (with Carmen J. Lujan, featured in Chapter Four) the Christian Day Nursery in Las Cruces, served as member of various committees within El Calvario UMC, and also is referred to by other women I interviewed as inspirational and exemplary in living according to her faith.

Josephine served for six years as the first Hispanic on the Las Cruces school board in the early 1960 dealing with segregation. She recalls being asked to intervene in a dispute between the principal of Washington School, which served black students only, and parents who were unhappy with the second-class education their children were receiving. She was on the board when desegregation of the schools took place and expresses great pride that her children attended integrated schools.

She was asked to continue to serve on the school board and supposed that she could have run for public office had it not been for a decision she and her husband, Catarino Smith, made that she leave the school board and support his booming construction business, and had it not been for expected gender roles. I also believe that it was Josephine’s socialization within the Protestant church that provided a foundation to

⁹⁹ Leva Soto Gutierrez, interview with MaryEllen Triviz, “Hilaria Triviz Barrio, Democrat” unpublished paper, undated.

her integrating her religious convictions with the desire to serve the public in a way that was acceptable for women. For the school board was a natural extension of women's work, and the emphasis on education so important to missionary teaching in Mexican American communities is reflected in her interests both within and outside of the church structure.

Josephine graduated from high school, and earned a B.A. from New Mexico State. She and her husband supported four of their five children pursuing college degrees, and played important roles in encouraging their grandchildren to do so as well.

I have tried to imagine the conversation between Francisca Soto and Emily Harwood. But all I have is my imagination, for there are no records in Emily Harwood's biography confirming the nature of her relationship to the Soto sisters other than the one lone reporting of her meeting Francisca and daughter 'Senaida'. The influence of E. Harwood and the promotion of noble womanhood is something I can identify from my perspective one hundred years later as being part of the long reach of the tentacles of missionary work. However, after reflecting on my grandmother and her influence, I am more willing to concede that at some point between F. Soto and E. Harwood's meeting and Josephine's coming of age, the somewhat insidiously influential tentacles became healthy self-supporting branches.

The multi-vocal, undisciplining nature of my ethnographic methodology is at play in this section.¹⁰⁰ I never met Zenaida, but I am placing the voices of her and her sisters in conversation with the discourse of missionaries, my grandmother Josephine, and my own understanding of the influence of missionaries on me. My own place in the

¹⁰⁰ Russel y Rodríguez, "Messy Spaces".

genealogy of the MMU also represents the ‘messy spaces’ between “writing others’ and writing one’s own experiences.”¹⁰¹

Zenaida, and her sisters Leonor, Margeret, Siria, Francisca, along with Josephine’s mother, Leva must have been influenced by the ideals spread by ‘new spheres of usefulness.’ Leva herself was named after a missionary, according to Josephine, and perhaps Margeret was also.¹⁰² I am presuming that her aunts had an impact on her own self-image as a woman of faith, as a mother, and certainly as a grandmother. I can identify certain aspects of my grandmother’s character as reflective of a ‘noble womanhood’. Since Josephine has been identified by several contemporary women as having been influential in their lives, I believe that she represents the aforementioned shifting from the tentacle-like nature of missionary work to a more branch-like healthy and organic native growth. Throughout her life, she exhibited a strong faith. When she, her five children, and thirteen grandchildren went through difficult times, she was the rock upon which our faith rested. She believed that all people were equal in God’s eyes. At the end of her life, she expressed a wish that her family remember to “stay close to the Lord, and in Him, all things will be possible.”¹⁰³

Stories From the Harwood Industrial Home and School

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰² I know the origin of Leva’s name because when I was pregnant with my first child, we had conversations about possible names. My grandmother knows that her mother had chosen the name Leva because of the influence a missionary named Leva had on her. I have not been able to locate a “Leva” in the missionary records, but it’s possible she was a Presbyterian missionary, not a Methodist. I suspect that Margeret was also named after Methodist missionary Margeret Tripp who ran a school in Las Cruces, and lived there around 1899, the year of aunt Margeret’s birth.

¹⁰³ Josephine G. Smith, interview with Gerald M. Smith.

In addition to basic reading and writing skills, young women like the Soto sisters were also exposed to other skills at Harwood. In some cases these overlapped with what I have categorized as Social Services and in others they intersected with mission or evangelism. Since Harwood was a boarding school, the girls' education and 'training' took place at every level of interaction. The girls lived in different wings of the building according to their ages, and were assigned a 'house mother'. Each house mother was responsible for teaching the girls in her care how to maintain and clean their personal space. She taught borders proper etiquette ranging from how to set a table to how to carry and wash plates and how to eat soup properly. Girls took classes on cooking and hygiene, but were also trained in doing any chores for which they were responsible. Those whose families could not pay the tuition were required to perform basic chores in exchange for their education.¹⁰⁴

Essentially, at the Harwood School young Mexicanas were taught how to be good mothers, and being a good mother was to express one's commitment to the values inherent in American culture.¹⁰⁵ Once refined into noble womanhood, Mexican American women would be schooled in American values, would be able to cook eggs Benedict, and would attract an equally useful husband who had been trained at a similar

¹⁰⁴ The chores and training experiences I've described come from the interviews I conducted with Harwood alumnae. Since we don't have any first person accounts from women who attended before around 1940, I am inferring that those accounts are consistent with what experiences would have been like between 1895 and 1940.

¹⁰⁵ There were girls who attended Harwood who were not Mexican-American, there were also girls from various Pueblo communities whose families had some how heard of Harwood's lenient tuition policy. In later years, after 1940, alumnae I interviewed reported there being a broad range of girls there: Anglo, Native American, African American and even women from wealthy Mexican families (A. Costales, C. Maldonado, J. Sundermann, L. Bermudez interviews with the author). More on this will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Methodist School for boys.¹⁰⁶ Ultimately the women would be able to read the Bible to their children and in conjunction with their husbands would instill the values and lesson of usefulness in their own children. Their girls would learn the same skills as their mothers and their boys would exhibit American masculinity.

With this background in mind, I turn now to the interviews I conducted with women who attended Harwood for varying lengths of time, from one semester to twelve years. Louisa Bermudez, Amy Costales, Charlotte Maldonado, and Jeanne Nieto¹⁰⁷ agreed to talk with me about their experiences and memories of Harwood School, commonly referred to as Harwood. All but Jeanne Nieto described their experiences as completely positive, beneficial, and influential in their later lives.

Louisa Chavez Bermudez was born to Celedón Chavez and Alice Pacheco Chavez in Socorro, New Mexico. Her grandfather, Juan Chavez was a Methodist Minister, and her grandmother Rumaldita Pacheco attended Harwood at the Fourteenth Street location, as did her mother. Louisa is married to Rev. Bermudez, a retired Methodist minister; they currently reside in the childhood home of Louisa just seven blocks from the current location of Harwood School on Seventh Street between Mountain and Gold. Louisa attended Harwood from fall 1952 until her graduation in May 1963. With the exception of her sixth grade year, Louisa went to Harwood from first through twelfth grade. Although Harwood was a boarding school, Louisa lived at home and walked to school every morning, returning home every night. She attended Browning

¹⁰⁶ Many of the marriages that resulted in prominent Spanish speaking clergy began within the context of the schools founded in this early period. Graduates of Effie Edington school in El Paso, Texas met their husbands at social events that included Lydia Patterson Institute male students, for example.

¹⁰⁷ Charlotte Maldonado and Jeanne Nieto are sisters and are also my paternal aunts.

Business College and received a certificate in business after two years. Louisa has no children, but sees her life's commitment to the church, supporting her husband's ministry, especially children and youth. Louisa said she has always liked to sing, directs the choir at El Buen Samaritano UMC in Albuquerque, and has held numerous leadership positions.

Amy Costales was born and raised in Placitas, New Mexico approximately thirty miles south of Albuquerque. Her mother was Presbyterian, and until she attended Harwood in 1944, so was Amy. She and her three sisters attended Harwood, and boarded there from 1944 through 1955. Amy's parents sent her brothers to Menaul School, a Presbyterian, co-educational boarding school in Albuquerque. When I asked why she and her sister were not sent to Menaul, she guessed it was because it was co-ed, and her parents didn't want them to be around boys while away from home. Amy met her husband Ernest Costales at an event sponsored by the Harwood Girls' School and its corresponding boys' school. Her sister Alice also met her husband, Abel Chavez at a similar event. Amy has held numerous positions within the church of El Buen Samaritano, including president of the local MMU, minister of music teaching, lay leader, President of the Council of Ministries, organist, choir director, teacher, and coordinator of Young Adults. She was one of sixty women featured in the 60th Anniversary Publication of the MMU.¹⁰⁸

Amy's highest level of education is two years of nursing school; she is a retired R.N. She is mother to five children, four of whom have earned Bachelor's degrees, and four of the five continue to be active in El Buen Samaritano in Albuquerque.

¹⁰⁸Mujeres Metodistas Unidas, *60th Aniversario: 60 Mujeres en Misión*.

Charlotte Nieto Maldonado boarded at Harwood only for seventh grade. Born to Rev. Simon and Natalia Nieto, sister to six girls and seven boys, Charlotte remembers her year at Harwood as a positive experience. She spent most of her adult life in Dallas, Texas with her husband Rev. David Maldonado Jr. and their two children, one of whom earned an M.D., while the other is a CPA. Charlotte's highest level of education is a Masters of Education.

Jeanne Nieto was in first grade when she first went to Harwood, and her older sisters Charlotte and Pauline attended at the same time. Jeanne only attended for one semester, because she became "too homesick". Of the four women, Jeanne had the most negative memories of her time at Harwood, and this she attributes to being so young, only seven years old, and to having been "plucked away" from her constant playmate, her younger brother. Her only vivid memory consists of having to wash the stairs by hand with a bucket and towel, "until they shined."¹⁰⁹ Jeanne would be the most likely interviewee to agree with the tentacle metaphor proposed earlier in the chapter, but only because she remembered the school as a "terrible, horrible" place to have to spend time away from family and home; it was the absence of home rather than any particularly insidious influence of the school that impressed her most. Jeanne's highest level of education is just shy of a Bachelor's degree. She has two children; one earned a law degree and the other has a BA and is a public school teacher. All of them reside in Albuquerque.

¹⁰⁹ Jeanne Nieto, interview by the author, tape recording, 20 July 2007, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Consistent themes that emerged from memories of the interviewees and include the value of education as instilled by the missionaries at Harwood. Within that was an emphasis on motherhood as an expression of patriotism, and an expression of Christian womanhood. Even though the women who came to teach at Harwood were not mothers, part of the curriculum was nevertheless teaching skills such as proper housecleaning, table etiquette, cooking, and hygiene. All four Harwood ‘girls’ reported being told, sometimes repeatedly, how to properly set a table, “which type of fork goes where and how to fold the napkins, and even what was appropriate and inappropriate meal-time conversation.”¹¹⁰ For the most part, they reported enjoying the food served at Harwood, although Amy reports being taken aback by the brains they were served one day and remembers she “just pretended they were scrambled eggs and forced them down.” All of them remember fondly learning how to make Eggs Benedict during cooking class and reported that their mothers were surprised when they came home to cook such a novel meal.

Music was another important skill that Amy and Louisa especially enjoyed. Both learned to read music, play the piano, and took voice lessons arranged by one of the teachers in return for extra help. Each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday the students had chapel services in which singing was an important feature. Louisa remembers one teacher, Miss Streaty, who took her under her wing and helped nurture her leadership skills by encouraging her to plan the music portion of the chapel services. Louisa became the chairperson of Religious Education and reported that her experience with this “was a really big help in developing myself. I was a really shy girl and to lead chapel, I had to

¹¹⁰ Amy Costales, interview by the author, tape recording, 11 July 2007, Placitas, New Mexico

get up in front of people and say a prayer. That time really helped me come out of my shell, I got to pick speakers and work with adults from the church.”¹¹¹

Evangelism and mission of course were elements of all the other aspects of Harwood. As Louisa mentioned, chapel took place three times a week in addition to Sunday church services. The students also had a Bible class along with English, math, cooking, and sewing classes. These classes were helpful, according to Charlotte, Louisa, and Amy because it gave them the opportunity to know the Bible, to learn the stories, and to understand “God’s word.” In fact, all three of them believe that their parents were happy that their girls were exposed to an education that was grounded in spirituality.

With the exception of Jeanne Nieto, the women who attended Harwood speak of it fondly. They tell of having no hard feelings toward the teachers; in fact, Amy and Louisa continue to keep in touch with Marion Crissy, who, at the time of the interviews in 2007 was 99 years old and still living in Albuquerque. They remember how “easy-going” and fun she was, how caring and kind a teacher she was, one who took time to get to know each of the students.

When asked what it was like to be away from home, however, both Amy and Louisa qualified their claims of fond memories with stories of resisting their parents’ choice for them to go to Harwood. Amy said, “Oh, it was awful. I remember we would cry and cry because we had never been away from home. It was such a totally different environment. My father would take us and we would hang on to him.” She paused, and said, “I guess eventually we got used to it. And got to making friends.”¹¹² Louisa didn’t

¹¹¹ Louisa Chavez Bermudez, interview by the author, tape recording, July 2007, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

¹¹² Amy Costales, interview by the author, tape recording, 20 July 2007, Placitas, New Mexico.

board at Harwood, but at the end of our conversation, after I asked if she had anything she wanted to add, she said, “I guess, you know, now that I’m thinking back, my mom would walk me to school and at recess at lunch, I would just leave. I guess I didn’t like school all day.” She recalls her parents taking down the recently purchased swing set until she decided to stay at school all day, “so, I guess I got over that real fast, after the first couple of weeks of that.”

Amy and Louisa report that any hard time they had being away from home was quickly remedied by the sense of family they felt they had at the school, both among other students as well as among the teachers. Charlotte reported that the environment at Harwood was “really a great multi-cultural experience, or what we would call diversity in action.” She attended Harwood for one year and loved that it was an all girls’ school. She said the education she received there surpassed that at Old Armijo Elementary in Albuquerque’s south valley: “We got individual attention, we were valued as individuals, and we never got teased for being Protestant like we did at Old Armijo.”¹¹³ All three women believe that their experience at Harwood fostered in them a deep respect for the value of education, which is evidenced in their choices as adults. As mentioned in Amy and Charlotte’s biographical sketches, they supported their children’s desires to go to college. Of the three, Charlotte had the most formal education, having earned a Masters in Education. She served as a public school teacher for thirty-five years in Arlington, Texas, building on the foundation of valuing education that had been instilled in her at Harwood.

¹¹³ Charlotte Nieto Maldonado, interview with the author. Charlotte’s hinting at anti-Protestant sentiments on the part of classmates was not the only point during my research that anti-Protestant attitudes were reported.

Houchen Settlement House-Community Center

The Houchen Settlement House was built in El Paso, Texas in 1912 and named for Rose Gregory Houchen. Soon after the settlement house was built, Freeman Clinic was housed in an adobe tenement in 1921 to meet the needs of the sick, of pregnant women, and to provide maternity and post-partum services to the community of El Segundo Barrio in South El Paso. Houchen was established by the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church-South in order to fill a need at the border. Established in the midst of the Mexican Revolution during which at least one million Mexicans were displaced and another million migrated north to the U.S., the location in El Segundo was ideal as a place in which missionary women could meet the needs of Mexican and Mexican American women who were identified as the most vulnerable of the population. It was part of the larger trend of establishing settlement houses throughout the U.S.; as such, Houchen "became one of many projects nationwide seeking to build institutions of social assistance and improvement within the impoverished immigrant neighborhoods of America's cities."¹¹⁴

Houchen has remained an important part of the history of south El Paso, and has also played a critical role in the lives of many Mexican and Mexican American women. Houchen, Newark, and Freeman Clinic were labeled "friendship square" in 1950 although the four blocks on which those places sat is commonly referred to as Houchen. El Buen Pastor Methodist Church was also located there but later merged with El Mesias

¹¹⁴ Carr, "Missionaries and Motherhood," 118.

MC. The original church was knocked down and Emmanuel UMC replaced them in 1968.

Houchen and Newark Maternity Hospital were both part of Phase One (1869-1933) of women's missionary work, but both had an impact well beyond those years. Houchen still exists today and serves as both a community center and a Child Development Center, though initially Houchen and Newark provided basic services to neighborhood residents, including health care for women and children, childcare services, hygiene classes, English language classes, and other programs such as athletic activities for youth.

Chicana historian Vicki Ruiz situates Houchen within the context of Americanization programs sponsored by various Protestant denominations throughout the southwest. In an article "Dead Ends or Gold Mines? Using Missionary Records in Mexican American Women's History," Ruiz claims that she is "intrigued (actually, obsessed is a better verb) with questions involving decision-making" of Mexican American women "with regard to acculturation."¹¹⁵ Ruiz argues that although it is difficult to arrive at an accurate description of Mexican women's experiences and attitudes by examining missionary records, she can conclude that "when standing at the cultural crossroads, Mexcian women blended their options and created their own paths" - something she names "cultural coalescence."¹¹⁶ After examining the missionary records housed at Houchen in search of evidence of Mexican women's agency, Ruiz concludes

¹¹⁵ Vicki L. Ruiz, "Dead Ends or Gold Mines? Using Missionary Records in Mexican American Women's History," in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellan Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 1994), 298.

¹¹⁶ Ruiz, 312.

that although some women in the neighborhood took advantage of the services offered-- such as child care, English language classes, and health care-- Houchen was unable to “mold [the] consciousness or identity” of Mexican women, specifically noting that “they refused to embrace the romantic idealizations of American life.”¹¹⁷ No wonder, for she herself critiques the discourse found at Houchen as being couched in paternalistic and racist terms to which Mexican women were too astute and “resilient” to succumb.

Ruiz’ work is an example of the pitfalls of unexamined assumptions scholars are liable to make, even about their “own community”. It comes from a generation of scholarship that claims to challenge and name power imbalances along racial lines, yet is just as guilty of essentializing Mexican and Mexican American identity as being naturally Catholic. Ruiz dismisses the importance of Mexican Protestantism generally, and specifically Mexican Methodist faith communities, explaining the few successful conversions by Methodist missionaries by saying that “those that did respond... were already pre-disposed to it.” Why were they pre-disposed to it? Ruiz doesn’t entertain the possibility that those who converted to Methodism were also enacting cultural coalescence. Luis D. León applies Ruiz’s “cultural coalescence” model to the experiences of Latino/a Pentecostals as well.¹¹⁸

Just as the women who used the social services but did not join the Methodist Church were enacting cultural coalescence, so too were the Mexican women who did choose Methodism as their religious expression. Ruiz considers the rare records of

¹¹⁷ Ruiz, 308.

¹¹⁸ Luis D. León, “Born Again in East LA: The Congregation as Border Space,” in *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*, ed. R. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 76-109.

Mexican women who converted to Methodism as being anomalies. Soledad Burciaga is quoted as saying, “There is not a person, no matter to which denomination they belong, who hasn’t a kind word and a heart full of gratitude towards the Settlement House.”¹¹⁹ Another example of how Mexicanas got “duped” into Protestantism appears during an interview that Ruiz’ assistant conducted with Estella Ibarra. Mrs. Ibarra reported getting teased and discriminated against by neighborhood children because her family was Methodist, not Catholic. Ruiz uses this interview as evidence of how the “Mexican community thwarted conversion.”¹²⁰ Ruiz seems unaware that Estella Ibarra was the daughter of Soledad Burciaga, quoted earlier in the article. Estella no doubt experienced discrimination for being Protestant, but her story could not have been told to support the argument that discrimination discouraged Mexicans from converting. Ruiz further argued that “long-term sustained efforts” at proselytizing “had limited appeal” to the Mexican community in South El Paso. It is unfortunate that Ruiz does not acknowledge that Soledad Burciaga, her daughter Estella Ibarra, and her daughter-in-law Lucy Burciaga were engaging in cultural coalescence as well.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ruiz 306, quotation from Board of Home Missions Pamphlet, 1939.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 307.

¹²¹ Vicki Ruiz’ work is an example of the pitfalls of unexamined assumptions scholars are liable to make, even about their “own community.” In this case it comes from a generation of scholarship that proclaims to challenge and name imbalances in power along lines of race, yet is just as guilty of essentializing Mexican and Mexican American identity as naturally Catholic. Dismisses the importance of Mexican protestant, specifically Mexican Methodist faith communities by explaining the few successful conversions on the part of the Methodist missionaries with “those that did respond...were already pre-disposed to it.” Why were they pre-disposed to it? Ruiz doesn’t entertain the possibility that those who went with Methodism were also enacting cultural coalescence. Like the Catholic Mexicanas who only took services like health care, pre-natal stuff and child care, because they were just gonna take what they could from the system.....So did Methodist women...but Ruiz does not want to acknowledge that that was agency too. Her own biases against Mexicans converting to the quintessentially white religion of Methodism got in the way of unacknowledged bias.

Lucy Burciaga is currently a member of Emmanuel United Methodist Church in El Paso. She was born Juanita Prieto, in Mexico and was raised Catholic until she became a student at Bowie High School in El Segundo in El Paso. She met Alfonso “Al” Burciaga, captain of the football team, and began attending youth events at Houchen and El Buen Pastor with Al and his sister Estella. Lucy recalled the moment she felt called to the Lord when a missionary at Houchen said to her, “Lucy, don’t you know that Jesus loves you?”¹²² She continued, “When this missionary told me, it was a different feeling. All I heard growing up was ‘Dios te va a castigar’ (God is going to punish you). And I always thought, why would Jesus punish me? So when I heard her say, ‘Lucy, don’t you know that Jesus loves you?’ I was just filled with joy.”¹²³

Shortly after meeting Al, Lucy married him and for their honeymoon they went to the Western District Family Camp at Sacramento Methodist Assembly. She went to the altar call during her honeymoon and remembers vividly the hymn, “Jesús es mi Rey Soberano.”¹²⁴ Lucy said, “I remember the words just touched me so, that I received Christ in my heart and I [have] come up here every year since.”¹²⁵ Among the women I interviewed, Lucy is one of the exceptions to the rule, not having been born into

¹²² Lucy Burciaga, interview by the author.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ The hymn is often referenced as the first hymn to be composed and written in Spanish, by a Mexican American. See Barton, chapter five, and Daniel Ramirez’s “Alabaré a mi Señor: Hymnody as Ideology in Latino Protestantism,” in *Singing the Lord’s Song in a Strange Land: Hymnody in the History of North American Protestantism*, ed. Edith L. Blumhofer and Mark A. Noll (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 196-218.

¹²⁵ Our interview took place at the same family camp in 2007. Every year, when the organizers of the camp present their slide show, Lucy and Al get teased by the whole crowd for being so dedicated to God and to the church that they spent their honeymoon there.

Methodism. Lucy converted as a young adult, and as a result articulates her decision in terms of how much better than Catholicism Methodism seemed to her as a religious choice. She was not allowed to read the Bible in her Catholic community, and, as mentioned above, she felt that she was always being told that God would punish her for “every little thing” including daring to read the Bible. She was attracted to the programs that Houchen offered, especially the attention the missionaries paid to athletics and to young women. Shortly after she was married, she joined the Wesleyan Servant Club for women, was the secretary of the local Women’s Christian Society, and went to her first Annual Conference meeting at La Trinidad UMC in San Antonio. The following is an excerpt from a biographical note Lucy wrote:

Lucy is a member of Emmanuel United Methodist Church, El Paso, Texas, where she is at present Church Lay Leader, has served as Church Treasurer, PPRC (Pastor-Parish Relations Committee) and other offices. She has continually held a UMW office in the Local Unit for the past 56 years. Eight years as District UMW vice-President and President. Seven years as Conference UMW Officer and at present elected Vice President to finish her eight year Conference tenure.

In her UMW journey, she represented the Rio Grand Conference UMW by serving as the West Golf Regional School of Missions Registrar. Four years-South Central Jurisdiction Core Planning Group Treasurer and first Hispanic President. Her second four years as Women’s Division Director, she was unanimously elected the first Hispanic women’s Division Officer to serve as Vice-President of the Section of Membership and Organizational Development.¹²⁶

Lucy also serves on the Board of Directors at Houchen Community Center, was President of Church Women United, and teaches water aerobics at her YMCA to senior citizens.

Reyna Susana Alfaro Dominguez and I had a conversation at Emmanuel UMC in south El Paso on a hot July evening. The annual Vacation Bible School (VBS) was taking place at the time, and Mrs. Dominguez agreed to talk with me as long as we could

¹²⁶ “Lucy P. Burciaga.” Biography provided by Lucy to the author.

do it at the church, so it would be more convenient for her. Our conversation took place in the fellowship hall during the ‘free time’ session of the VBS. She started our conversation by telling me how much she loved Houchen, the missionaries, and all the things she had learned to do there. She gave birth to most of her six children at Newark Maternity Hospital, attended El Buen Pastor UMC, and all of her children attended Houchen community center for day care, Bible classes, cooking, sewing, and health classes.

Mrs. Dominguez remembered Millie Rickford, the director of Newark Maternity Hospital, as someone who taught her a great deal: “I learned so much from her about how to be good, how to be a Christian.” She described her interactions with Houchen staff, nurses, and missionaries as nothing but positive and helpful to her, “para mí, las enfermeras, la que mandaba, la Rickford, todas eran magnificas (for me, the nurses, the one who was in charge, Rickford, all of them were magnificent).”¹²⁷ She emphasized how much she learned from her time spent at Houchen, how valuable were the lessons of how to care for babies and how to eat a good diet. But what is also important to her is how she has translated her faith and her understanding of how to be a good Christian. Mrs. Dominguez said one lesson she taught her own daughters was that they could choose whatever church they wanted to choose. She and her husband raised them in El Buen Pastor (which merged with El Mesias and formed Emmanuel UMC in 1968) but she told her daughters that if they found a church they preferred, they had her permission to move. Having told me that, she quickly pointed to the three daughters Irene, Caroline, and Susana in other parts of the fellowship hall as if to say, “see, they are all here now.”

¹²⁷ Reyna Susana Alfaro Dominguez, interview with author, tape recording in English and Spanish, all translations are my own. El Paso, Texas, 1 July , 2008.

Mrs. Dominguez recalled telling her daughters that they should always keep in mind that there will be a lot of things that they will have to endure, and if they go “one week here, another week there, nobody will know who they are, and if they stay at our church, they will have all the beautiful families who know them.”¹²⁸

Mrs. Dominguez has held various leadership positions within both the MMU at the local, district and conference levels, and in the wider denomination. She and her family are important members of the Emmanuel UMC congregation. She pointed to three generations of her family in the fellowship hall who have stayed connected with their church and bring their own children there as well. Interestingly, Mrs. Dominguez’ granddaughter, Joy Leos, just earned her Bachelor of Science in Public Health. In a sense, Joy’s professional choice of public health is a testament to the lasting impact of her family’s long relationship with Houchen and Newark.¹²⁹

Mrs. Dominguez’s daughters Susana and Caroline also shared with me stories of their experiences at Houchen. Besides both being born at Newark in 1947, Susana recalled, “My experiences at Houchen were so wonderful. We really got the best of both worlds; it was always a fresh, positive, wonderful environment. We were always singing, the missionaries were always with a smile.”¹³⁰ When asked what she meant by “best of

¹²⁸ Reyna Dominguez.

¹²⁹ Joy Leos is a friend of mine who I’ve known since childhood. We know each other from the annual family church camp we attended as youth, and now as adults. Joy was instrumental in setting up the opportunity for me to chat with her grandmother, mother, and aunts. Although I know her relatives on my own, I have no doubt that her grandmother was more comfortable sharing with me due to Joy’s recommendation. Joy also shared with me that she doesn’t see a separation between her choice and her faith. She believes that her vocational goals which include working with AIDS patients are informed by her and her family’s history in women’s work through the MMU and the church as a whole.

¹³⁰ Susana Dominguez, interview by the author, 24 June 2008, Emmanuel UMC, El Paso.

both worlds” Susana responded that all the teachers were white, “and thank God for that. I mean, just because they were so different from home. They just really made you feel like you were special. Because our dad, you know, girls didn’t have a place really. So the missionaries helped me to know that I was very special.” Susana was very open and willing to talk to me, but she was the director of the Vacation Bible School and since we were talking during the sessions, she had to cut our conversation short. She wanted to make sure I knew that without the support of the Houchen missionaries, without the “spiritual growth, I don’t think I would have made it. All the teachers were so white.” Before I could follow up on that comment, she continued “They were role models, they were nice, kind, beautiful people and their values were being good, they sang songs all the time. I really am blessed to have known them and have been exposed to their kindness.”¹³¹

From Tentacles to Branches

This chapter has summarized the goals, motivations, and strategies foundational to the early missionary institutions that targeted Mexican and Mexican American women. These institutions provided little room for Mexicana agency and autonomy. In order to have access to the institutions and the learning they provided, to a certain extent the mujeres had to show some kind of loyalty to the imported ideas and values. The benefits they expected to reap must have outweighed the uncomfortable, awkward, unequal interactions with the white missionary women. But ultimately the women of that first generation were willing to make such concessions to ensure that their daughters would have access to opportunities otherwise unavailable to them.

¹³¹ Ibid.

The missionary work in this early era was characterized by programs of education, social services, health care, and mission that trained Mexican women to be American mothers. Annie Norton was right when she said Harwood was an institution of “remarkable power”; the next chapter highlights the stories of the MMU and the ways in which the MMU transformed the foreign tentacles of the missionary programs into sturdy, life-giving native branches.

But the MMU took that emphasis on education seriously and didn’t stick to the plan for Mexican women just being housewives, domestics, and preachers’ wives. They joined in the women’s movement’s demand for equal access to higher, post-bachelor, and terminal degrees, drawing on the structure of The UMC to benefit themselves as well as the church

Chapter 4

Emancipatory Migrations-*Peregrinas en la jornada*

*Peregrinas en la jornada: Manos a la obra con santa devoción.
Nuestros dones se necesitan; somos hoy el cuerpo de Cristo en acción*
(Pilgrims on the journey: hands doing the work with holy devotion.
Our gifts are needed; today we are the body of Christ in action)¹³²

Chapter three focused on the role of mission in the lives of Mexican and Mexican American women between 1869 and 1933. During that period, the term “mission” referred to the work Anglo Methodist women did with Mexican and Mexican American women. Las mujeres who lived during that time period were the first ones to come into contact with white missionaries. Women such as Marianita García, Soledad Burciaga, Francisca Soto, María Venegas, the mother of Minerva N. Garza and Alfredo Nández, and many, many others took the *primera travesía* from Catholic to Methodist between 1869 and 1933. We saw in the previous chapter that the first generation’s interactions with Anglo missionaries are only known to us via the second generation’s memories. Very few written accounts from the perspective of the uplifted “black-eyed Mexican girls” are available to us today.

This chapter features the stories of Mujeres Metodistas of the Rio Grande Conference through their own eyes, and with their own words and memories. The chorus of the song *Peregrinas en Misión*, emphasizes that las mujeres see themselves as pilgrims

¹³² Chorus to the song “Peregrinas en Misión” written and composed by Dr. Raquel Mora Martinez, for the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the MMU. Printed in Program from Annual Meeting of las Mujeres Metodistas Unidas, 42.

on a journey through mission. The song *Peregrinas en Misión* reflects the shift beginning in 1933 in which the uplifted became the uplifters. By naming themselves as *peregrinas*, the women reflect their belief that they are not on a unilinear path to salvation, but are on a journey that began with those women who came before them, is set forth with their present journey, and will continue on to women who will come after them. Thanks to the foresight of women such as Minerva Garza, Carmen Lujan, and others, the women of the MMU began to consciously chronicle their history as an organization, which meant that the following generations would have access to the *herstory* of las mujeres. I am weaving together the stories that have been told about the first generation with what the second generation inherited along with how that heritage is honored now and continues to impact religious choices. The narratives point to the religious poetics with which the Peregrinas have engaged in their homes, communities and congregations.

Las peregrinas' journeys had begun during the first travesías of the previous generation, but it was not until 1933 that Mexican American women exerted independence and some degree of autonomy in relation to the national Women's Division of The UMC. They adapted structures to which they were exposed during the first phase of missionary work, including the organizational model from the Women's Missionary Society to which white missionary women belonged. Along with that, they maintained an emphasis on education, a concern for health care access and public health issues for women and families, and finally, a deep understanding of the role of mission.

The emphasis on mission evident at every level of the work that MMU has supported and promoted is symbolized by the title of the theme song, *Peregrinas en Misión*, and particularly by the lyrics "peregrinas en la jornada" (pilgrims on the

journey). Mission has become so important to the MMU at the conference, district, and local levels that a majority of the fundraising efforts throughout the year go toward supporting the School of Missions usually held at Kerrville Conference center in Kerrville, Texas. The Rio Grande MMU School of Mission, however, was not founded until 1958, with Minerva N. Garza as the first director.

The contemporary Mujeres Metodistas Unidas has a long and complicated history mentioned briefly in the previous chapter. On November 2-3, 1933, the *Sociedad Misionera Femenil Conferencial –SMF* (Women’s Missionary Society) of the Rio Grande Annual Conference was born at La Trinidad Methodist Church. Carmen J. Lujan was elected president. Yet besides her it is Minerva Nañez Garza, director of the School of Mission, who remains one of the most important and most well-known women active in women’s work. In “The Influence of Methodism on Hispanic Women Through Women’s Societies” she describes her first encounter with Methodist Missionaries: “Who were there to greet the missionaries as they began their ministry among the Mexican people? Women! They were taking care of the household duties while men were out working.”¹³³ Garza continued

It happened in my mother’s home. One day a Methodist minister visited us. My Mother welcomed him. During their conversation the pastor asked, pointing to a picture on the wall, ‘Who is he?’ My mother very proudly answered, ‘He is my son who is studying to be a doctor.’ Before leaving the minister said, ‘May I have a word of prayer that your son become a Christian doctor?’ My brother Alfredo Nañez did not become a doctor, instead he became a minister of the Gospel.

When the missionaries knocked at the Hispanic doors, women were there to receive them. They were used by God to bring the whole family to Christ.

¹³³ Garza, 79.

‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household.’¹³⁴

Minerva Garza’s account emphasizes the valuable role of women-- in this case of her own mother-- in beginning and maintaining Methodism among Hispanic communities. Her story also nuances the story of her brother changing careers from medical school to the ministry, which Paul Barton tells somewhat differently:

Born in Monclova, Mexico, in 1902, Náñez entered a private school in Saltillo in 1918 to prepare for medical school. There he learned French and prepared to enter the national school of medicine in Mexico City. Social turmoil resulting from the Mexican Revolution prevented him from realizing this goal. After graduating from preparatory school in Saltillo, Náñez moved to the Texas-Mexico Border to find work. In Eagle Pass, he converted to Protestantism while listening to Rev. Frank Onderdonk preach at a revival service in 1923.

Garza’s brother was one of the first Mexicans to earn a Bachelor of Ministry at SMU’s Perkins School of Theology in 1932. Minerva N. Garza obviously has enormous respect for her brother, and obviously both were completely committed to the development of the Methodist ministry among Mexican communities, in part no doubt thanks to their mother’s support and prayer. The two stories are not mutually exclusive: we know that Rev. Onderdonk was working in the region at that time, and there is no reason to dispute that Alfredo Náñez converted upon hearing Onderdonk preach. However, the emphasis on Alfredo’s individual experience of conversion that is emphasized in Barton’s work points to some differences in the ways that myth gets constructed as history. Minerva Garza reminds us,

Church history has been essentially men’s history, yet women have been the life of the church and the majority of the membership. Their motto goes as follows: ‘Each Area a Mission Field, Each Church a Mission, and Each Christian a Missionary.’ No wonder the work of the Kingdom advanced so rapidly.”¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Ibid., 80-81.

¹³⁵ Ibid.,80.

Minerva N. Garza is conscious of the power dynamics at play in the politics of history and has taken great pains to fill in with the stories of women's contributions the gaps left by male-centered histories. Stories such as Garza's and those highlighted throughout this chapter point not only to the contributions of women throughout the Conference's past, but also serve as an example of the communal and genealogical nature of borderlands religiosity, history, and identity. Certainly "the Kingdom" to which she refers is not limited to ministry among women, but includes all of the community.

Garza is careful to document the challenges, goals, strategies, and successes of individual mujeres and those of the collective. In fact, these women's stories emphasize a religiosity that takes place as a *process*, and in community. The initial conversions-travesías of the foremothers are important, but the individual experiences of conversion are not typically at the center of the stories. What make these stories is the detail and context. I discovered this when I realized the women I interviewed gave me no simple answers to my questions of how long they had been involved with the MMU, how they had initially become interested in it, and what was the most valuable part of the MMU for them. Instead, their responses typically began with a story of an ancestor such as: "Well, what you have to understand is that my mother..." or "My grandmother was approached by missionaries" or "I've always been a Methodist...".

Although Garza emerges as the main historian for the Women's Society/MMU, she is ever diligent in regards to giving credit to women who did the work. She consistently names individual women who attended important meetings and

conferences.¹³⁶ For example Garza identified “the lack of Spanish resources” as a “severe problem” in the “progress” of promoting “...the goals and program of the organization, and methods to keep the members informed.”¹³⁷ In 1944 the Women’s Division of Christian Service (the national body of The UMC) granted the formal request to translate materials. Garza reports that “Mrs. Elida G. Falcon was named translator of the program books and her daughter, Clotilde F. Nández, became her assistant.” Beginning in 1970, however, there were concerns that merely translating program material from English to Spanish was not sufficient. At a meeting of WSCS from the U.S. and Puerto Rico, members of the Women’s Division, Educational and Cultivation Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, established guidelines and the work to create a new “Spanish program book” began.

The organization has a long history within the Texas Mexican Conference, which merged with the Western Mexican Conference to form the Southwestern Mexican Conference in 1939. In 1940 at the same church in San Antonio, La Sociedad Misionera Femenil changed its name to La Sociedad Femenil de Servicio Cristiano (Women’s Society of Christian Service).¹³⁸ The name of the organization remained La Sociedad Femenil de Servicio Cristiano from 1940 until 1973 when it merged with La Fraternidad Wesleyana de Servicio “*para dar luz a la nueva estructura y cuerpo que ahora se conoce*

¹³⁶ Garza’s article is divided into five sections; at the end of each section, she lists the names of women and their accomplishments within the MMU during that particular time period. Many of the women she names in her article appear in several different sources, particularly the yearbooks and annual MMU meeting materials. It is no coincidence, as Garza served on the planning committees for most of the meetings up to and including the 75th Anniversary meeting in October 2008.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 85-86.

¹³⁸ Minerva N. Garza, President of Anniversary Committee, *Peregrinando en la Misión- Journeying Through Mission: Celebrando 75 Años en Misión*. Pamphlet included in meeting registration packet, Feb. 3, 2008. See also Garza’s article in *Methodist History*.

como Mujeres Metodistas Unidas” (to give birth to the new structure and body which is known as United Methodist Women).¹³⁹ Several people still refer to the MMU as either La Sociedad Femenil de Servicio Cristiano or the Women’s Society of Christian Service, though this depends on the context in which the subject is raised and of course the age of those I am visiting. Typically those who are older than 60 use the name La Sociedad Femenil interchangeably with *Mujeres Metodistas Unidas*.

If phase one of the missionary work took place between 1869 and 1933, phase two began with the 1933 meeting at La Trinidad UMC, San Antonio. Minerva N. Garza is one of many women from the second phase of MMU (1933-1959) who came of age during the second phase. This phase also corresponds to *travesía tres*, women’s crossing from being object to subject. These women represent the first generation of Mexican and Mexican American women who had relative autonomy over the organizational structure of what became the *Mujeres Metodistas Unidas*. These were the women who had been raised in the Methodist church. It was their mothers and grandmothers who after 1848 had the first contact with Anglo missionaries. Their mothers and grandmothers were the “black-eyed Mexican girls” to whom Annie Norton of the Harwood Industrial Home and School referred.

Carmen J. Lujan¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴⁰ Mrs. Lujan passed away in 1979, so the information gathered here comes from an interview with her son, Erasmo Lujan and various MMU produced histories that featured biographies of members who served in various capacities. Also, one of the main reasons I chose to interview Erasmo about his mother was because after each of my interviews I asked women who had been important to their development in faith, and four out of the five women I spoke to identified Mrs. Lujan. All of them said, “You should talk to Erasmo, he knows more about the women than most of us women do.” So, I took the suggestions seriously.

Mrs. Lujan was born in Zacatecas, Mexico, to José and Ester Juárez. Ester brought Carmen and her sister Luisa, to west Texas after José was killed in a freak shooting accident “walking across a bar.”¹⁴¹ They eventually moved to El Paso, Ester remarried and had other children, and the whole family became active in El Mesias Methodist Church. After spending some time in Los Angeles with her mother and sister working at Ramirez Funeral home, Carmen moved to Mexico and taught at a primary school. Erasmo wasn't sure of the dates for these events, but they must have all been before 1933. She attended Effie Edington school for girls in El Paso, Texas.¹⁴² In 1933, She married Reverend José Eduardo Lujan who attended Lydia Patterson Institute in El Paso. The two met at a social event that was sponsored by the two institutions hosted by El Mesias Methodist Church. Like so many other stories of courtship among these women, the relationship began within the structure of the church and its various institutions.

When I asked how did her faith help her through trying times? Erasmo Lujan joked: “Well, every church we went to, every congregation was trying times.” We laughed. He continued and emphasized that she went through several trying times in her life. To explain, Erasmo recalled a time in her life:

One time she was crossing the border from Magdalena, Mexico and the border patrol made a comment to her, ‘What pretty eyes you have’ and she said ‘You are supposed to be taking care of business here, not noticing what color my

¹⁴¹ Erasmo Lujan, interview by author, 13 July 2008, Las Cruces, New Mexico, tape recording.

¹⁴² It is unclear whether Effie Edington was a high school, or college, or Industrial School similar to the Harwood School. More research on Effie Edington School is necessary. It was mentioned by two of my interviewees, Alma Barba of Las Cruces, New Mexico, and Erasmo Lujan, Carmen Lujan's son. Barton's *Hispanic Methodist Presbyterians and Baptists* mentions it only once and relied on an M.A. thesis on Methodist educational work written in 1934. I have found no mention of it in Jean Miller Schmidt's work either.

eyes are. So they held her there, [and] the missionaries had to come bail her out. They wouldn't let her come across.

But trying times in the church? I would say one of the most difficult times would be in Del Rio, Texas. My dad wanted to repair the ceiling of the church, it was leaking all over the pews whenever it rained. In that part [of Texas], in those days, there was quite a bit of segregation. You know, it was Del Rio, Texas. We had the black side of town, the Mexican side of town, and the white side of town. So, we had our church. Well, in that congregation, there were quite a few middle-class Mexican Americans, Hispanics, whatever you want to call them. They were doctors and lawyers and they had a lot of money to help contribute to the church. It was a well-to do church. But they didn't want to help pay for the roof. So, my dad got some humble people to help him and they almost killed themselves. It was an expense, I guess, for the church. So when the conference came along, you know when they do roll call, when they do all the benevolences and all that? They didn't pay them, they held their money back, their offering. And [the conference was] prepared to send a lawyer to the church and say my father shouldn't be a minister because he hadn't raised the money to pay the church.

Erasmó continued:

Well, that summer before the Conference, my younger brother was playing in the backyard. Enrique must have been about one and a half, two years old. [...] [F]ather always kept a beautiful yard. A really nice yard. Trees, grass, flowers. And Enrique fell over and hit [...] [him] self on the bricks and was killed instantly. When they went to Conference, with the insurance, my father paid all the bills to the church. Father had paid everything in full. So when they had the roll call, everything was paid in full, and they called the church Del Rio, and those people didn't even know, and they were gonna send someone there and have father removed as a minister. So, it must have been a pretty trying time.¹⁴³

Enrique and Erasmó's mother, Señora Lujan, held many leadership positions within the structure of the MMU. She was the first president of the Conference Women's Missionary Society in 1933; Secretary of Promotion, Literature and Children's work; Student Work; Program Resources and Personal Christian Valor. She taught at the first Conference School of Missions and served as the Dean during the second year. At the district level she served as president of the SMF in both the southern and western districts of the Conference, and organized the first Spiritual Retreat for the western district. Since

¹⁴³ Erasmó Lujan, interview by the author.

she was married to Rev. Lujan, they traveled and worked in various towns and congregations. However some of her solo accomplishments include working with a Cub Scout troop, founding the Kindergarten of San Pablo in El Paso, Texas as well as co-founding with Josephine G. Smith (Santa #2) Christian Day Nursery in Las Cruces, New Mexico. She was also honored by the National Cub Scout Organization, National United Methodist Men, National Congress of Fathers and Mothers, and given a Silver Medal by Alpha Iola Asociación Internacional.¹⁴⁴

Carmen Lujan was committed to working with the MMU, and her most sacred work, according to her son, Erasmo, was teaching women the Bible at the School of Missions. Carmen taught at different mission schools in Arkansas and Kerrville, Texas, and toward the end of our conversation, Erasmo remembered that one of her favorite subjects was women in the Bible. Erasmo shared his memory of her desire to teach about women in the Bible at the Schools of Missions

Because of the power that they (women) had. And she got a lot from that. And not necessarily being independent from their husbands, but what they could accomplish being women. You know in the Bible, they were judges and generals. And that's what she taught. You know, that women could become what they wanted to become just by examples from the women in the Bible. She wanted to teach the women that they could achieve whatever they wanted to achieve because by being women, they shouldn't be held back of their talents, of their positions. She was very much for that.

I pressed Erasmo a little by asking him how he thought she passed those values of women's contributions and talents on to him and his brothers and sister. Erasmo replied,

She always accomplished whatever she wanted to. Basically she thought she could have been a better preacher than my dad. She thought she should have been a preacher, or a missionary. I mean her family was important, but the church was even more so.

¹⁴⁴ From 60 Aniversario: 60 Mujeres en Misión: Ellas Salieron Sin Saber a Donde Iban 1933-1993, Mujeres Metodistas Unidas Conferencia Rio Grande Iglesia Metodista Unida, 23.

Erasmus explained that one of his siblings resented their parents always traveling for the church. Specifically, one of his sisters was unhappy with all the time Carmen spent taking care of the Women's Society, and leaving the kids to "fend for themselves". He continued,

But it was her work, her livelihood, her calling. She believed in God. She believed the women were very important in the church. And she would get upset that women would be involved in political parties and not be involved in the church, in the women's societies. She pushed for that. That they should be involved in the church as they are in political parties. She was pretty cool.

Her legacy continues to be honored. Norma Vera's keynote address at the 75th Anniversary meeting in San Antonio began by acknowledging the hermanas that had come before her, who had struggled before her, "Siempre me acuerdo de la hermana que...siempre andaba muy bien vestida que fue la primera. Quien me dice su nombre? (I always remember the sister who always dressed very well. She was the first. Who can tell me her name?)" Several voices from the audience responded with "La Hermana Lujan! (the sister Lujan)" and Vera affirmed "Sí, la hermana Lujan. Que esa hermana te inspiraba. Por que tenia una, una chispa. Una chispa que inspiraba uno a seguir adelante. Y pensaba, qué hermana tan poderoso. Que ayudó a tantas mujeres"¹⁴⁵

Lujan is also featured in all of the anniversary publications of the MMU as one of the "60 Mujeres en Mision: Ellas Salieron Sin Saber A Donde Iban" ("60 Women in Mission: They left without knowing where they were going").¹⁴⁶ I knew Mrs. Lujan as a

¹⁴⁵ Norma Vera, "Keynote speech" (speech given at 75th Anniversary Celebration of the MMU, San Antonio, Texas, 12 October, 2008).

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. "They left without knowing where they were going" was originally part of the Centennial celebration of the United Methodist Women (generally). To commemorate that, a book entitled *They Went Out Not Knowing-100 Women in Mission* was published. Out of 100, there were five Hispanic women

child. During my youth, she and Rev. Lujan had retired in Las Cruces, where I spent every summer with my grandparents. Two of the highlights of my summers included attending the Western District Family Camp of the Rio Grande Annual Conference, and attending Vacation Bible School at my grandparents' church, El Calvario UMC. I spent every birthday with Mrs. Lujan's granddaughters, Carmen and Christina (Erasmus's daughters) and remember Mrs. Lujan as a very small, kind, and loving woman, someone who was graceful, faithful and strong.¹⁴⁷

Rosa Munguia

We met Rosa Munguia at the beginning of this dissertation. Her grandmother was the one in her family who made the initial *travesía* from Catholic to Protestant. Her mother, Anita, made the second crossing, from Mexico to the United States. Twice in three days I met Mrs. Munguia for conversation in Austin, Texas, once at the home of her granddaughter, Cristela, and next at her home, where she lives alone. When we first began to talk at the first meeting, she spoke in Spanish exclusively. Although I am comfortable with my Spanish language skills, I asked her (in Spanish) if I could ask her the questions in English, and she could answer them in Spanish. Expecting a usual compliance for Mexican women of that generation (she was born in 1922), I assumed she would agree. Instead she said, “pues no, porque somos Mexicanas. Somos Mexicanas.”¹⁴⁸ I knew from this response that this would be an interesting interview.

featured: Elida G. Galcon, Luisa Garcia Acosta González, Clotilde. F. Nández, Gladys Fuentes, and Minerva N. Garza.

¹⁴⁷ Lucy Burciaga; Idalia Edwards, interview by author, tape recording, 22 June 2008, Las Cruces, NM; Amy Costales, Alma Barba, interview by the author, tape recording, 23 June 2008, Las Cruces, NM.

¹⁴⁸ Rosa Munguia, interview by the author, tape recording, 14 October 2008, Austin, Texas.

Mrs. Munguia and I spent almost five hours together over two days. For the second meeting, she told me she only had a half-hour to talk to me, but in the end she gave me much longer, two and a half hours. I am convinced that she needs to be the subject of a biography. Given the vast amount of information and knowledge and memories she shared with me, I will not be able to do justice to her stories in this project. Throughout our time together, she was showing me and reading to me about her life stories that she's been writing since she was a young woman. Her husband used to work on the railroads for days at a time, so she would write to pass the time. Then when he was home, he just liked to watch TV and she didn't like TV, so she would write in her *librocitos* (little books).

A major theme that arose from Rosa Munguia's stories is the very fundamental role the Bible plays in the lives of her and her family. Rosa has only a fifth-grade education, yet she has stacks and stacks of journals-- what she calls *librocitos*-- which chronicle her life. When asked how she became such a prolific writer with only a fifth-grade education, she responded, "Pues por Dios! (Well, because of God)." Four out of five of her children have master's degrees (the four daughters, that is; her son went to community college, and now has a successful small business). Most of her grandchildren have at least bachelors degrees and one granddaughter has a doctorate in sociology.¹⁴⁹

Using her faith, her belief in the relationship with God, and the power of prayer, Rosa Munguia tells stories as a way to explain how she has dealt with the difficult circumstances throughout her life. She applies biblical texts to her own experience as a Mexicana. When I first got to her house, she showed me what she had written in one of

¹⁴⁹ Her granddaughter Dr. Belisa Gonzalez has been instrumental in facilitating the time for me to meet with Rosa. Dr. Gonzalez and I have been colleagues through Women's Studies since 1997.

her books. She had a Bible verse (although not quoted verbatim) and this prompted her to tell me the story of Jacob and how he was in Egypt for 17 years. Her mother was in the campo as a sharecropper in the Ranchito de Rialitos and she prayed for the whole time that she would get to the *pueblo*, which in this case was Kingsville, Texas. After her mother prayed and prayed for 17 years, like Jacob, they got to Kingsville.

Rosa was the first, and perhaps only, woman I interviewed who quoted the Bible often and in order to illustrate a point. But she also relayed stories of her youth that she felt were important for me to know about how she became involved with the MMU.

She recalled how wonderful she thought it was to be invited to a Women's meeting, for which her friends told her "dejen los niños con tu jefe (leave your kids with your 'old man' or husband)." She was thrilled at the idea of being able to serve the Lord and be away from her children at the same time. She recalled that Minerva Garza had encouraged her to get involved with the MMU and she loved it.

During our visit over two days, Rosa's sister was in the hospital and Rosa was obviously very concerned about her. She spoke to her by phone while I was there and they prayed together. Rosa frequently broke down crying, especially when she spoke of her mother, for whom she felt a very warm regard. Rosa is well known throughout the Rio Grande Conference, and the Mungia family as a whole is also well respected. She was featured in the "60 Mujeres en Misión" as important to the development of the MMU throughout Texas.

Which of the four mission themes were most important to my interviewees seemed to depend on the generation and region from which they come. This period is characterized by a concern for mission, issues of health care, and education. An

organizational model developed which combined aspects from white female missionary and Mexican American cultures. One of the most significant aspects of this time period is that by establishing the Sociedad (later the MMU) Mexican American women had control over their organizational structure. After 1958 and the founding of the first Rio Grande Conference School of Missions, the MMU took more aggressive steps at establishing their own unique form of mission work. Some of the programs that were initiated include the Mother-Daughter Banquet, Women's Day, and the White Christmas. The Mother-Daughter banquet is the most commonly celebrated event at each local unit and usually takes place during Mother's Day weekend. It almost always includes a keynote speaker, a meal prepared by someone other than the women of the unit, and the highlight, a fashion show. Mexican American women were able to incorporate even into this even values that reflected the central relationship that mothers and women in general play in the work of the church and in promoting mission.

Many of the stories of those with whom I spoke and who came of age during the volatile period of the 1960s reflect conscious engagement with social justice issues. Many of these women were particularly open to discussing how their experiences of race and gender intersected. This is partly because they have seen and sometimes experienced the effects of segregation as children, and then as adults have been able to enjoy some of the benefits of the Chicano Movement and African American Civil Rights movement that gradually ended segregation. But they also grew up in the period of Women's Liberation, or the second wave feminist movement. While most of my questions were about their experiences and feelings regarding the UMC and the MMU, one of my questions to all the women was to "describe an experience you have had with discrimination". I did not

specify whether I wanted to hear about racial, gender, or religious discrimination, but left it open to them. The answers varied widely. Idalia Edwards identifies as Hispanic, but when referring to experiences during her childhood, she said “Mexican.” Idalia recalled that when she and her family moved from Texas to New Mexico, her experiences with racial discrimination subsided, and it didn’t cause her any problems after that. However, she did refer indirectly to gender discrimination when she emphasized to me, “I just want to say that I think being a United Methodist woman has...[given me] leadership experiences [that] have been beneficial to me.” When asked why, she replied, “It makes you stand up for yourself. When somebody is trying to push me around I can say, ‘Hey, I don’t have to take that’ or if they try to get you to do stuff, to take more on, I can stand up for myself and say, ‘I don’t have time for that.’”¹⁵⁰ While not explicitly referring to race or class, or gender, she nevertheless acknowledges that there have been instances of struggle during which her MMU experiences supported her confidence. The religious poetics that characterize Idalia’s experiences in the MMU have fostered her own sense of agency. She credits her experience in the MMU for her professional, academic, and personal accomplishments.

Marion Smith, daughter-in-law of Josephine G. Smith (see Chapter 3), reported that her hardest experience with discrimination was not regarding race, but was based on her and her family being Protestant in the small northern New Mexico town of Peñasco. Marion had attended the Presbyterian Menaul School in Albuquerque and remembers that upon returning home from school, she had a difficult time: “After I got back to Penasco, [I] didn’t fit in with the other girls.” When asked what she meant, she said, “We (she and

¹⁵⁰ Idalia Edwards, interview by the author, tape recording, July 2007, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

her sister) weren't afraid of our minister like the Catholics were. They were under the thumb of the church to be great. And we didn't have to do that to be great. We were great on our own." Marion remembers that to get to the Presbyterian church, she had to walk past the Catholic church and she remembers that the priest yelled at her and her sisters that they were going "to Hell" and that the "Priest came to minister in Peñasco and told the minister to get the kids out of hell church." She said "We were tested daily in Peñasco," but she also tells that she was comforted because: "we were governed by a real faith. We didn't have to go talk to a priest who was drunk to find out we had real faith. It grounded us more."¹⁵¹ Although Marion attended Presbyterian Menaul school, she transferred her denominational membership to Methodism when she married Gerald Smith, Josephine Smith's son. The tentacles of the body that I identified in Chapter three, mission, education, health care and social services, appear to have transcended the denominational lines between Presbyterian and Methodist. Marion's anti-catholic sentiments were only solidified by being mistreated by the local priest in Peñasco, and not, according to her, during her residence at Menaul. She also distinguishes herself from her Catholic female counterparts thanks in part to the lessons she received at Menaul: "During make-up lessons, dressing lessons, they used to say 'less is more' [and] 'If you wear too much, you will look like a tramp,' and 'Menaul girls are girls of distinction.'" Marion believes that her gender training helped her throughout her life and taught her how to carry herself in a way that would show the world "you were worth something."¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Marion Smith, interview by the author, tape recording, 23 June 2008, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Marion has served in various capacities at the local church level, for example as choir director and as one of four pianists who serve the musical needs of El Calvario UMC in Las Cruces.

These women's relative comfort discussing issues of race, gender, and religion may have also been due to their comfort with me. Many, though not all, of the women from this generation have known me, my mother, my father, and both of my grandmothers, and so I felt comfortable enough with them to ask direct questions about specific issues.

75 years Peregrinando en mission

On Sunday, October 12, 2008 at the closing service of the 75th Anniversary Celebration of the Mujeres Metodistas Unidas of the Rio Grande Conference in San Antonio's Radisson downtown hotel banquet room, Bishop Jim Dorff told the group:

“You are a letter from God”. Just as the Corinthians used the letter as a tool, so have the MMU used their organization as a tool. He said “as the Rio Grande Conference UMW celebrates 75 years, letters have been written in and through your lives and hearts. A letter written, not with paper and ink, but by the spirit of God, the spirit of Christ working in the through you. You are the letter of recommendation, letter of witness, letter of testimony and that letter is more important today than ever before. The witness and testimony has never been more important.”¹⁵³

He told a story about some missionaries who go and do mission work in places in Africa and Asia and even here in the U.S., and the ones sending them don't tell them what to do, other than just go and be with the people of that place. If the people they are with go to work on their fields, the missionaries get their hats and say “Ok, may I go help you?” They went “to be with them and do what they do...what an idea!” The Bishop was advocating that the women go back to their home churches, homes, and communities and be the letter that God has called them to be. Both the Bishop's talk and Norma Vera's keynote address called out the names of founding mothers, and focused on the nature of mission and witnessing and how it has changed through the years.

¹⁵³ Bishop Jim Dorff, “Letter From God” (sermon preached at closing communion service in San Antonio, Texas 75th Anniversary of the MMU, 13 October 2008).

Leadership development

Organizational structure of the gathering followed parliamentary procedure. However, breaks were taken if there was confusion as to who the official delegates were and where they were supposed to sit. Occasionally, when the new business or by-laws were read, there was a shout from the audience, “En ingles!” Whether a woman was proficient in Spanish, English, or both seemed to be a generational matter. While typically such conference-wide events were held in Spanish, all my interviews were done in English although sometimes the interviewees would answer in a combination of English and Spanish.

Generation Gap

Most of the attendees were women over 50 years of age. This lack of participation in the MMU on the part of ‘young’ women is of concern to the ‘older’ women. During lunch on Saturday, the ‘young’ women were invited to meet and eat together in a separate space, I was asked to go to that lunch. There were about 15 to 18 of us in there at the time. Instead of me asking questions, though, the six women I sat with wanted to ask me a few questions of their own. Lucy Burciaga (not in the 50 and under group) sat in on the meal and began the conversation by asking me to talk about my project, emphasizing how important it is for young women to become active in the MMU beginning with their local unit and continuing on at the district, conference, jurisdictional and national levels. One woman, Mary Silva just over the 50 mark, said “I never thought I would be here. I thought it was just for old ladies, my grandma, my mom, even, but never did I think I would become involved in this.” During the lunch conversation, the ‘older women’ asked the younger ones what they could do to attract more young women.

The overwhelming response from the group of fifteen who were present, was that the younger women simply do not have the kind of time it takes to commit to the demands of the MMU. Due to work commitments, child care and other activities they are involved in, they simply do not have room in their lives for the MMU. This leads to the next section in which the emphasis on education at times takes women away from being able to work for the church.

Cindy Andrade Johnson is in the United Methodist Church's General Board of Global Missions Deaconess program right now and was held up with pride during just about every session. For example, if there was a question on Parliamentary procedure, or any other point of contention the leader would say "We don't know the answer to that, maybe we should ask Cindy, she's the deaconess" and laughter would erupt.

I was introduced to the whole group by Lucy Burciaga as "one of our own". Minerva Garza attended the banquet and sat at the head table with her husband, who got up and spoke and shared with the group that Minerva had taken a fall just two weeks before the event, but she was determined to be at the celebration. She appeared very weak and frail, and since she was only there for the banquet, lots of people wanted to talk to her and I didn't want to burden her or interrupt those conversations to ask for an interview.

Religious Poetics of the MMU

At the Saturday morning opening at the Radisson San Antonio, just blocks from the "mecca" of the Rio Grande Conference, La Trinidad UMC, as always the session opened with several songs. Songs ranged from *coritos*, to traditional hymns such as How Great Thou Art, and of course those written and composed by Dr. Raquel Martinez, Peregrinas en la jornada. When the song leader, Vera's daughter, who is an opera singer,

asked for requests, someone made up lyrics to a popular song, La Murcura, a catchy cumbia. The woman who re-mixed it said, “I don’t like the words...but I changed them, cause I like the music.” So, she taught it to us, the lone male minister was there, young handsome loud voice, lead the group in a cumbia. The words are:

Estamos aqui gozando y celebrando las mujeres

Estmos aqui gozando y celebrando las mujeres.

Setenta y cinco anos

Setenta y cinco anos

Setenta y cinco anos

Y muchos mas para venir

(We are here enjoying and celebrating women

we are here enjoying and celebrating women

75 years

75 years

75 years and many more to come)

The whole crowd erupted with laughter. They had just communally composed a song that was then sung at every session of the weekend. It took a couple shout from others in the audience to help come up with lyrics that would represent the sentiment in the room. What the women did with this popular, secular song that is associated with Mexican and border culture is symbolic of the bending and adapting they do in their everyday lives. It was also an example of how women are no longer bound up by the racist and sexist assumptions that all women’s mission work should do is support the educational, vocational goals of Hispanic men; instead, the women have learned to

support activities that will empower women in the organization to reach their full potential, to affect the world, and to do so winnowing out the chaff of patriarchal and hierarchical lives that identifies what is “women’s work” and what is not.

These poetics are embodied in the way they narrate their own histories. They know the early structures fostered imbalanced power relations, but strategically remained firmly planted in the middle of the borderlands. Thanks to negotiation and a series of *travesías*, while the first-generation border-crossing women didn’t get to go to college, they worked so that they could indeed send their daughters and grand daughters. The first generation of MMU were those being missionized, but they raised their own daughters and granddaughters, organized their own school of missions, raised money to support education for Latino/a Methodists and effectively negotiated power from within the structure of the MMU in order to empower later generations. The subsequent generations then have interacted with their own socio-historical contexts and integrated their public, professional lives with the values of they learned, and skills they obtained from the MMU.

Chapter 5:

Toward a History of Hope

The women of the MMU, and the missionary women who came into contact with them are examples of persons whose lives have been as they say, “moved by the power of the divine” and have not responded with anger, resentment and hopelessness, but have responded with hope, faith and forgiveness: a hermeneutics of love. They are powerful examples of the resiliency of a community, they exhibited the ability to endure difficult times. Between 1869 and 1933, I believe they were conscious of the power dynamics that were responsible for silencing their experiences. I have no doubt that women like Francisca Soto, Reyna Dominguez and others were aware of the assumptions that missionaries made from them. The interactions, however, that the missionaries had with Mexican women are examples of the human level of interaction between women from two worlds. The responses to the conditions of the borderlands by the mujeres de MMU can teach us lessons regarding love, forgiveness, and hope.

As I come to the end of this dissertation project, I know that it has raised more questions than I have answered. Even so, the project has been immensely valuable simply for having asked questions, for having listened to the stories of the MMU told in response, and for having documented those in written form for others to see.

I remember years ago sitting in church between my grandmother, Josephine G. Smith and my mother, Martha Smith, and feeling like I was part of something bigger, in

this case part of a long line of women of faith. I don't know if at that point I had imagined having children myself, but as I look at my daughter now, I am comforted by the thought that she too is part of something larger and older than herself. My daughter, my mother, and I embody something larger than the sum of our parts. We are only a link in a chain, only a part of a genealogy, but once you have a sense of your place in the universe, you can feel a cosmic connection to other human beings, to other animals, and to the divine, and you become empowered to contribute what you can to that larger connected universe.

Yet as a critical scholar I am also conscious of the ways in which indigenous practices and epistemologies have become appropriated for less than righteous purposes. In response to that, and in response to five centuries of racism and dehumanization of indigenous ways of knowing, I have been reluctant to claim that the MMU had any kind of indigenous religiosity creeping up under the surface. However, a future direction for this project would be a conscious un-earthing of indigenous ways of being and knowing in the world. Superstition was identified first by Catholic friars during the conquest of Mexico, then again by the Anglo Protestants, as an indication of remaining indigenous practices. Protestantism takes us one step further away from indigenous knowledges, and no doubt one day whatever supersedes Protestantism will do so too. Since conquest is never fully complete, since practices continue to change, it is all the more important to document while some of the actors are still alive what they recall happening, and in the case of those women who kept written records, personal or institution, what they recorded at the time.

Such a move would also help shift directions in the field of Chicano Studies and Latino/a religions for it guarantees interdisciplinary, feminist knowledge. It further encourages ecumenical dialogue while at the same time being careful not to alienate non-church members. Such a study would be best written in a language that does not rely on one discipline to the exclusion of another, but would embrace many of them, thus opening the researcher to ask many more kinds of questions. Testimonio and undisciplining ethnography while acknowledging the multi-vocal contributions to the experiences of the MMU make room for me to suggest that these stories say more than just experience. These stories say “we know our circumstances prevented us from getting an education” yet they make sacrifices in order to ensure later generations of Mexicanas go to college. The commitment to the MMU is an expression of solidarity with Latinas who, without the structure of the MMU would not have had the opportunities to develop leadership skills, would not have thought it possible to obtain a higher education.

This project also honors the difficult work of my academic elders who began a journey with virtually no institutional support simply because their projects were about Latino/as. They did not have the kinds of collegial support now available to Latina/o scholars committed to social justice and mentorship. They came of age as scholars in a time where disciplinary boundaries were very much more rigid and tightly held.

Identity only works for you if you benefit from it. It only works for you if you were at some point denied from having an identity and as a result felt pain, subjugation, powerless. For the MMU, the identification with Mujeres Metodistas Unidas as its own religion, has empowered them. They used to be called dirty, superstitious Mexicans. They have re-claimed Mexican evidenced through the poetics of Spanish language use in

writing and in conducting conference level business. The symbolic language of the MMU includes the songs composed by and for MMU, emphasizing mission as fundamental to their choosing to be involved with the MMU. Many of the women indicated that they believe they are put in the world for a reason and if the reason is to help others, then the MMU provides avenues through which they can help others.

The religious poetics of the MMU informs women's decisions about their lives outside of the spaces of the church as well and goes beyond the home into the public sphere. Of the twenty one interviews, those who work outside the home are either educators or social workers. If they have not chosen either education or social work, they still believe that their faith gets lived out in whatever vocation they do have.

What if the missionaries didn't have as direct an impact on the women in the Southern District? The behavior, mannerisms, Americanized ness of the region is different in Texas. Of course, that's been said about Tejanos in general, right? They have maintained a remarkable balance between Mexicanidad and gringo worlds, cultural production and expression. Perhaps the investment in whiteness was represented by the religious identity, Methodism, and the other stuff, manners, culinary, linguistic, aesthetic maintained a closer tie to Mexican cultural aesthetics. Perhaps they have chosen, traversed to Methodism as a strategy. There is something very humanistic about the level of communication that took place and continues to take place in the feminine spaces of Harwood and Houchen. With a different set of questions and modes of analysis, a study of cross-cultural communication would be fruitful as well.

Maybe such an assessment focuses too much on the negative, on the ideological formations and discursive suturing of the subject to ideology. Those are important factors

to paint a clear and vivid picture of the time and experience of the women. However, if we only look at the ideological and discursive formations of the equation, we miss the profound human element to it, and that is the memories of the women, what they remember about the experience. The women with whom I have spoken (mainly in relation to their experiences of Harwood and Houchen) had almost nothing but fond memories of the missionaries, of the white women who came to save them and bring them into civilization. Maybe I've been too worried about being the historian and searching for documents that prove what I'm trying to say about the missionary institutions.

The most hopeful part of the project is that the institutions were created by human beings, and at one level, their motivations were less than ideal. But on another level, regardless of their motivations that originally got them there, they came into contact with the Black-eyed girls as human beings. And the black-eyed girls had never been in charge of institutions like schools or community centers, so their only frame of reference was to meet the missionaries as human beings, as children of God, and as fellow pilgrims of faith. While it is beyond the scope of the project, one possible direction for future research would be to meet and spend more time with the women who had contact with my Mujeres. I met two of them, and many have passed away, but there must be correspondence between them and their families, there must have been a record of how they felt, what they experienced on their journey of faith, women such as Ms. Crissy in Albuquerque and Dortha Muñoz in El Paso, who married a Mexican. There must be examples of intercultural communication, cross-cultural dialogue, and interracial relations that I have not unearthed.

So, if we have ideology on one hand and human beings on the other what gives them common ground upon which to interact, is that they are all *peregrinando en f e*. And so are the female missionaries that came to work with them. This surely is a lesson in and of itself: that two sets of people can come together from very different circumstances, white missionary women do-gooders and Mexican women in the southwest, can find common ground on the basis of their common humanity.

The wise Dr. Vincent Harding wrote in his introduction to *Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement*, “When we search deeply enough into the struggles for truth, justice, and hope of any human community, moving with disciplined compassion and vision, we emerge from the exploration with lessons that were meant for us all. In other words, when approaching the movement from this perspective, what we realize is that the story of the African-American struggle for freedom, democracy, and transformation is a great continuing human classic whose liberating lessons are available to all seekers and discoverers, but especially to those who understand that the battle is still in their own hands and hearts.”¹⁵⁴ He continues “What better way to teach religion--in any setting--than through the experiences of those persons whose lives have been deeply moved by the power of the divine and who have allowed that movement to expand their hearts and draw them into the struggle for a more just, compassionate, and democratic society?”¹⁵⁵

The women of the MMU, and the missionary women who came into contact with them, are examples of persons whose lives have been “moved by the power of the

¹⁵⁴ Vincent Harding, *Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1990), 10.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

divine.” Moved by that power, they have not responded with anger, resentment, and hopelessness, but with hope, faith, and forgiveness. The MMU gatherings represent woman centered respect and honor. They have weaved faith, vocation, child rearing and mission into their everyday choices about how to engage the world. The MMU is its own religion, its own identity that encompasses race, gender, class, history, geography, and language. By reading the MMU as an aspect of borderlands religiosity they provide examples of how to break down binaries. This project represents that from black-eyed girls to the MMU exemplify and redefine relationships based on oppression and imbalance of power to relationships built on love. May this dissertation be my contribution to preserving their legacy and in so doing retrieving my own story.

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