MULTICULTURALISM AS RESISTANCE: LATINA MIGRANTS NAVIGATE US MORMON SPACES

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On a warm and breezy Sunday afternoon, Julissa[1] opens her door and gives me *saludos*, a traditional greeting kiss on the cheeks. Stepping inside, I am engulfed by the familiar smell of green plantains with cheese, yellow rice, and roasted meats. I immediately tie up my hair and get to work. I stir the rice with her young daughter on my hip while Julissa's mom chases after her older child. We fall into a comfortable rhythm as melodic as the *cumbia* music in the background. These foods and this trust placed in me to help prepare them are the result of many close years spent together, and I am touched every time I am included in this tradition. Finally, when all is ready, Julissa calls upstairs to the family: *"Come eat! Hermana Brittany is here!"* I cannot help but smile when she calls me *hermana*, her "sister." Her reference to me signifies a dual meaning: I am not only like a family member to her, but additionally, the term *hermana* is used among Spanish-speaking members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known as Mormons) to signify solidarity and integration with one another. This sentiment of *el/la hermandad* (brotherhood or sisterhood) is an important practice to remind Church members that we are socially and spiritually tied to and reliant upon one another. For Latina migrants in the Church, *la hermandad* is an essential part of navigating spaces within Mormonism that are complex, predominantly white, and/or

1. All interview participants' names have been changed.

politically and historically painful as they work, worship, and parent in the United States.

Julissa is twenty-eight years old and has been my *hermana* for over a decade. She is the daughter of an Ecuadorian mother and Salvadorian father. Her father and older siblings arrived in the US as refugees from El Salvador under temporary protected status (TPS). They had traveled from Ecuador and stopped to live in Mexico before crossing the border. Because none of Julissa's older siblings were born in El Salvador, they did not qualify for temporary protected status with their father and therefore had to cross without documentation. Her mother crossed unauthorized months later with the help of Church contacts in southern California. In the early 2000s, Julissa's mother won the green card lottery: an annual, preset number of visas issued to applicants from selected countries. Through this, she was able to petition for herself and then her children's permanent residency.

On the night of my visit, Julissa agreed to go beyond her normal *hermana* role. She decided to share with me her intimate experiences growing up Mormon within an undocumented immigrant family in the predominantly white suburbs of Salt Lake City as well as her current experiences as a Latina raising bicultural children in the Church. Throughout our interview, I began to see how living in the United States has required her to develop multicultural approaches in order to navigate complicated social and religious environments. Julissa shared some ways these intersections manifested in her upbringing:

> I remember my mother working odd jobs because she didn't have papers. Growing up, I would see people from school or church being taken by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). Unless you live through it, it's hard to understand. Getting papers isn't like paying a parking ticket. I've always considered myself an American, but in school and on my mission people made fun of me because I wasn't American "*enough*." That would hurt me. But I'm not ashamed. I'm eternally grateful my parents made our home reflect the parts of the world they knew. I learned music, food, language, and my faith. Those are a huge part of me. I want that for my daughters now.

Julissa's experiences mirror what many other Latina Mormon mothers shared with me in anonymous interviews about living as immigrants in mixed-status or undocumented families in the United States. She is part of a large and underserved community within US Mormon spaces.

According to official statistics reported in December 2018, around 43 percent of global LDS Church membership identifies or has ties with Latin American or Latinx heritage.[2] Despite such a strong worldwide presence, Mormon Latinx voices are vastly underexamined in Church historical archives, Anglo-American LDS community dialogues, and scholarly research, with a few exceptions.[3] I know this because as a white US citizen born into the Church, aside from the occasional faith-promoting story or *Ensign* article, I did not grow up hearing Latina or migrant voices and histories highlighted in English-speaking congregations. It has been an ongoing process for me as a Church member and academic researcher to begin to understand how these public narratives regarding members' life experiences have stayed for the most part, Anglo- and androcentric in nature. In the summer of 2018, I interviewed over twenty practicing Latina Mormon mothers living in Utah, Nevada, and southern California, all geographically considered part of the "Mormon Corridor," or areas where early Church members historically settled and colonized. I was interested in the stories and

2. "Facts and Statistics: Worldwide Statistics," *Newsroom*, Sept. 1, 2018, https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/facts-and-statistics.

3. Rebecca A. Smith and Susan E. Mannon, "'Nibbling on the Margins of Patriarchy': Latina Immigrants in Northern Utah," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 6 (2010): 986–1005; Ignacio M. García, "Finding a Mormon Identity through Religion and Activism: A Personal Note on Constructing a Latino Time and Place in the Mormon Narrative," *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 2 (2015): 69–90; Ignacio García, "Empowering Latino Saints to Transcend Historical Racialism: A Bishop's Tale," in *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion*, edited by Joanna Brooks and Gina Colvin (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2018), 1–360; Sujey Vega, "Hermanas interseccionales: Las latinas de LDS navegan por la fe, el liderazgo y la solidaridad femenina," *Latino Studies* 17, no. 1 (2019): 27–47.

experiences of these women, all of whom had lived undocumented in the United States for long periods, with about 45 percent who adjusted their legal status at some point after arrival. Some questions I explored in developing this research and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) interview guide were:

1. What is the historical role of Latinx inclusion and race relations in the LDS Church?
2. How do immigrant Latina mothers construct their sense of belonging in US Church communities?
3. How do Latina mothers choose to preserve their cultural values and traditions in their faith practice and family relationships?

It is crucial for me as both an *hermana* and researcher to highlight the voices of mothers who shared their stories with me, some doing so at risk to their personal safety or social standing within Church circles. My findings indicate that the majority of mothers often feel a strong disconnect between Church public policy and doctrine—one that encourages the protection of migrant families and cultural pluralism—and their actual lived experiences with Anglo-American family and Church members. Every woman interviewed expressed complex feelings of both belonging and marginalization, each recalling instances of discrimination within US Church spaces due to their ethnic and racial identity or legal status. These experiences heavily influenced mothers' preferences for attending pan-ethnic Latinx congregations within the created spaces of Spanish or Portuguese "wards." This is majorly in part due to the historical struggles Latinas, migrants, and women have all faced since the inception of LDS missionary work both inside and outside the US. This large and complex history expands well beyond Salt Lake City Church headquarters. Strides for racial equity and inclusion within Mormon spaces, US Church member attitudes regarding immigrant assimilation, and their individual migration experiences all influenced interviewed mothers in their development of multicultural social and parenting strategies. These approaches strive to navigate the

overlaps of institutional oppression, transnational existence, and personal conceptualizations of identity and place.

I. Mormon Histories of Latinx Inclusion and Race Relations

Past scholarship has assessed how the LDS Church has struggled to create inclusive and equitable spaces for people of color as well as indigenous and immigrant communities.[4] Although it now maintains a larger international than domestic membership, the intersections of religious practice, gender identity, and immigration history and politics are all important in contextualizing how Latina migrant mothers experience and move within the body of the Church in the Mormon Corridor and, more broadly, US society. Many of the challenges the Church has faced both in the past and present in embracing and including underserved communities of color stem from doctrinal ideologies created by Book of Mormon interpretations regarding race, pastoral stewardship, and who has the authority to lead or speak for God.

The Book of Mormon perpetuates biblical beliefs that certain ethnic or racial lineages are deemed more "worthy" or capable to lead and preside over others.[5] It recounts the story of one family unit that divides itself between the descendants of two brothers, Nephi and Laman. Laman and his family make divergent and "sinful" choices

4. Elise Boxer, "'To Become White and Delightsome': American Indians and Mormon Identity" (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2009); Hokulani K. Aikau, *A Chosen People, A Promised Land: Mormonism and Race in Hawai'i* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Moroni Benally, "Decolonizing the Blossoming: Indigenous People's Faith in a Colonizing Church," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 4 (2017): 71–188.

5. Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

on their journey from Israel to the American continent, while Nephi and his family obey God's commands and continue down a righteous path. This ultimately leads to a change in their physical appearances, with light-skinned Nephites becoming more "white and delightsome" and, over time, being given spiritual and physical stewardship by God over the "rebellious, cursed" darker-skinned Lamanite tribe.[6] Much of the Book of Mormon text is spent relaying continued histories of these two conflicting tribes, with skin color leveraged as a marker of obedience and worthiness. Because Book of Mormon scripture clearly states that Lamanites were of Abrahamic heritage, they were worthy of some saving effort and fellowship. Wilford Woodruff, fourth president of the Church, viewed Anglo Mormonism as being tasked with assisting those descended of Lamanite blood to "blossom" so that "they would be filled with the power of God . . . and go forth to build the New Jerusalem."[7] This scriptural narrative helps to contextualize the dogmatic foundations that shaped early perceptions among Church members regarding race and authority. Ultimately, because of the commandment for lighter-skinned communities to "save" their darker Lamanite brethren, they were privileged with increased status from the structural inception of Mormonism.[8]

Official Church sponsorship of missionary work and colonization of presumed "Lamanite"-dominant geographical areas in the American Southwest, Polynesia, Latin America, and the Caribbean began shortly after Mormon settlement in the Western frontier in 1847. Second Church president Brigham Young saw missionary efforts as a continuation of Church founder Joseph Smith's vision for gathering the

6. 2 Nephi 5:21, 23–24.

7. Floyd A. O'Neill and Stanford J. Layton, "Of Pride and Politics: Brigham Young as Indian Superintendent," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1978): 239–41.

8. Sylvester A. Johnson, "Accounting for Whiteness in Mormon Religion," *Mormon Studies Review* 3 (2016): 117–33.

twelve tribes of Israel together in preparation for the Second Coming of Christ.[9] White Church members felt commanded to carry out the Book of Mormon's call to graft Lamanite descendants into the faith. While efforts to include non-white peoples into the Church by proselytizing were considered "progressive" by the standards of the mid-nineteenth century, the grip of North American politics and racial attitudes on early Mormon treatment of "Lamanite" descendants cannot be ignored if we are to understand the contemporary placement and second-class citizenship of Latinx migrants in US Church spaces.

I frequented many a Sunday School lesson growing up where I was taught that the primary reason Utah was denied statehood for so long was the misunderstanding Congress had regarding the practice of polygamy. While this is generally true, polygamy was only one pillar of the Republican Party's concern for American "decency" during the mid-nineteenth century. The Party was also concerned with the other "twin relic of barbarism," which was the practice of slavery.[10] Congress representative Justin Smith Morrill argued that Utah's delayed entrance was also because of the Church's participation in indigenous people's enslavement and indentured servitude. Utah was the only known US state to participate in state-sanctioned enslavement of indigenous peoples.[11] Because Mormons were seen as propagators of this "barbarism" on both fronts, along with accepting converts from outside Anglo ethnic groups, Church members began to experience a racialization that denoted them a degenerate breed of people who were losing their

9. Max Perry Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

10. John Kincaid, "Extinguishing the Twin Relics of Barbaric Multiculturalism—Slavery and Polygamy—from American Federalism," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 33, no. 1 (2003): 75–92.

11. *The Congressional Globe*, Thirty-Eighth Congress, Second Session, Jan. 1865, 144.

holistic whiteness.[12] To counter this and promote the Church as one producing "an angelic, celestial people," a previously hesitant Brigham Young began encouraging Anglo members to buy indigenous slaves from their captors as adoptees or house servants. He stated that God permitted Mormons "to come here for this very purpose . . . [that] the Lord could not have devised a better plan than to have put the saints where they were to help bring about the redemption of the Lamanites [and] also make them a white and delightsome people." This was all in order to "accomplish their redemption" in addition to serving as a pathway to battle negative racialization directed at the Church from outside groups.[13]

On top of attempting to ease fears of unbelonging within the Anglo mainstream, Mormon settlers felt "white savior" pressures, as Andres Reséndez explains, which were the driving motives for the passage of the Act for the Relief of Indian Slaves and Prisoners in 1852. The law passed by popular consensus in the Utah territory to allow Mormon settlers to bypass the illegality of slavery within Mexican territorial lands. Church leaders felt that by purchasing indigenous slaves "into their freedom" from the horrendous conditions of illegal Mexican slave trades, they were upholding their spiritual obligation to "save" Lamanites.[14] The passage of the Act allowed for the Native enslavement to continue favoring local Mormon labor markets, and additionally permitted Church leadership to continue encouraging conversion among enslaved Lamanite

12. W. Paul Reeve, "From Not White Enough to Too White: The Historical Evolution of a Mormon Race," *Sunstone Magazine* (website), Jan. 1, 2015, https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/from-not-white-enough-to-too-white-the-historical-evolution-of-a-mormon-race/.

13. Sondra Jones, *The Trial of Don Pedro León Luján: The Attack Against Indian Slavery and the Mexican Traders in Utah* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000).

14. Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

women and children by placing them in Anglo homes where they could be "with the more favored portions of the human race."[15] Reséndez also goes on to state that: "Mormons who adopted Indians had to strive to erase their Native cultures. These pervasive attitudes prevented Indians from fully integrating into Mormon society. Mormons [had] never anticipated keeping them as 'indentures.' . . . [T]heir impulses to help in their redemption eased their transformation into owners and masters. In colonial times, Spanish missionaries had acquired Indians to save their souls. In the nineteenth century, Mormons' quest to redeem Natives by purchasing them was not too different. Both ended up creating an underclass."[16]

These scriptural and social contexts identify the ways in which Lamanite identity was negotiated; people perceived as Lamanite ancestors should be saved through spiritual conversion as well as cultural assimilation practices via Anglo member efforts. These contexts are also what has made upward mobilization efforts so difficult for indigenous, migrant, or resource-poor members of the Church. They are often seen as outliers, or as Others, whose stories within the context of early Mormon history or current political dialogue may not meet the expectations of the standard "faith-promoting" narrative that so many leaders wish to propagate within missionary work and social dialogues. Professor Ignacio García reaffirmed the importance of understanding the breadth of these historical placements and constructs in a plenary address to the Mormon History Association: "Too much of Mormon historical studies still tell the story of the Other. This Other is voiceless and mindless, too often we speak for them (as) it concerns the anxieties of white Mormonism. . . . History provides a language and a protocol with which to articulate thoughts and concerns. People who have history have a language that provides a sense of agency, of being in control

15. Kate B. Carter, *Heart Throbs of the West*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1943).

16. Reséndez, *The Other Slavery*, 245.

of their lives, or at least of being players within it."[17] García's analysis is particularly relevant to this discussion, as the majority of mothers I interviewed shared experiences in which their Latina and Mormon identities were in conflict with one another in regard to the attitudes of Anglo-American membership. They expressed that US-born members' ideas of faithfulness to the Church are often conflated with a willingness and loyalty to adhere to Anglo-American Church ideologies, and they often felt their efforts to contribute to the kingdom of God were marginalized by instances of discrimination or alienation, most likely due to this lack of historical narrative within English-speaking congregations. They reported that this conflict often created an environment of pressure and emotional distress that compounded their already complex negotiation between the Self and the Church. As Garcia further argues, Latinx Mormons, "need their history—the chronicle of their struggles, triumphs, and disappointments—to understand their place in a religion that in the past has required placing and timing—in the collective sense—to fit in."[18]

Racialized hierarchy and differentiated levels of inclusion by race maintain their historical grip in the modern Church as they continue to influence organization, policy, and gendered social relations between Anglo-American members on the one hand and communities of color and migrants on the other. Given the Church's complex history of domination, enslavement, servitude, and submission of "Lamanite" heritage groups, I argue that being Latinx and Mormon has been problematic in nature from the beginning. Consequently, the struggles Latinx communities have faced in Mormon histories have much larger implications for contemporary social relations and membership than previously acknowledged. It is essential that Church leaders and researchers who work within the frameworks of Mormonism focus on decolonizing any

17. García, "Finding a Mormon Identity."

18. Ibid.

"crafted soliloquy" that minimizes the Anglo-American Church's contribution to the oppression and marginalization of people of color.[19]

II. Assimilation and Latinx Belonging in an Anglo-American Landscape

Aihwa Ong conducted one of the primary cases that investigated the experience of non-white belonging within US Mormon spaces, specifically that of Cambodian refugees who converted to Mormonism in the greater Oakland, California area.[20] She evaluated how the Church provided economic and social stability to many in this particular migrant group, many of whom were refugees fleeing genocide and war-torn areas. She also recounted that while interviewees who attended the Khmer-speaking wards reported increased economic opportunity and spiritual belonging through Church membership, they also encountered many social and racial barriers with Anglo members as they navigated their newfound religion. Ong writes: "The transnational appeal of Mormonism has been the reaffirmation of patriarchal values and discipline . . . that assimilates less successful people or impoverished immigrants to American values of strict morality, hard work, and middle-class success. . . . Yet, Mormonism maintains a structure of racial domination."[21] These findings are consistent with the Church's historical focus on grafting and incorporating migrant communities of color as preached from the pulpit for decades, especially within Latinx populations.[22] The Book of Mormon's alternate history appealed to

19. Octavio I. Romano-V, "Minorities, History and the Cultural Mystique," *El Grito: A Journal of Contemporary Mexican-American Thought* 1, no. 1 (1967): 5–11.

20. Aihwa Ong, *Buddha Is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, and the New America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

21. Ibid., 200–01.

22. Mark L. Grover, "The Maturing of the Oak: The Dynamics of LDS Growth in Latin America," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 2 (2005): 79.

many potential Latin American Church investigators, providing a theological narrative of God's belonging and divine destiny for those living in the Americas, one that existed outside of the legacies of genocide and oppression inflicted by European settler colonialism and Catholicism.[23] Assimilation, taught through a scriptural lens and propagated for many years mostly by Anglo missionaries from the US Mormon Corridor, was viewed as a natural and positive route to both inclusion and salvation. Aside from preaching to nonwhite populations, American Church leadership emphasizes the promotion of a nuclear family structure. This includes encouraging women to idealize motherhood and responsibility within the home. These perceptions reflect a larger historical lens of how the Church has appealed to nonwhite populations, as this nuclear family structure is prevalent in many parts of the world, including Latin America.

However, many mothers reported that this expectation for converts to "graft" or assimilate themselves into the gospel often requires nonwhite or immigrant members to adopt distinctly "white" Church or family traditions. One mother, Ines, shared her experience with this US Church cultural expectation. Ines came to the US from Guadalajara when she was in elementary school. She converted at seventeen and was able to adjust her legal status after marrying a Chicano citizen. Even at Ines's baptism, Church leadership involved were very aware of her legal status. When she decided to serve a mission, she went domestically to Idaho. The Church's current protocol allows undocumented missionaries to perform their service domestically so service can occur without compromising residency in the US. It was on her mission where she felt the most insecure about her legal status and immigrant status and felt

23. Michael O'Loughlin, "Competing for Hispanic Catholics: Secularism, Other Faiths Battle for Souls," *Crux* (website), July 2, 2015, https://cruxnow.com/church/2015/07/02/competing-for-hispanic-catholics-secularism-other-faiths-battle-for-souls/.

pressured to acculturate to Anglo-American points of view. Ines shared with me the following: "I was scared to share my status on my mission. White members were really loving until they found out I didn't have papers. I was undocumented until I was married. Spanish wards accept you and don't judge based on legal status; we don't have to hide. Right now, my bishop is undocumented. He knows how it is. For me, I'm still learning to live with all my identities. Too many American members wanted me [to assimilate], but I'm glad I've held on to who I am."

Ines's words express how legal status may transform Anglo Church members' perceptions of their migrant co-worshipers, even if they first appear "assimilated." In Ines's case, because she spoke English with no discernable accent and presented as more *güera,* meaning she has a lighter physical complexion, she wasn't immediately targeted for discrimination until her citizenship came into question. Her story highlights how nonwhite Mormons experience differential levels of inclusion and acceptance, heavily dependent on local attitudes. I argue that instead of striving for this grafting, which participants felt has led to erasure, US Mormons can better serve Latina migrant women by amplifying their voices, thereby responding to many underserved communities' need for "knowing and being known" in their intersectional spheres of lived experience.[24] All interviewees shared with me that they wished their migrant experiences, "illegal" or otherwise, would be treated with the same dignity, respect, and space migrant Mormon pioneers are given in Church history narratives. It is valid that these *hermanas* would ask: why are early Mormon (and mostly white) migration experiences viewed as more legitimate than theirs?

Previous scholarship has examined how the continued efforts to "graft" nonwhite and/or immigrant members of the Church has created social division and tensions between Anglo and Latino leaders

24. Roberto G. Gonzales, *Lives in Limbo: Undocumented and Coming of Age in America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

regarding stewardship of Latinx wards.[25] This research addressed the ever-increasing growth of Latinx membership as well as attempts to dismantle pan-ethnic Latinx wards, opting for assimilation with local English-speaking congregations. The dramatic drop in tithing and member activity in those areas where Latinx wards were forced to assimilate was profound, leading to Latinx wards being reinstated.[26] Other research has found that American leadership often failed to validate differing cultural expressions of faith, oftentimes minimizing Latinx members' efforts to contribute to worship sharing and practices.[27] These histories and social contexts within Church history and US congregations are important factors in why most mothers I spoke with who attended majority Latinx congregations at the time of interviewing believed it was an environment where they could feel safety, peace, and community.

Another reason many Latina migrants reported a preference for attending the Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking ward was to distance themselves from the idealization of Anglo mothering expectations that heavily influence US Church spaces. While many mothers came from cultural backgrounds with rigid gender norms, most interviewees felt that English-speaking ward communities were not understanding or flexible with their specific circumstances. Some mothers worried that

25. Claudia L. Bushman, *Contemporary Mormonism: Latter-day Saints in Modern America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 102–09.

26. Mark L. Grover, review of *"In His Own Language": Mormon Spanish Speaking Congregations in the United States*, by Jessie L. Embry, *BYU Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1999): 211–14, available at https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol38/iss2/13/.

27. Emily Ann Gurnon, "The Dark Face of a White Church: Latinos and Mormon Racism" (master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 1–17; Emily Gurnon, "Minority Mormons: Latinos and Latter-day Saints," *Christian Century* 111, no. 5 (1994): 157–59.

they could not achieve the "ideal" of being a stay-at-home mother like many of their white counterparts. This was not financially possible due to low wages or frequent labor exploitation because of their legal status. Many chose instead to frame their sense of belonging through Church ideologies, which emphasize the role of motherhood as sacred and respected, additionally finding comfort in doctrine regarding eternal families. Even though they agree with the Church's doctrine on the eternal value of their roles as mothers, many did not want to feel obligated or pressured to parent the same way as their Anglo Mormon peers. Many expressed feeling better supported by other mothers in the Latinx ward, who made space for their ideas or had shared interests. Mothers shared with me that this distance from the pressure of whiteness allowed them to preserve cultural traditions and support one another in handling the challenges their families faced.

Luisa was newlywed and pregnant when she and her husband crossed the border from Mexico. After they converted to the Church in New York City, a Mormon leader provided a way for her, along with her immediate and extended family, to move to Utah. Luisa reported she had her family attend the English-speaking ward while her children were growing up because it was a mostly white area, and it seemed like a good idea to help everyone adjust and fit in. While she expressed nothing but pride and love for her children, she wished they had also interacted with more Latinos by attending the Spanish-speaking ward. During our time together, she told me:

> I began noticing how my kids relate and do more activities with white kids. I have a hard time with that. They didn't keep the Mexican culture the way I wanted. For example, I visited my dad the other day at his (Latino) neighbor's house. Right away they invited me to eat. See? That's my culture. We are very welcoming and attentive, we notice others. I get embarrassed when my kids have friends over and don't offer them food! I'm hoping the older they get, the more they will take interest. My daughter asked me to teach her more, so I'm happy about that. But, I still wish we had done more.

Luisa's experience highlights an important dilemma that Latina migrant mothers face in the US: how to bring up children in your own culture while preparing them to live and learn in another. In the Church as well as US society, women are still expected to be the primary caregivers and nurturers to their children. These expectations placed on women to adequately nurture as well as parent through a dual cultural lens while living with limited resources because of legal status adds layers of stress to migrant mothers. Many leaders within Mormonism, much like national policy makers, have rarely considered these realities when assessing migrant social capital or economic outcomes.

Previous research on mothers in the US has analyzed the expectations of intensive mothering as a historically constructed ideology that requires mothers to expend copious amounts of emotional and physical labor in raising children.[28] Much of this previous research used middle-class, white citizen participants who shared similar parenting opinions.[29] Studies that have sought to understand Latina migrant experiences have found that these expectations become compounded when a migrant is parenting transnationally or raising bicultural children in the US.[30] It is important to recognize here that these other studies reveal a similar pattern of disparities to that which we see in Mormonism. Immigrant mothers often feel a strong sense of obligation to remain connected to cultural, gendered norms of mothering from their sending countries while also facing immense pressure to

28. Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998).

29. Pamela Stone, *Opting Out?: Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

30. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila, "'I'm Here, But I'm There': The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood," *Gender and Society* 11, no. 5 (1997): 548–71; Leisy J. Abrego, *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2014), 11; Joanna Dreby, *Everyday Illegal: When Policies Undermine Immigrant Families* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

assimilate to Anglo-American societal expectations.[31] These disparities between Anglo cultural expectations for motherhood and Latina mothers' actual lived realities create a need for personalized relief and validation, often found in Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking wards where women can talk and worship with others in similar situations. For most women though, simply worshipping with other mothers in their native language is not enough.

Most Mormon leadership approaches and cultural values were created by middle-class white Americans. Many mothers I interviewed felt that the multifaceted factors that shaped their undocumented immigrant experiences were greatly oversimplified within US Church conversations, which emphasize personal agency as the primary determining factor for economic and personal success in the US rather than the support and access to resources that studies have demonstrated as most important. This, layered on top of Mormonism's historical racialization of worthiness and authority among Lamanite descendants, can create a toxic emotional health environment for migrant mothers trying to find their place. A few mothers shared traumatic incidents and mental health concerns with me that they did not have the language or space to speak about even among other Latinas or within Latinx Church communities. One interviewee, Maria Dolores, told me her experience of being pregnant when she traveled by foot from Ecuador to Mexico hoping to cross the border and join her husband and

31. Patricia Fernández-Kelly and Sara Curran, "Nicaraguans: Voices Lost, Voices Found," in *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America*, edited by Rubén G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 127–56.; Elma I. Lorenzo-Blanco, Alan Meca, Jennifer B. Unger, Andrea Romero, Melinda Gonzales-Backen, Brandy Piña-Watson, Miguel Ángel Cano, et al., "Latino Parent Acculturation Stress: Longitudinal Effects on Family Functioning and Youth Emotional and Behavioral Health," *Journal of Family Psychology* 30, no. 8 (2016): 966; Vicki Ruíz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

other children already working in the US. During her crossing of the US–Mexico border, she experienced and witnessed horrific violence. Upon her arrival, she faced unstable housing situations and food scarcity during her first years in the US and saw no outlet to process her trauma. She cites a loving bishop from the Spanish-speaking ward as her advocate, expressing that loving Church leaders allowed her the economic resources she needed to get through the transition period. However, her negative experiences continue to trouble her. Maria Dolores cried softly as she relayed:

> We suffered because I didn't have papers for a long time. I had to be very strict with my children so we could stay safe, because of course racism will always exist here. Our circumstances required us to become strong. My children made me strong, and the Lord helped us survive. I also feel I was very blessed [in the US]. I know their lives have more opportunity. But I had to go through all of that [at the border] and navigate the two cultures. . . . That was so much. Looking back, if I had to do it all again, I'm not sure I would.

While almost all mothers interviewed heavily credited their faith and the Church with getting them through hard times pre- and post-migration, I often wondered if increased emotional and social support from Anglo leaders and more positive treatment from white membership might have positively affected the mental health, parenting, and economic outcomes for mothers like Maria Dolores. I believe these instances of isolation created by US Church spaces create a culture of casual but distant acceptance, as shown in previous work on Latinx paradigms within US Church spaces. Ignacio García emphasizes the importance of remembering how histories of assimilation pressures from Anglos on their Latinx counterparts have created inequalities that make it difficult for underserved communities like migrant Latinas to advocate for personal and spiritual needs at an infrastructural level. He writes: "Cultural whiteness; it remains entrenched in our institutional memory, in our manuals, sometimes in our conference

talks, and too often in the deep chambers of our minds and heart. . . . [W]hite (members) rarely see beyond a superficial exoticism in the lives of Latino Mormons. They will appreciate our culinary skills and our quick feet, but not our history or our thoughts. And we will be left with the notion that our white brothers and sisters like us, maybe even love us—but nothing substantive will change."[32] It is because of these infrastructural barriers that many mothers I interviewed developed and employed multiculturalist strategies and approaches when navigating US Mormon spaces. This occurred not only as a mechanism for survival but also created avenues to resist the underlying whiteness of the institution. Enacting their personal agency, mothers' multiculturalist attitudes allow them to preserve, treasure, and amplify their Latinx identities and traditions within created Church spaces.

III. A Case for Multiculturalism as Resistance and Power

Navigating religious expectations in a bicultural parenting environment is not a new topic of interest in Latina migration studies, as many gendered influences regarding womanhood are based in religious influence.[33] LDS Church doctrine has prioritized and reinforced the idealization of traditional feminine roles and motherhood as a path to salvation. Past Mormon women's studies in the US have predominantly focused on the experiences of white American citizens in their

32. Ignacio M. García, "Thoughts on Latino Mormons, Their Afterlife, and the Need for a New Historical Paradigm for Saints of Color," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 4 (2017): 1–29.

33. Patricia Arredondo, "Mujeres Latinas—Santas y Marquesas," *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 8, no. 4 (2002): 308–19; Rachel Hershberg and M. Brinton Lykes, "Redefining Family: Transnational Girls Narrate Experiences of Parental Migration, Detention, and Deportation," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* 14, no. 1 (2013): 14–35; Leah M. Sarat, *Fire in the Canyon: Religion, Migration, and the Mexican Dream* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

quest to find belonging in a patriarchal religious power structure.[34] Many of those interviewed reported feeling expected to restrict their energy to domestic spheres, religious belief, and child-rearing. Most of these traditions encourage women to personify characteristics such as self-sacrifice, family well-being, purity, and loyalty: qualities all akin to the Catholic conception of the Virgin Mary many interviewees were familiar with. Although it is not always the case, previous interviews have shown that many undocumented mothers form tight-knit networks that provide a better sense of stability for their members as they navigate parenting in a new country.[35] Fictive kin networks operate as a coping mechanism allowing Latina mothers to find ways to acclimatize to American life by balancing complex identities, with recent surveys indicating that multicultural and pluralistic attitudes are becoming more and more common among Latina parents.[36] The way

34. Catherine A Brekus, "Tanner Lecture: Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (2011): 58–87; Dorothy Allred Solomon, *The Sisterhood: Inside the Lives of Mormon Women* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Neylan McBaine, *Women at Church: Magnifying LDS Women's Local Impact* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014); Cory Crawford, "The Struggle for Female Authority in Biblical and Mormon Theology," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 48, no. 2 (2015): 1–66; Curtis G. Greenfield, Pauline Lytle, and F. Myron Hays, "Living the Divine Divide: A Phenomenological Study of Mormon Mothers Who Are Career-Professional Women," *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 16, no. 1 (2016): 1–14; Neylan McBaine, "Roundtable: Mormon Women and the Anatomy of Belonging," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 1 (2017): 193–202.

35. Edward Flores, *God's Gangs: Barrio Ministry, Masculinity, and Gang Recovery* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Claudia Roesch, *Macho Men and Modern Women: Mexican Immigration, Social Experts and Changing Family Values in the 20th Century United States*, Family Values and Social Change, vol. 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015).

36. Tina U. Hancock, "Sin Papeles: Undocumented Mexicanas in the Rural United States," *Affilia* 22, no. 2 (2007):175–84; Sujey Vega, *Latino Heartland: Of Borders and Belonging in the Midwest* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

these mothers choose to live their religious faith as well as outwardly demonstrate it within church communities is important when considering not only how social networks form but also how mothers begin to employ multicultural parenting strategies within them.[37]

Previous research has addressed the importance of utilizing multiculturalism in Church discourse and social interaction. Historian Jorge Iber considered Utah, along with many other areas of the Mormon Corridor, to be "lands that held great promise. . . . [Their] mines, railroads and beet fields held the hope of economic possibilities."[38] His work explores how the Church addressed Latinx migration patterns to Mormon-dominated areas in the early twentieth century, often employing multicultural approaches in order to find common ground and shared value systems with Spanish-speaking migrants. This not only led to increased conversion to the Church but also maintained some degree of ethnic peace between white members working alongside Latinx communities in blue-collar industries.[39] The work is careful to include, however, that the attitudes of many white members and prevailing narratives of Lamanite history continued to create separation and segregation between the communities. Other previous studies have addressed conflicts and pathways multiculturalist approaches have had in influencing Latinx and Anglo relations in the Church ward and stake infrastructures.[40] These conflicts often manifested themselves in the psychological or social stress Latina migrant mothers experienced

37. Peggy Levitt, "Religion as a Path to Civic Engagement," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 4 (2008): 766–91; Felipe Hinojosa, *Latino Mennonites: Civil Rights, Faith, and Evangelical Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

38. Jorge Iber, *Hispanics in the Mormon Zion, 1912–1999* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000).

39. Ibid., 19–39.

40. García, "Thoughts on Latino Mormons."

when choosing how and when to employ multiculturalist approaches within their households.

Natalia is a biracial convert from Argentina. Her mother is Congolese and immigrated to Argentina in her youth. When her father passed away, the family moved to the eastern US, where Natalia met Mormon missionaries. She ultimately moved to Utah, which she described to me in our interview as a place with many more opportunities for undocumented members to find work and a future spouse. Now married to an Anglo Church member, Natalia expressed some of these multicultural ideas to me in her own parenting and religious approaches:

> I feel you have the expectation being Latina, you can't have your kids talking back to you, you need to grab the *chancla* [sandal, sometimes used to spank] or yell at them. For [white] Mormons, you don't ever grab the *chancla*. Yelling isn't what the Lord would do. So you get both sides. What should I do? I feel like I must find common ground, and it's difficult to not feel judged. I think also in terms of language. I want my child to speak Spanish. I also want him to learn French and have his African culture, especially because he's so light-skinned. I don't want him to forget who he is or where he comes from.

Again, we see from Natalia's experiences the overlap and intersection of many worlds and the kinds of stressors that can create. All the mothers I interviewed, especially those married to white men, were very cognizant of how race would be perceived in heavily white US spaces, specifically in the Church. They also constantly must consider the layers of their heritage, their culture, US culture, Anglo Church culture, feminine gender roles, and their own personal desires as individuals living in multiple identities at once. Many interview participants felt better supported in the Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking congregations, stating that they felt more encouraged in parenting *their* way, according to *their* traditions rather than modeling their parenting choices after Anglo perspectives. This is where the idea of developing and employing

multiculturalism strategies becomes increasingly important as a means to adapt to ever-changing political, social, and cultural circumstances, both in and outside of US Church spaces.

It is in this space that we see how many mothers began to utilize overlapping and intersecting identities for their advantage and personal mobilization in Church and US society. Most mothers reported that they had to transform the pressure and their feelings of being in-between two cultures into increased opportunities for learning, exploring, and maximizing the potential for procuring economic and social resources for their families. All mothers responded at one point in our time together that it was essential to recognize the importance of raising their children multiculturally for them to have the greatest chance to be included in both American culture and that of their sending countries. Essentially, mothers reframed the negative narratives Anglo social societies (Church communities included) projected onto them to generate innovative approaches that bolstered their parenting and economic positioning. One great example of this is Fernanda. Born and raised in Curitiba, Brazil, she and her now ex-husband moved to the States with their children after a former missionary from Utah helped sponsor them and provided them housing when they arrived. Fernanda was reluctant to go to the English-speaking ward, not only because of the language barrier but because she felt more supported in raising her children in a multicultural environment. When asked about how to balance this duality, she said:

> I make sure we have our Brazilian customs here in the house. We speak Portuguese, have Brazilian birthday parties, we keep our traditions. But I know this is not my country. I know because of my color I've had some negative experiences. I learned many years ago that I had to adapt to how things are in American culture. Many bills are paid online. The systems [are] different. . . . The school is different. I am so grateful I have my Church community and children [who] helped me learn. I'm able to listen and talk with my children because they are growing up in a very different culture than I did.

Like Fernanda, many mothers' parenting approaches were influenced by their own upbringings but were also challenged by different technologies, classism, colorism, and racism from Anglo communities both in and outside of the Church. Additionally, many expressed that they struggled with the fear of how to raise kids who were not so "assimilated," did not "become so white," or become so *frio* (distanced or cold) that they forgot their roots.

Mexican migrant Cecilia had to figure out how to maneuver parenthood as she experienced her own insecurities and growth as an undocumented minority woman in the white, male-dominated Church institution. Cecilia was brought from Mexico to Chicago, where her family owned multiple bakeries and were very successful. After joining the Church, the family moved to Utah. Cecilia described how her own migration experiences and questions of self-doubt with her identity have influenced her multiculturalist approaches to mothering her two children, whose father is also an undocumented migrant, but from Argentina.

> In Chicago there were Mexicans and immigrants everywhere. I never questioned my identity until I came to Utah. I started to ask, am I Mexican enough? Am I too Mexican? Do I look like I should? It was rough for me to have that identity crisis, and then I wanted to overcompensate for my ethnicity. So, I want my children to embrace all three sides, especially at Church. They are American. They are Mexican. They are Argentinian. I want my children to be proud of where they are from even if they don't ever live there. I don't want others to question their identities so much. I want my children to think their way of living is something to be embraced.

Mothers like Cecilia cited that attendance in the Spanish-speaking ward allowed them to not only obtain parental support in Relief Society or from other migrant Church members but gave their children the opportunity to share space with other bicultural or multiracial children who were facing the same things as 1.5- or second-generation immigrants. This empowers mothers as they enjoy language retainment, engage in

cultural activities and traditions that may not be otherwise celebrated, and generally experience a greater sense of peace and belonging with other Latinx members. Of course, mothers were also quick to tell me some iteration of a phrase common in Church culture: "The Gospel is perfect, but the people are not." Mothers told me conflict was "bound" to happen in pan-ethnic congregations where different countries' cultures or politics may conflict and members undergo personality clashes. But overall, mothers felt more secure taking their children to pan-ethnic spaces where they could better engage with a broadly Latinx heritage and cultural environment not found in white, Anglo US Church spaces.

Andrea, another mother who spoke with me, was born in Costa Rica to Peruvian parents who were already members of the Church. After her parents arrived in the US, they separated shortly thereafter, with her mother remarrying a Jewish Cuban man. She described how living undocumented in a multicultural household affected her personal perspectives. Although at times it was incredibly difficult, she felt it improved her worldview and made her a more Christlike and spiritual person. She is now married to a white Church member, and she told me it was a struggle with her in-laws to demonstrate the benefits of multicultural approaches in raising their grandchildren. It was not until she brought her husband to the Spanish-speaking ward that he was able to see why raising their children in a Latinx environment was so important to her. She exclaimed:

> I'm very proud of my culture! I want my children to love it. I took my husband and kids to Church hoping they would learn Spanish and the Latino mindset. My husband grew up seeing the negative stereotypes but married into my family, and now he sees the beautiful too. He saw that Latinos work hard. We come, we contribute, and we fight to tell our story. I want my children to never feel ashamed of where we come from. Now he understands in a way he couldn't before. . . . Hopefully my in-laws can [become] more open-minded too.

For mothers who expressed a desire to preserve their traditions like Andrea, active measures to assert themselves and their children through

salient multiculturalism meant active participation in the Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking wards, which better allowed them to implement elements from each of their respective backgrounds to rear adaptable, culturally aware American, Latinx, Mormon children. The more pressure mothers felt from Anglo Church society to "assimilate," the more motivated mothers appeared to be to take their children to dominantly Latinx spaces. Fictive kin groups of mothers within the Church then become not only spaces formed as a strategy for survival in the US but are platforms in which these women can assert their personal agency and power to resist the overreaches of white patriarchy within the Church institution.

As immigration, gender, and religious politics are highly unlikely to decrease in importance in our daily societal interactions, we must look to subcommunities like Latina migrant Mormons, who tactically employ multiculturalism as a form of resistance in the face of resource and social capital scarcity for examples of adaptive parenting. Their efforts are consistent with previous research that has discussed how small-scale actions, sometimes called "weapons of the weak," can alter community experiences within an institution but do not risk threatening the overall power structure and, thereby, the benefits of group membership.[41] I believe it's important to recognize why Latina migrants, along with other underrepresented communities within Mormonism, have had to employ these adaptive tactics in order to be recognized for their immense contributions and unseen labor given to the mainstream Church. Church resources should be used to alleviate the disparities nonwhite/immigrant communities currently face instead of furthering their marginalization.

I am acutely aware that Mormons have historically been a controversial, misunderstood community. Latina migrants who are deeply underrepresented or similarly misunderstood in US society have been able to find recognition and pathways to success within US Church

41. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2015).

spaces. This should be recognized, as it has created an intense feeling of belonging and loyalty among many I interviewed. Loyalty from the white US Church, though, has often required a cost from Latina migrants—one that can compromise or erase identity and place by succumbing to Anglo assimilation pressures. My hope in conducting this study was to first and foremost amplify the diverse voices, circumstances, and contributions of Latina migrant mothers, many of whom are women I grew up with and who mothered me. I remain passionate about authentically sharing their stories. My secondary but equally important goal was to begin to lay a conversational foundation that asks both the LDS Church institution and its Anglo US communities to evaluate where it is succeeding or failing in assisting members who face intersecting societal disadvantages. By understanding underserved populations' perspectives on what the US Church can and *must* do better, we as a Church society can begin *intentional* action for structural and sociocultural change. I believe that in doing so, the Church could be a model for other influential religious and government bodies. Using the immense resource capital within Mormonism's (inter)national political and social landscapes, we can pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive future. It is a long road that requires recognition and reparation with the past and sincere preparation for the future. That, to me, as both researcher and Church member, is the most effective and purposeful way we can exemplify and create true reciprocity within our religious societies and *hermandades*.

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