

# How Our Lady of Guadalupe Became Lutheran: Latin American Migration and Religious Change

Luisa Feline Freier

*Student M. A. Latin American, Caribbean and Iberian Studies,  
University of Wisconsin-Madison*

## ABSTRACT

International migration is initiating myriad processes of religious change from the level of individual conversion to the institutional transformation of religious structures and practices. An approach combining a transnational perspective and the concept of diaspora space facilitates the analysis of the different scales, agents, and actions involved in migration-caused religious change. The article analyzes the broadening of Lutheranism to incorporate *Latino Catholic culture* into the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in Madison, Wisconsin. Under the leadership of their pastor, Latin American immigrants in Madison are agents redefining the understanding of the category *Lutheran* through the incorporation of popular Catholicism. Though strongly contested by the Roman Catholic Church, the ELCA accepts these processes due to its institutional interest in the recruitment of new Latino worshippers.

*Keywords:* 1. Latin American migration, 2. transnationalism, 3. Lutheranism (ELCA), 4. religious change, 5. Midwest.

## RESUMEN

Las migraciones internacionales causan varios procesos de cambio religioso desde el nivel de la conversión individual hasta la transformación institucional de las morfologías religiosas. Para facilitar el análisis de las diferentes escalas, agentes y acciones relacionados con los procesos migratorios que resultan en el cambio religioso, este artículo sugiere la combinación de una perspectiva transnacional y del concepto de espacio diaspórico. Después de la discusión de este cuadro teórico, el artículo analiza la expansión de la morfología de la iglesia evangélica luterana en América en Madison, Wisconsin, para incorporar la *cultura católica latina*. Exigiendo la incorporación del catolicismo popular, inmigrantes latinoamericanos en Madison determinan la redefinición del significado de la categoría *luterano* bajo el liderazgo de su pastor. Aunque la iglesia católica romana rechaza estos procesos, la ELCA los acepta por su interés institucional en el reclutamiento de los feligreses inmigrantes latinoamericanos.

*Palabras clave:* 1. migraciones latinoamericanas, 2. transnacionalismo, 3. luteranismo (ELCA), 4. cambio religioso, 5. Midwest.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

On October 6, 2002, the Latino Ministry of the Lutheran Nazareth Church<sup>2</sup> in Madison, Wisconsin, opened its doors for its first Spanish-language service. Ever since, two big signs on both sides of the church property proclaim: “*Ofrecemos la Santa Misa en Español*” (“We offer the Holy Mass in Spanish”). These signs and the religious syncretism they imply have led to severe tensions between the Lutheran Nazareth Church and a neighboring Roman Catholic congregation. Members of the St. Patrick Church, which is located just one block away from the Nazareth Church, believe the signs amount to religious fraud that misguides Latin American immigrants by pretending to offer a Roman Catholic mass.

Since the founding of the Nazareth Latino Ministry, the Lutheran practices of the Nazareth Church—what is considered to lie within the boundaries of the category “Lutheran”—has indeed changed. The Latino Ministry not only uses traditional Roman Catholic terminology, but it also celebrates a significantly more solemn service than commonly done in Lutheran churches. Additionally, the ministry incorporates Latin American Roman Catholic socioreligious festivities, such as the *quinceañera*, a girl’s 15th birthday celebration. Furthermore, the geographic space of the church has been transformed in important ways. Apart from the signs reading *santa misa* outside of the church building, little baptism vessels were put up in the church entrance. Even more intriguingly, a portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe seized its place

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<sup>2</sup>To protect the privacy of the informants, I have changed the names of the churches and all my interviewees.

on the left side of the church nave, directly across from a portrait of Martin Luther on the nave's right side.

While the Roman Catholic St. Patrick Church condemns these developments as religious fraud, the Lutheran Nazareth Church interprets the adoption of traditional Roman Catholic elements as the incorporation of *Latino culture* into the Lutheran tradition. The dispute between the two churches raises three important questions: Under what conditions and how are congregational morphologies changing in response to recent migration patterns? Who are the agents of this religious change and what are their incentives? And which theoretical framework offers us the tools for a comprehensive analysis of the processes of religious change initiated by international migration?

Migration experiences alter the surroundings and circumstances in which migrants constitute their lives in many ways. Thus, these experiences stimulate an especially strong need for the redefinition of identity referents, including religious sense-making, which can result in the conversion of migrants. When studying religious change, we should not only consider religious-conversion processes *per se* but also the transformation of the relationship individuals establish with religious institutions, the transformation of the meaning believers attribute to traditional religious practices, and the modification of the religious practices of a particular denomination (Odgers Ortiz, 2007:166).

To account for the various psychological, social, and institutional levels at which international migration initiates religious change, I suggest combining a transnational perspective (Levitt and Khagram, 2007) and Avtar Brah's (1996) concept of diaspora space. A transnational perspective's distant, bird's-eye view acknowledges the continuous social and psychological ties of Latin American converts to the religious worlds of their countries of origin. Brah's concept of diaspora space is based on a theoretical understanding that social identification stems from practices of categorization. When the ethnographer zooms in on a specific church setting, the concept offers a toolkit for the analysis of religious change at a micro level.

As David Fitzgerald puts it:

Ethnography at its best is like a camera with a zoom lens that can both capture the wide context of structure and narrowly focus on agents in a way that shows their interactions with that structure (Fitzgerald, 2006:9).

The first part of the article discusses this theoretical framework. After introducing the ethnographic case study, the second part analyzes the change in Lutheran migrant converts' attitudes toward the Roman Catholic Church, and their ongoing identification with Catholic tradition, which lead to their simultaneous identification with Lutheran teachings and the identity referent *Latino Catholic culture*. The third part analyzes the institutional religious change within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) that is based on multiculturalist claims related to this identity referent.

### *Theoretical Framework*

#### *Transnational Socio-Religious Fields Reconsidered*

In past decades Latin America's religious landscape has gradually turned more Protestant (Martin, 1990; Stoll, 1990; Gill, 1999; Alvarez, 2002), and Latin American immigrants in the United States are increasingly converting to non-Catholic Christian denominations (Greeley, 1972; Hunt, 1999 and 2000; Espinosa, Elizondo, and Miranda, 2003). Viewed from the theory of transnationalism, the relationship between these two conversion processes might seem self-evident: the increasingly Protestant surroundings of their places of origin familiarize and culturally prepare potential migrants for their conversion in the United States. At the same time, migrants' continuous transnational ties initiate change in the religious practices among those who remain behind (Levitt, 2003). At least for the Mexican case, however, Olga Odgers Ortiz (2007) has shown that communities with the highest migration rates remain

the most closely linked to Catholicism, whereas those with more pronounced religious diversity show the lowest migration rates.

Only multi-sited ethnographic studies (Fitzgerald, 2006) could effectively analyze the conversion effects of transnational religious activities of migrants and stay-at-homes (among others, see Hernández and O'Connor, 2006). However, the continuing prevalence of Catholicism in sending communities with high emigration rates also invites us to rethink the relationship between Latin American immigrant conversion and processes of religious change in the United States. To what extent do the transnational socioreligious fields (Levitt and Khagram, 2007) of Roman Catholicism, in which Latin American immigrants constitute their lives, initiate religious change within Anglo-American Christianity?

Although the transnationalism literature faces some risks and limitations,<sup>3</sup> an initial transnational bird's-eye view of the situation of Latin American immigrant converts in the United States is essential for understanding the context of migrants' exit and reception (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996) and the construction of the diasporic category of "Latino Catholic culture." The perspective of transnational social fields lets us conceptualize the world as multiple sets of dynamically overlapping and interacting social fields that create and shape seemingly bordered and bounded structures, actors, and processes (Levitt and Khagram, 2007). These transnational fields intersect and coexist within and beyond nation-state boundaries (Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2007), and they encompass discourses, material flows, and cultural interaction (Levitt and Khagram, 2007).

The theoretical frame of transnational social fields allows us to analyze the relationship of migrants with the religious worlds of their places of origin and their continuing attachment to these due to contact with family members and friends back home, a planned

<sup>3</sup>Transnational scholarship has been criticized for overstating the ostensible homogeneity of transnational communities, dismissing cross-community interactions and internal divisions (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002), and for drawing attention to what transnational scholarship negates—to the continued significance of the national (Hannerz, 1996; Fitzgerald, 2004).

return in the near future, or their mere memory and imagination of these worlds (Levitt, 2003:851). At the same time, the approach recognizes that migrants are also adapting to their new surroundings in the country of reception. This article applies a transnational perspective (Portes, 2003; Glick Schiller, 2003; Levitt and Khagram, 2007) without defining transnationalism necessarily as the *physical* translocality of migrants in at least two national settings.

Without essentializing current national borders, a transnational perspective of socioreligious fields also lets us acknowledge the physical nation-state border between Mexico and the United States as a crucial element for constructing the concept of Latino Catholic culture. This article will show that Latin American immigrants perceive the border as not only a political and economic frontier but also a massive social and psychological one, separating the United States from all of Latin America. This perception characterizes the identification with Latino Catholic culture and the related processes of religious change.

### *The Concept of Diaspora Space*

Avtar Brah's (1996) concept of diaspora space offers a useful frame to analyze migration-caused religious change once we have zoomed in on the micro level from the transnational bird's-eye view. This approach transcends the historic meaning of diaspora, as geographic displacement and takes into account the circumstances and reasons that lead to international migration. It also considers the processes of dislocation and multilocationality across geographic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological boundaries that the migration experience implies. Brah's approach does not entail an undifferentiated relativism for the diaspora concept,<sup>4</sup> in which everything is "hybrid, fluid, creolized, and syncretic" (Brubaker, 2005:11). Relying on a Foucauldian understanding of historically contingent genealogies, Brah stresses the importance of analyzing the specific power relations and boundary constructions that un-

<sup>4</sup>See Brubaker (2005) for a critique of the loss of the term's discriminatory power due to its semantic, conceptual, and disciplinary dispersion.

derlie diasporic border crossings as they are produced, reaffirmed, or challenged, not only on macro levels but in everyday life.

Brah explains that multiple migration journeys can “configure into one journey via a confluence of narratives as it is lived and re-lived, reproduced, and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory” (1996:183). Thus, the character of a specific diasporic community is not pre-given but constructed through a discourse that rests upon multiple modalities, such as race, class, religion, gender, language, and generation (Brah, 1996:183). In accordance with Brubaker (2005), I understand the category diaspora itself not as a bounded entity but as a discursive category of practice, that “is used to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilize energies, to appeal to loyalties” (Brubaker 2005:12). Although Brah uses the term identity,<sup>5</sup> I follow Brubaker and Cooper’s (2000) terminology of identification, categorization, self-understanding, commonality, and groupness.

To understand how the felt transnational religious belonging of migrants influences religious change, one must investigate the manifold social boundary constructions inherent in conversion processes. Meaning is not intrinsic but relational, and human identification, whether racial, ethnic, national, or diasporic, always stems from practices of categorization. It is constructed in relation and differentiation to an outside Other (Barth, 1998; Bourdieu, 1991; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Brubaker, 2002; Cornell and Hartmann, 1998). Brah’s approach expands on the binary of the insider and the outsider of social boundary-making processes and recognizes that there are “multiple others embedded within and across binaries, albeit one or more may be accorded priority within a given discursive formation” (Brah, 1996:184-5).

What does it mean then to analyze the construction of the identity referent “Latino Catholic culture” from the theoretical

<sup>5</sup>For Brubaker, “the trajectory of ‘diaspora’ resembles that of ‘identity,’ which moved from being a technical term of philosophy and psychoanalysis to a key term throughout the humanities and social sciences, and which came to be widely used in the media and popular culture” (2005:4).

approach of diaspora space? First, culture itself is understood as a process. One has to keep in mind that “the distinctiveness of a specific cultural element is itself a historical product of previous syncretisms, not a primordial principle, although essentialist discourse might represent it as such” (Brah, 1996:235). The emphasis of any sociological analysis from the theoretical approach of diaspora space should thus be on *what* is constructed as “custom,” “tradition,” or “value” (Brah, 1996:234).

Secondly, we must understand “Latino” or “Hispanic”<sup>6</sup> pan-ethnicity as a social construction. Some scholars deconstruct race and ethnicity as artifacts created by states through the use of census politics (Loveman and Muniz, 2007; Oboler, 1995; Rodríguez, 2000). Others continue to stress the political, cultural, and linguistic commonalities between Latin American immigrants, while understanding the social group itself, along with its discourse, as a process rather than a fixed entity or meaning (Flores and Benmayor, 1997). Along the same lines, the framework of diaspora space sees ethnicity as a “mode of narrativizing the everyday life world in and through processes of boundary formation” (Brah, 1996:241). Ethnic boundaries are rarely fixed and impermeable, and no exclusive categories are necessary for ethnic distinctions to occur. Rather, we must analyze ethnic labeling as a multilayered identification process with overlapping and unstable boundaries and contradictory heterogeneity within the ostensible homogeneous ethnic groups (Freier, 2008).

Lastly, when analyzing the construction of the category Latino Catholic culture, one has to take into account the critical role religion plays in the identification processes of believing migrants. In Manuel Vásquez’s words:

Religion helps immigrants imagine their homelands in diaspora and inscribe their memories and worldviews into the physical landscape and built environment. In addition, religion generates and re-

<sup>6</sup>There is no consensus among scholars about the preferred use of the labels Latino *versus* Hispanic (Oboler, 1995; Rodríguez, 2000). In this article, I favor the term Latino because it is the category that my interviewees generally used.



centers selves challenged by the migration process, producing new habituses, introducing new forms of collective and individual identity, and new understandings of citizenship, locality, and community. Although these processes are “imagined,” they are not inconsequential; they have tangible effects on space, time, and body (Vásquez, 2005:238).

Following Stepick (2005), I thus treat religion as a heuristic category that helps us understand how individuals understand themselves as subjects and how they engage in place-making. Religious categories are always subject to change, based on the identification and interests of the different individuals, groups, and institutional agents involved in their definition, reaffirmation, and contestation.

To summarize: The distant bird’s-eye view of a transnational perspective allows us to see the continuing social and psychological ties of Latin American Lutheran converts to the religious worlds of their countries of origin. Turning to another analytical lens and zooming in on the process of religious change at a specific location, Brah’s concept of diaspora space offers a toolkit for the analysis of the related boundary-making processes at a micro level.

### *The Case Study*

Recent case studies have analyzed how Latin American migrant religion “de-Europeanizes”<sup>7</sup> Anglo-American Catholicism (Juárez *et al.*, 2008; McAlister, 2002; Tweed, 1997; Warner, 1998), while also influencing more recently founded charismatic Protestant groups (Hernández and O’Connor, 2006; Menjívar, 2003). However, the literature has overlooked Latin American immigrant conversion to mainstream Protestantism, including Lutheranism. One explanation for that oversight is that foreign-born mainstream Protestants make up only 3 percent of religiously active Latinos in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2007:12).

<sup>7</sup>The term “de-Europeanize” was coined by Warner (1998).

However, when we consider that this small group of migrant worshippers has brought about major qualitative changes in the Lutheran tradition, their importance becomes evident.

Wisconsin's state capital, Madison, is an example of the increasing growth of Latino populations and Latino-oriented churches outside the traditional centers of Latin American immigration and Hispanic residential neighborhoods in the United States. The city and the entire state exemplify the quantitative explosion of Latino populations in the suburbs and mid-sized cities in the southern and midwestern states (Brewer and Suchan, 2001; Crane and Milliard, 2004). From 1990 to 2000, Wisconsin's Latino population has more than doubled (Chapa *et al.*, 2004). In 2000, the U.S. Census counted 8 512 Hispanics in Madison, 4 percent of its total population.<sup>8</sup>

As early as 1970, the Roman Catholic Church established a special office to serve the Latinos in the Diocese of Madison. This was in response to the first Latin American immigrants arriving in Madison from Cuba and Central America. Today, two Roman Catholic, two Methodist, one Pentecostal, and one Lutheran church offer Spanish-language religious services. The data for this article were gathered in an ethnographic study from September 2006 to November 2007, at the Lutheran Nazareth Church and the Roman Catholic St. Patrick Church. These churches offer a unique case study because they are the two biggest Latino congregations in Madison and are located within blocks of each other on the same street. This circumstance made it possible to analyze migrants' choice of which church to join independent of geographic location and recruitment through neighborhood networks.

Additionally, an analysis of the relationship between the two congregations sheds light on the role migrants' Catholic backgrounds and their continuous ties to Catholic culture play in their conversion process. Human identification is based on relational

<sup>8</sup>If we include undocumented migrants, the total number of Latino residents in Madison is presumably much higher. The NGO United Way (2006) estimated the Latino population of Dane County, home to Madison, at about 40 000 in 2006, or more than eight percent of its total population of 463 826.

“othering,” and Latino Lutheran migrants’ sense making of their conversion process is characterized by their dissociation from other Latino migrants who remain in the Roman Catholic Church.

The Latino Ministry of the Lutheran Nazareth Church, the Parroquia Nazareth, was founded in 2003 as a new ministry and an integral part of the church. About 200 Latinos attend the Sunday service, compared to 900 Anglo-Americans who worship at the English services. The Parroquia encompasses elements of what Foley and Hoge (2007) describe as “family-style,” “community-style,” and “civic leader” worship communities. Based on close ties among members of the congregation, the Parroquia strives for community building within the congregation, and it also addresses the concerns and interests of the broader Madison Latino community.

The three defining characteristics of the Nazareth Latino convert<sup>9</sup> congregation are: 1) The vast majority are first-generation migrants, and they were practicing Roman Catholics in their home countries. 2) Latino worshippers at the Lutheran Nazareth Church see themselves as a group sharing higher educational and socio-economic backgrounds than Latin American members of the Roman Catholic St. Patrick congregation. And 3) although roughly half of Nazareth Latino converts come from Mexico, they believe that they constitute a truly “Latino” congregation that comprises members of numerous Latin American countries, in contrast to the St. Patrick congregation, which they pejoratively label as “Mexican.”<sup>10</sup>

The Latino congregation at the Roman Catholic St. Patrick Church has grown from the initiative of Latino immigrants who held religious services at a social service center in the 1980s and the early 1990s. In 1995, the St. Patrick Church gave them permission to use its facilities. Since then, the number of Latinos

<sup>9</sup>The terms conversion and convert will be used for both official conversion and converts and those who attend the Nazareth Church without attaining official membership.

<sup>10</sup>For a detailed discussion of the class-based but ethnically labeled religious boundary making between the two congregations, see Freier (2008).

attending mass regularly has surpassed the number of Anglo-Americans. About 700 Latinos attend the Saturday evening and Sunday morning Spanish masses each week, compared to only 500 Anglo-American worshippers in the English services. However, it is intriguing that only very few Latino worshippers have become official members of the St. Patrick Church, and many perceive that the Anglo-American church community considers them tolerated guests. Because it focuses on worship with little lay participation and on religious education, the St. Patrick Spanish-language congregation encompasses characteristics of what Foley and Hoge (2007) call a typical Roman Catholic “house of worship.”

While Lutheran converts practice class-based but ethnically labeled boundary making towards the St. Patrick Latino congregation, Catholic Latino worshippers’ perceptions of Lutheran Latino converts are characterized by the reverse: a feeling of ethnic brotherhood and religious separation, that even includes feeling pity for the converts’ moral decay. Using the label of *hermanos separados* (separated brothers), which the Roman Catholic Church commonly employs to describe converts to Protestant and Evangelical Churches, the St. Patrick Latino congregation members describe Nazareth Latino worshippers as morally weak. They charge that their *hermanos separados* have left the Roman Catholic Church for materialistic reasons. Latino Catholics do not consider Lutheranism to be a different Christian denomination. Instead, they view it as a different religion or a sect. In particular, they condemn the Nazareth Church for its use of traditionally Catholic terminology and imagery, especially the portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe, claiming that these things are a strategy of deceit to “pull people over” from Roman Catholicism. The complex relationship between the two congregations shows how religious and ethnic signifiers slide into one another in the processes of socioreligious boundary making and that “racialized power configures into hierarchies, not simply between dominant and subordinate groups of people, but also among them” (Brah, 1996:3).

### *Migration-Initiated Conversion Processes*

Olga Odgers Ortiz sees international migration as a factor leading to religious change based on four main characteristics: 1) migrants' conversion due to the exposure to a context of greater religious diversity, 2) migrants distancing themselves from traditional mechanisms of social control, 3) the vulnerability associated with the migratory condition, and 4) the process of redefining identity referents in the integration process into the destination society (2007:168-9). These are important reasons explaining why international migration leads to religious change. However, we have to add another main characteristic of migrants' search for religious sense-making: their transnational socioreligious ties to their places of origin.

Migrants' exposure to more religious diversity and the contestation of institutional Roman Catholic authority results in Latinos' conversion to Lutheranism and the denominational changes seen in Madison. However, it is the combination of a feeling of commonality as vulnerable Latino immigrants and migrant converts' continuous transnational Catholic identification that leads to the construction of, and identification with, Latino Catholic culture. Applying a transnational perspective and the concept of diaspora space, reveals how the above factors play out on personal, communal, and institutional levels. It also reveals that the Lutheran Nazareth Church's adoption of Our Lady of Guadalupe symbolizes religious change based on Latino immigrants' claims for the recognition of Latino Catholic culture.

Non-Catholic Christian groups are growing at high rates in many Latin American countries (Martin, 1990; Stoll, 1990; Gill, 1999; Alvarez, 2002). However, the majority of Latino migrants only confront a true religious market, formed by a pool of numerous Christian denominations, once they settle in the United States. At the same time, it is often precisely their migration experience that causes the need for a redefinition of their religious identification. A 76-year-old Lutheran convert from Mexico explained:

I think people are looking for something they couldn't find in the Catholic religion. [She pauses.] So they are looking for something that better resembles this change of life, now, in this country, something, something more. And they feel freer to be able to look for it. So, some become Lutheran, some become Buddhist.

In the context of more pronounced religious liberty, Latino worshippers at the Parroquia Nazareth criticize the Roman Catholic Church as being a conservative and manipulative power, and they distance themselves from its traditional mechanisms of social control (Odgers Ortiz, 2007). They take issue with the church's hierarchical structure and its use of the concepts of sin and guilt to control its members, especially the less-educated communities in the smaller villages of their home countries.

Although many worshippers at the Parroquia Nazareth criticize the Roman Catholic Church as an institution, and welcome the more liberal values and practices of the Lutheran Nazareth Church, they maintain strong ties to Roman Catholicism as it is lived in their places of origin. Many interviewees explained that they were not planning to officially convert to Lutheranism because they would move back to their home countries at some point in the future, and they feared that being Lutheran would alienate them from their families and friends (for similar cases, see León, 1998, and Marquardt, 2005). First-generation Latin American migrants who attend the Lutheran Nazareth Church thus distance themselves from the Roman Catholic Church's traditional mechanisms of social control in a context of transnational socioreligious ties that still bind them to the Catholic worlds of their places of origin.

Some worshippers with strong transnational ties to Catholicism find that attending a Lutheran church leads to personal dilemmas and strong feelings of guilt. Converts come up with different strategies to reconcile their Catholic and their newly attained Lutheran self-understandings. Some stress that they will only attend the Nazareth Church for a limited amount of time, and others attend both the Lutheran service at the Parroquia Nazareth and the

Catholic mass at the St. Patrick Church. Even official converts explain that although they are not *Roman* Catholic anymore, they still consider themselves as *Apostolic* Catholics or even as *Lutheran* Catholics. A 43-year-old Lutheran worshipper from Panama said, “I’m Lutheran because I like the reform. I absolutely agree to everything Lutheranism encompasses. And I’m Catholic, because I like the Catholic tradition.”

Even official Latino members of the Lutheran Nazareth Church emphasize the sociocultural aspects of Roman Catholicism, saying that these things were fundamental to their upbringing and family lives in their home countries and still influence their daily lives in the United States. A 42-year-old Lutheran worshipper from Honduras explained:

I miss our traditions a lot, for example, the celebration of the saints. During the *Semana Santa*, there are so many activities to participate in, and one grows up with that, and here it’s all so light, so one misses being there [in the home country] on these dates. [She pauses.] It’s that the religious traditions, the processions and all of that, it’s very strong. [She pauses again.] It’s a way of life, no? You grow up seeing it, although you don’t understand why. It’s something you live with. You live it, and live it, and it’s an annual tradition. It’s something that captures you—it’s nearly not optional.

Latino Lutheran converts welcome the ELCA’s independence from the Vatican, but at the same time, they stress that Martin Luther’s will for reform did not initially aspire to the founding of a separate church. Migrants’ somewhat schizophrenic relationship to the Roman Catholic Church and their decision to join a Lutheran congregation that offers them a very liturgical worship service, incorporating a traditionally more Roman Catholic terminology and artifacts, can only be understood in the context of these Latinos’ continuous transnational ties to Roman Catholicism.

One example of the relationship between a migrant choosing a Lutheran church with more liberal practices and the ongoing

importance of Roman Catholic culture as an identity referent appears in the migrant's welcoming the ELCA's acceptance of divorce and homosexuality, while simultaneously feeling the need to receive the Holy Communion on a weekly basis. Most of the interviewees at the Parroquia Nazareth were divorced or mentioned separated or homosexual family members or friends even though these categories had not been a sampling criteria. The contestation of Roman Catholicism's exclusion of these groups from the Holy Communion was a main reason for their conversion to Lutheranism.<sup>11</sup> A 76-year-old Mexican Lutheran worshipper narrated:

In the Catholic Church, I couldn't receive the Lord's Supper, and I was left with a trauma, because my mother-in-law [pause] she is divorced too. She was divorced, and when we went to church in Mexico, she couldn't receive the Lord's Supper. And I asked: Why? She couldn't because she was divorced. So, she died in sin in the eyes of the Catholic Church. So, when I got here, I was left with that idea that I couldn't receive the Lord's Supper, but I went [to a Catholic Church], and I did receive it, and I felt with sin, because I said: apart from being divorced, I was receiving the Lord's Supper without having the right to do so. So, that's a double sin. [She pauses.] So when I came here [to the Lutheran Nazareth Church], the table of the Lord's Supper was an Open Table, and I really liked that. That: "Come—no matter which denomination, the table of God is set, come!" They don't put anything like: You are divorced. You can't receive Lord's Supper!" So, now I don't feel guilty. I feel comfortable when I go and receive the Lord's Supper, and I feel free.

The interviewee criticizes the Roman Catholic Church for being a powerful, conservative institution denying divorced people the right to receive the Holy Communion, and she welcomes the open communion practiced by the ELCA. At the same time,

<sup>11</sup>The Pew Research Center (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007) finds that 47 percent of Hispanic Catholics disapprove of the Roman Catholic Church's position on divorce, and seven percent of all converts name this as a main reason for their conversion.



the key reason for her official conversion to Lutheranism was her rootedness in Mexican Roman Catholic tradition, manifested in her desire to receive the Holy Communion every Sunday.<sup>12</sup> Latin American immigrants' conversion to Lutheranism in Madison is based on their distancing themselves from the Roman Catholic Church as an institution. At the same time, they choose the Parroquia Nazareth because its religious practices are very close to the Roman Catholic tradition.

### *Latino Catholic Culture and Our Lady of Guadalupe*

Apart from common identification as Catholics, worshippers at the Parroquia Nazareth share feelings of groupness as a diasporic Latino congregation. The construction of this Latino identification rests on feelings of commonality based on shared language, customs, and similar migration experiences, and on a number of different categorization processes, such as the class-based but ethnically labeled boundary-making process towards the St. Patrick Church's supposedly "Mexican" congregation.

Immigrants' vulnerability is an important factor in the discursive construction of their new identity referent as a diasporic ethnic group. Brah explains that "ethnicity emerges out of shared socioeconomic, cultural, and political conditions and is played out in the construction of cultural narratives about these conditions that invoke notions of distinctive genealogies and particularities of historical experiences" (Brah, 1996:238). Latin American immigrants at the Parroquia Nazareth share a similar—real or imagined—migration history, which includes the territorial crossing of nation-state borders, and often negatively experienced economic and social borders, that they faced as undocumented or unwelcome immigrants in the United States. A 37-year-old worshipper from Venezuela explained:

<sup>12</sup>Most Anglo-American Lutheran services do not practice Holy Communion on a weekly basis. The Latino Ministry of the Nazareth Church acknowledges its worshippers' transnational Catholic ties by offering the Lord's Supper every Sunday.

Here, outside of our countries, we are all Hispanics, or Latinos, here we are all one *raza*.<sup>13</sup> The Americans classify us like one single *raza*. When I—when we are in church, it doesn't matter where you are from, you feel Hispanic. You don't separate anymore, we don't separate anymore—but we feel like a single culture, a single *raza*. Because we are rejected, we feel alike.

External, racialized categorization and social rejection are a constitutive part of the narrative of Latino ethnicity at the Parroquia Nazareth. Multiple individual migration experiences are narrated as a single diasporic journey, inscribed in common memory and built upon a compassionate self-understanding as a Latino diaspora. The same interviewee stated:

The great majority come with nothing. They pass the river. They come through Mexico. Only God knows how they cross that border [pauses] from rapes, to murders, humiliations, misery [pauses] many have been raped, raped in front of their husbands. Yes, I know people that have been raped. Many people have died on the way. So, all these sacrifices you have to do. You can come from your country with everything—but they take your clothes and they give you misery for passing and crossing. And you come here with your spirit on the floor. To come and find an impressive border, a great change, sociocultural, political, religious. It hurts my heart. And although I am Colombian, I'm Hispanic, and I will die Hispanic, always!

The interviewee had not personally experienced an undocumented border crossing on land from Mexico to the United States. Her narration of the human rights violations occurring at the nation-state border and the common social borders faced in the United States nevertheless make her identify collectively as Hispanic.

Even Latino immigrants who reside and work in Madison legally have crossed not only territorial but also cultural, social, and

<sup>13</sup>Raza cannot simply be translated as “race.” Depending on the context, it can mean race, ethnicity, a people, or all of these concepts at once (Rodríguez, 2000).

psychological boundaries, and they have to find ways to settle and make new sense of their lives. For the collective identification as Latinos, the U.S.-Mexican border becomes the crucial dividing line between here and there, between them—the American citizens, and us—Latin American immigrants who have crossed *la línea* (the border), whether on foot or by air, legally or as undocumented immigrants. The meaning of the border thus transcends the territorial division between Mexico and the United States and symbolizes a political, economic, social, and psychological border between the United States and all of Latin America.

The feeling of panethnic groupness as a common Latino diaspora transcends nationalist identification, but it incorporates individuals' transnational ties to Roman Catholicism. The Parroquia Nazareth is made up of Latin American immigrants who share a Roman Catholic background and an imagined common migration history, but who come from different Latin American countries. Thus, they bring with them a variety of religious traditions and symbols. The Latino Ministry's strategy of reconciling not only Lutheran and Roman Catholic tradition but also various Catholic customs is accomplished by recognizing and reinforcing national similarities and differences. Similar to other case studies (Stepick, 2005; Marquardt, 2005; León, 1998), the Parroquia Nazareth forges panethnic identity through the celebration of unity in diversity, incorporating what immigrants understand as their national traditions: food, music, and specific religious customs. The celebration of sociocultural differences and similarities reinforces national identification, and at the same time, it encourages panethnic Latino identification. The Parroquia thereby allows worshippers to articulate their specific cultural expressions of faith, while at the same time keeping the unity of the congregation under the umbrella of the Latino category (see Menjívar, 1999).

The Nazareth Church's incorporation of the Mexican Lady of Guadalupe symbolizes how different national variations of Roman Catholic tradition are broadened and personal transnational ties to Roman Catholicism merge into a feeling of a shared La-

tino Catholic culture.<sup>14</sup> A 48-year-old Columbian worshipper explained:

Some love the Virgin much more than others. The Mexicans are passionate about Our Lady of Guadalupe, Colombians about the Virgin of Rosario. But it's the same Virgin, like in one thousand forms, the only thing that changes is the color of her dress. For me the Virgin always will be the Virgin. Me, today I wear pink, tomorrow red, another day green, that doesn't matter, I'm still Ana Teresa! The same thing seems to happen with the Virgin. It's that inside of Catholicism, we change her colors. It's Our Lady of Guadalupe of Mexico, it's the Virgin of all!

It is especially interesting that the Nazareth Church accepts the Mexican Lady of Guadalupe as the representative of all other Latin American Marian apparitions, given that the Latino Nazareth worshippers generally take great care to clearly separate themselves from St. Patrick's "Mexican" congregation. Despite the general discourse of ethno-religious *othering* against Mexicans, approximately half of the Nazareth Latino worshippers are Mexican. Thus, Guadalupe represents the majority national group. Furthermore, this is the only Latin American Marian apparition fairly well known in U.S. Christianity, which most definitely helped the Nazareth Church accept the image.

Roman Catholic Latino worshippers at the St. Patrick Church condemn the Lutheran Nazareth Church's use of Catholic terminology and imagery, especially the portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe. A worshipper from Ecuador claimed:

Our brothers at Nazareth, they say—they put up a sign that reads: the Holy Mass. They put up a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and then they have the Virgin, they have an image of Our Lady of

<sup>14</sup>Our Lady of Guadalupe is known in Mexico as *La Virgen Morena* (the brown-skinned Virgin). Mexican Catholics believe that Guadalupe was a manifestation of the Virgin Mary in the Americas. She is a cultural and political symbol of significant importance for Mexicans and all Latin Americans (Castillo, 2001). A papal decree in 1999 made her the official "Patroness of the Americas" (Brading, 2001).

Guadalupe. And we know that they did that with the idea that if they had the image there, of the Virgin, they would make the Hispanics feel more comfortable. Saying that it is the Holy Mass, and saying that they are priests, confuses the people. Many, many people went there and afterwards they come back and say: I thought it was a Catholic Church! So my sadness is this: if you want to go to one of the other churches, okay, you're free to do that. But not by means of deception, do I make myself clear? There I do see a violation.

As an export of popular Mexican religion (Odgers Ortiz, 2007), the portrait of Our Lady of Guadalupe symbolizes the disputed syncretic character of Latino Catholic culture at the Lutheran Nazareth Church.<sup>15</sup>

Our Lady of Guadalupe, a product of a historical syncretism between Roman Catholicism and indigenous Mexican beliefs, has varying theological interpretations, ranging from an ancient indigenous goddess to a practical replacement for God in prayer and piety (Johnson, 2002). The various Latin American apparitions of the Virgin Mary form an essential part of popular Catholicism, through which Christianity itself came to be expressed in Mexico, Central, and South America. Often under the leadership of Latin American women, popular Catholicism has survived and has been passed down through generations (Johnson, 2006). These apparitions exemplify how faith in popular religion is always challenged, interpreted, and appropriated. Especially for Latin American immigrant women, the Virgin's approachability as being both human and female, like them, continues to be an essential element of their religiosity when they migrate to the United States (Megill-Cobbler, 2007).

The Nazareth Church's incorporation of the Virgin's portrait into its sanctuary—across the nave from the portrait of Martin Luther and above a little wooden altar with candles showing the images of the Virgin and the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ

<sup>15</sup>The syncretism of "popular Catholicism" and Lutheranism is not inherently new to the context of Latin American immigration to the United States. See Rostas and Droggers for the Latin American case (1995).

that are lit during the Parroquia's service—is even more intriguing because it not only demonstrates how religious conversion is subject to the construction of a new religious identity referent, Latino Catholic culture, but it also symbolizes denominational religious change on an institutional level. Although both Catholic and Lutheran theologians have hailed the Virgin of Guadalupe as a model of culturally sensitive evangelization,<sup>16</sup> her image has been widely contested even in Roman Catholic Anglo-American churches, especially in the Midwest, where Latin American immigrants have introduced her only in recent years (Jefferds and Milliard, 2004). Although some Lutheran theologians encourage the incorporation of Our Lady of Guadalupe into ELCA's catechism, arguing that it would represent desirable Lutheran multiculturalism (Johnson, 2006; Cabello, 2007), others fear that this could lead to excessive Marian devotion.<sup>17</sup> Why did the Nazareth Lutheran Church incorporate the portrait of Our Lady of Guadalupe as the most prominent of various Roman Catholic elements?

### *Institutional Agents and Religious Change*

The different interpretations of what Lutheran and Catholic tradition should encompass have led not only to personal dilemmas and social tensions in the Madison Latino migrant community but also to an institutional dispute between the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. To understand the background of these tensions, one has to consider the current crisis for both the Roman Catholic Church and the ELCA. In Latin America, the Roman Catholic Church is losing members due to the high growth rates of charismatic Protestant

<sup>16</sup>Johnson explains that while the Iberian conquerors and missionaries were forcing conversions during the Spanish *conquista*, “the method of Guadalupe is based on beauty, recognition and respect for ‘the other’ and friendly dialogue” (Johnson, 2002:14) and that her olive skin is that of “a New World mestiza, one who represents the blending of the Iberian European with the indigenous peoples of the Americas” (2002:11).

<sup>17</sup>For the ongoing discussion about the incorporation of the Virgin of Guadalupe within the ELCA, see Megill-Cobbler (2007).

churches. At the same time, Latino membership is increasingly important for the future of Roman Catholicism in the United States. It is estimated that by 2030, Latinos will make up about 40 percent of all Catholics in the United States (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007).

During a special worship service for the installation of the new bishop of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin in September 2007, the senior pastor of the Lutheran Nazareth Church explained the ELCA's crisis and the need to develop new mission strategies. He described the church body as dominantly white and significantly older than the average age for Americans, and he lamented its increasing loss of members. Only 0.2 percent of religious Latinos in the United States are Lutherans (Pew Research Center, 2007), and Latinos only constitute 0.8 percent of ELCA membership (Cruz-Natal, 2007). However, about 15 percent of all of Madison's Latino Christian worshippers attend the Lutheran Nazareth Church, compared to about 75 percent who attend Roman Catholic services. In the Madison religious market, the ELCA and the Roman Catholic Church are thus competing for Latin American immigrant members. It is highly likely that this competition decisively influences the ELCA's disposition to broaden the boundaries of its Lutheran catechism.

The dispute over the redefinition of denominational categories manifests on an institutional level, as can be seen in the Nazareth Latino Ministry's discursive incorporation of Roman Catholic terminology, including, for example, the terms *misa* (mass) and *padre* (father). Lutheran liturgy adhering to the Augsburg Confession includes "mass" as one possible label for a Lutheran church service. More importantly, however, the Venezuelan-born pastor claims that the lack of a nonambiguous Spanish translation for the word "worship" makes the use of the term *misa* necessary for cultural reasons:

If you think about it, [in Spanish] we don't have a word for worship. *Servicio de adoración*, that's adoration service, it's not worship. So in Spanish, if I say *servicio de adoración* it could be anything, but if I

say *misa*, they [Latinos] know that they will hear the word of God, that they're going to sing, and that they will have communion. So there is no other word.

The pastor gave a similar explanation for being called *padre* (father), instead of using the direct translation of the traditional Lutheran term *pastor*. Apart from legitimizing his title through its existence in Lutheran liturgy, he explained that the Spanish title *pastor* would not earn him the appropriate respect in the cultural context of the Latino Ministry, as in Latin America “anyone could be called a pastor.” The Mexican Roman Catholic priest at the St. Patrick Church pejoratively described *pastores protestantes* (Protestant pastors) as lacking any kind of sound theological formation and therefore incapable of responsibly leading their congregations. This view supports the Lutheran pastor's conviction that he must refrain from the Spanish label *pastor*, in order to defend his theological authority in the context of Latino religious culture.

The Latino pastor is a main agent in the broadening of the ELCA's Lutheran catechism to incorporate what he calls Latino Catholic culture. After studying theology in Venezuela and earning a Master of Divinity degree from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, he was ordained as an ELCA pastor in the early 1990s. He successfully founded a Latin American Lutheran immigrant parish in Illinois, and, in 2002, went on to join the Lutheran Nazareth Church in Madison. The pastor is very committed to parish and missionary work, but he also offers Madison's Latino community social and psychological support as a family counselor, a community leader, and a musician.

He set a condition for accepting the position as pastor of the Nazareth Latino Ministry: the incorporation of Roman Catholic religious terms, practices, and artifacts. He does not see these elements as a convergence to Roman Catholicism *per se* but as the cultural integration of ethno-religious Latino heritage into Lutheranism. The pastor argues that there is no homogeneous way of



being Lutheran, and he points out the different worship styles of the Anglo-American congregation within the Lutheran Nazareth Church itself, such as a rock-music service on Friday nights. The pastor believes that within Lutheranism, different ethnic and cultural groups can and should celebrate their own forms of worship. Drawing a comparison to the gospel style of African Americans in the United States and the more charismatic Lutheran congregations in Puerto Rico, he promotes incorporating Latino Catholic culture into the Lutheran tradition:

As Latino Lutherans, we should understand that our faith in Jesus Christ does not require an abandonment of our common roots to become Nordic Europeans in the name of the Gospel. [He pauses.] So, we keep our traditions, with the water, the Saints, the Virgin, but all of it from a Lutheran point of view. So, yes, culturally we are more Catholic, culturally. But everyone who enters this church knows that it isn't a church affiliated with the Vatican, it's not Roman. But it keeps up the liturgy—because the Lutheran Church is very liturgical—and, at the same time, we can add something else, which is the Latin flavor. Something *alegre* joyful.

The Latino pastor's integration philosophy rests on a clear rejection of assimilation theories and the invocation of a multicultural ideology:

I think that the concept of the melting pot—the United States being a melting pot—is not a good analogy anymore because that implies that we all fuse into something. And I'm still brown, I'm not white, I'm not getting like a European type and I'm not blond. I am who I am—but—I really enjoy Thanksgiving, I really enjoy the festivities that we do here, I really enjoy a lot of the things of the system here, and I'm participating in it, but I am also enriching it with who I am. Therefore, I like the analogy more of a salad bowl—where the tomato is still a tomato, and the lettuce is still the lettuce. And in the church that's even greater because the love of Christ is the dressing that permeates the whole salad, and it becomes a beautiful, wonderful salad. One salad, but with many ingredients.

The most intriguing aspect of the Latino pastor's philosophy is his discursive secularization of Latin American Catholicism that occurs when he interprets it as Latino culture. His ideological stance of multiculturalism lets him incorporate Roman Catholic tradition as *cultural* elements into his Lutheran Latino sermon during which some of the migrant worshippers then re-elevate their meaning to a religious level.

The pastor believes that there are many things in the Lutheran Church that are not negotiable, including "the preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and the teaching according to the Lutheran confession." Other things, including the use of icons like the portrait of Our Lady of Guadalupe, he describes as *adiaphora*, as matters not essential to the faith and thus permissible in Lutheranism. He acknowledged that some Latin American immigrant worshippers, especially Mexicans, pray to the Virgin. But he explained that although he would never stop anyone from praying in front of the image, he trusted that through religious education, he could stop the "abuse" of the Virgin as an idol in the long run. However, the Latino Ministry honors Our Virgin of Guadalupe with a special service on the day of her apparition, December 12.

Similar to the argumentation of Maxwell Johnson (2006), the Latino pastor claims that the portrait of Our Lady of Guadalupe does not camouflage the Lutheran denomination of the Nazareth Church. Instead, it symbolizes the incorporation of "Latino culture" into the Lutheran reform movement. He sees the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico, and similar apparitions in other Latin American countries, as divine historic events that stopped the slaughtering of the indigenous people of Spanish colonial America and enabled their syncretic incorporation into Christianity. Implicitly promoting similar syncretic developments between Latin American Roman Catholicism and Anglo-American Lutheranism, he argues that the acceptance of Our Lady of Guadalupe, from a culturally integrative perspective, "strengthen[s] the faith and the identity of a people in their journey to Lutheranism," and condemns her abandonment as an

act of sociocultural oppression. Although Odgers Ortiz finds that migrant practices of popular religion mark the presence of immigrants in the places of destination as a “minority and sometimes, stigmatized group” (2007:176), the portrait of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the Nazareth Church rather de-centers and entangles the concepts of the native and the immigrant, by challenging the notion of a clear hierarchy between minority and majority congregations (Brah, 1996:189).

A theological movement within the ELCA favors the incorporation of the Virgin of Guadalupe (see Cabello, 2007; Johnson, 2006; Megill-Cobbler, 2007), but the Nazareth Church’s culturally integrative approach towards traditionally Latin American Catholic elements has not gone uncontested. The church’s democratic structure, however, gave the Nazareth’s senior pastor the necessary authority to accept and encourage these developments. He criticizes the policy of other churches that merely “rent their churches out to the Latinos,” and he stresses that the Parroquia Nazareth is an integral part of the Nazareth Church. He used the following anecdote to describe his integration philosophy and the incorporation of Our Lady of Guadalupe as Lutheran hospitality:

We had a student from Venezuela as a guest in my home. We asked him: “Tell us what you used to do on Christmas!” He told us about his customs and the whole family did that, and then we also did ours, because he needed to learn ours as well. But we thought: he is a member of our family for this year, we are good hosts, we are going to attempt in some small way to make him feel comfortable. That is what Our Lady is. We are a family that is growing. We don’t quite understand Our Lady. For me, it’s Mariology, but for them [the Latinos], it’s not. They’ve got it all figured out. So, we have Our Lady on the left, and Martin Luther on the right. We don’t like candles over by Martin, because that’s not the way we do things, they can light candles over there. I have never lit a candle for Our Lady, probably never will. But if others want to, that’s okay, we can allow that.

It is especially intriguing that although the senior pastor himself understands Latinos’ relationship with the Virgin as Mariol-

ogy, he accepts her portrait hanging in his church. At the same time, he rejects any accusations that his ministry is deceiving Latino newcomers:

I mean, we are not changing the rest of the building. We are not doing this to fake people out, to make them believe that we are really Catholics. We don't pretend like we're not really Lutherans. But Lutherans are to be good hosts, Lutherans are to be adaptable. There is a word in the Lutheran Church that means 'it is not of the essence'—the word is *adiaphora*. Candles or no candles, little *bautismo* fonts or no *bautismo* fonts... it's not that we would change our understanding of Baptism or the Holy Supper. That is of the essence.

In the same interview, however, the senior pastor explained that although the Latino Ministry had put up vessels in the entrance of the church, following Lutheran teachings, they did not go through any ceremony of blessing the water. The vast majority of Latino worshippers at the Nazareth Church who dip their fingers in the supposedly Holy Water and make the sign of the cross when entering and leaving the church do not know that the water has not been blessed. This fact, indeed, questions the ELCA's integrity in its recruitment of former Roman Catholic Latinos and could be described as religious fraud.

Further extending his integration philosophy, the senior pastor uses a diasporic discourse to construct a narrative of the Nazareth Church's history that starts with the founding of the ELCA by Norwegian settlers in 1853 and ends with the arrival of Latin American immigrants today. At the celebration worship of the fifth anniversary of the Parroquia Nazareth in 2007, the senior pastor preached to the Latino congregation in English, while the Latino pastor consecutively translated what he was saying into Spanish:

I'm a supporter of this service! I see my entire family history pass by. My mother grew up in Madison, and she did not grow up worshipping in English. She was one of nine children and her father thought

that all should learn English, but he couldn't imagine praying in English. They prayed in Norwegian. I hear you guys say the same thing: "Our children should learn English!" But you pray in Spanish because Spanish is your language of prayer, like my mom's language of prayer was Norwegian. From 1853 to 1929, for the first 75 years, the worship was held in a language completely different from English, and now another 75 years later we are back to worshipping in two languages. It is the way it was meant to be in this place. You are helping us to go back to where we began.

Only after World War I, did the Lutheran Nazareth Church see that the exclusive use of Norwegian was a serious deterrent to gaining new members, and so it gradually provided a full English worship service. The senior pastor instrumentalizes the migrant history of the founding fathers of the Nazareth Church, which is symbolized by a gigantic patchwork banner in one of the community rooms showing a group of immigrant Norwegian settlers next to a small wooden church, to create a notion of common diasporic fate among Latin American and Anglo-American worshippers.

Anglo-American members of the congregation generally accept the church's official integration philosophy. The senior pastor knows of only one family that left the Nazareth Church in protest against the portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The majority of the approximately 6 300 Anglo-American church members seem to welcome, or at least tolerate, the culturally inclusive approach toward what is understood as Latino Catholic culture. One of the Anglo-American members explained:

See, I was just thinking this on Sunday, that the cultural and the religious, especially in the Mexican experience, is so intertwined that you can't rip the religion away from someone's cultural things. Like the *quinceañera*. It's cultural, but it's so religious, too. It's a reaffirmation. So, [the Latino Pastor] is trying to create a bridge to allow Latinos who grew up in the Roman Catholic Church to be able to have a Lutheran Church, feeling comfortable, without feeling that there is no regard for their religious and cultural beliefs.

The incorporation of religious elements that are interpreted as Latino Catholic culture is not only accepted by Anglo-American worshippers, but it seems to increasingly influence the ways in which religious customs are carried out within the English-speaking congregation. Anglo-American worshippers expressed how much they appreciated the Latino church band and choir and that they wished the English service could incorporate a similar style of songs. More intriguingly, many mentioned their astonishment about the way the Latino congregation had influenced the Anglo congregation's celebration of First Communion, where the girls recently started wearing "these white dresses, almost like little brides' dresses." The Anglo-American Lutheran congregation's adoption of the Roman Catholic tradition of extravagant First Communion dresses shows how "religious exchange and syncretism arise out of neighborly observation of each other's practices and out of the permeability of religious boundaries" (Rudolph, 2005:195). It is likely that increased contact between the Anglo-American and the Latino services of the Lutheran Nazareth Church will lead to the selective adoption of what are understood as traditionally more "Catholic" and "Lutheran" practices on both sides.

### *Conclusion*

In Madison, the Lutheran Nazareth Church's incorporation of the portrait of Our Lady of Guadalupe physically marks and symbolizes the construction of migrant converts' identification with the category *Latino Catholic culture* and the related institutional, religious change within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Combining a transnational perspective and the concept of diaspora space, this article has recognized both the transnational religious fields in which migrants constitute their lives and the boundary-making processes of religious change that take place on a micro level.

The conversion of Latin American immigrants in Madison to Lutheranism results from their exposure to more religious diver-

sity, their contestation of institutional Roman Catholic authority, and the construction of the new identity referent *Latino Catholic culture*, which is simultaneously characterized by transnational Catholic identification and feelings of commonality as vulnerable diasporic migrants. The various factors that lead to the redefinition of religious identification are interwoven and often cause contradictions both for individual converts and for the religious institutions involved. Converts have to solve the dilemma of wanting to leave the Roman Catholic Church based on a rational critique of its hierarchical structure, while at the same time still identifying as Catholics due to strong transnational ties to the Catholic worlds of their home countries. They choose the Latino Ministry of the Lutheran Nazareth Church because it offers them a high church service that is very similar to a traditional Catholic mass, while simultaneously providing them access to more liberal Lutheran teachings.

The ELCA and the Roman Catholic Church in Madison are competing for Latin American immigrants, and the recruitment of new members is the main reason for the Nazareth Church's incorporation of Roman Catholic elements. The dichotomy between the ELCA's institutional interest in recruiting new migrant members, on the one hand, and the ostensible inviolability of traditional religious teachings, on the other hand, have caused an ongoing institutional discussion about the legitimacy of the incorporation of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The Lutheran Latino pastor solves this conflict by reaffirming the need to recognize his congregation's identification with Latino Catholic culture. Making claims based on the incorporation of this identity referent, he discursively secularizes Roman Catholic tradition and incorporates Catholic elements as an act of liberal multiculturalism. Although the Latino pastor uses Roman Catholic terminology and practices the Holy Communion on a weekly basis, the Anglo-American senior pastor of the church has developed new socioreligious narratives to include a fateful understanding of the incorporation of Latin American immigrants into the ELCA.

Apparently fixed and stable religious categories undergo constant reinterpretation. A close look at the construction of social and religious boundaries between a Lutheran Latin American immigrant congregation and its Roman Catholic counterpart, and between the Lutheran Latino Ministry and the church's Anglo-American core, shows that there are various boundary-making processes and overlapping power relations inherent in migration-caused religious change. These results suggest that we must be cautious not to stigmatize Latin American migrant worshippers as the disadvantaged minority group in the renegotiation of religious categories and practices. Indeed, we must recognize their agency in inscribing their religious memories and worldviews into the landscape of American Lutheranism.

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