

# *Matriarchy*

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# Matriarchy

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Printmaking in the Department of Printmaking of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island

By

M. Camila Escobar Vélez  
2018

Approved by Master's Examination Committee:

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Megan Foster, Graduate Program Director, Printmaking, Thesis Chair

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Andrew Raftery, Professor, Printmaking, Thesis Advisor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ruudt', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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Ruudt Peters, Thesis External Advisor

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## Abstract

This book collects my personal and artistic process since I got to the United States two years ago. My cultural and religious background is the foundation for my artistic explorations. This book collects theoretical references and personal stories that explore the impact of Catholicism on my personal life especially as a woman.



## Acknowledgements

Mi agradecimiento siempre será infinito para mis padres Heriberto y Mercedes. También para mis hermanos y sobrina Alex, Diana y Frida. Sin ustedes no habría sido posible realizar mis estudios y este proyecto.

Thanks to my peers and friends Audrey, Kelly, Kate, Valeria and Anna to provide an outstanding learning environment.



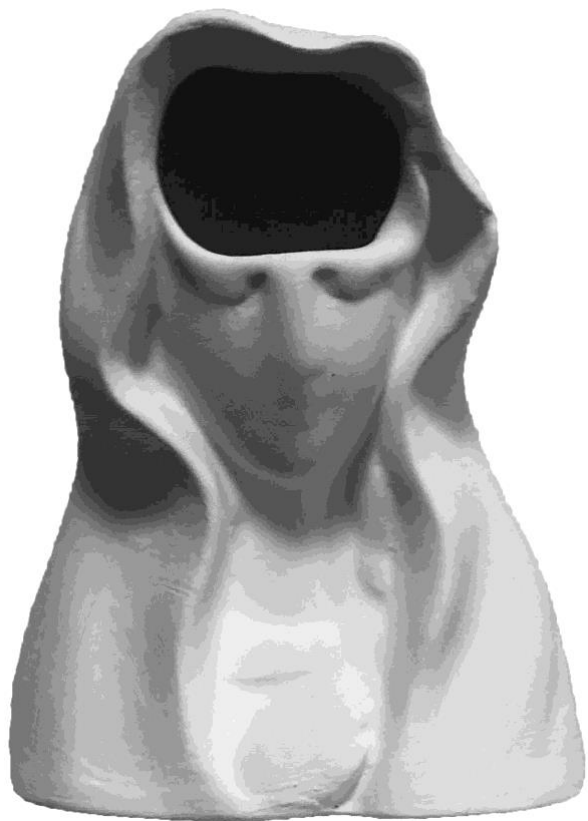
## Introduction

I grew up with a dualistic moral foundation, I was raised to be a good woman. The country I lived was (is) Catholic, my family too. As a child, I never thought about the relationship of this faith and the impact on my family dynamics, especially my female role models. Nevertheless, I saw many similarities in their behavior; they were always there for any family member even if they are having a bad moment. The duty of women in my family was to take care of others, be concerned about other's comfort, they wanted to be saints. Each of my female roles was the core of their families; they took care of each family member, they weren't a priority. They suffered, but other's suffering was first; they were the core of the family but not protagonists. They were always there but at the same time invisible, taken for granted.





The educational system I grew up in treated women and men differently for the same qualities and actions. Certain behaviors, especially sexual, were celebrated for males but were reproached for females. Expectations also played an important role by determining how both male and females relate to each other. Now I understand this education as an inflexible dualistic structure.









# *Mother and Nature*



Virgin Mary represents the female role for Catholics. Pre-Hispanic cultures had an immense devotion to mother earth also called Pachamama. Therefore, there are similarities in the devotion to Virgin Mary and Nature.

With the conquest of America by the Spanish, Catholicism arrived in the new continent. Spanish evangelist adopted nature imagery to establish a connection with Andean cultures. The role of the Virgin Mary was related to the role of nature and that impacted the Myriad cult which is strong in these communities. For example, the image of Virgin Mary adopted ornaments like flowers and fruits. Also, the use of incense and holy water.



“The Virgin and Pachamama are the providers and caregivers of life and health of their descendants. Both represent the quality of mother and virgin, they are not associated with any spouse. Both represent the human life. But their maternity has differences. The Pachamama, takes care of fertility, health, feeding, the life, and wellness of its descendants. On the other side, Mary represents the spiritual motherhood.”<sup>i</sup>



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<sup>1</sup>J. van Kessel, “Pachamama, La Virgina” *Cuaderno de Investigación en Cultura y Tecnología Andina*, (1992): 37-38.



*Memories*



“People will selectively use *tradition* to justify anything.”<sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>ii</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 8.



After 105 years, in 1991 the country wrote a new constitution. The main concern of the new constitution was fighting the drug trafficking. Also, there were brief but relevant references to religious matters.

“Freedom of beliefs is guaranteed. Every person has the right to profess any religion and spread it individually or collectively.”

But still, in 2018 the citizens sing the National Anthem and the stanza that says “understand the words of the one who died on the cross.”



The country was in a civil war, two political parties were in a cruel confrontation. He was a kid, around 12 years old, who went to mass every Sunday with his mom and siblings. During the sermon, the priest said: “Any conservative who kills a liberal will reach heaven.” From that moment the boy questioned the Catholic Church, but he still believed in Catholicism.







Her siblings were baptized a couple weeks after they were born. Getting baptized is important to prevent demons to take over the soul of the baby. But when she was born their parents were more educated and forgot to baptize her. They remembered to do so when it was time to prepare her for the first communion.



Since 1991 the country recognizes non-Catholic marriages for legal purposes and secular education was mandatory in public schools.



As part of the school curriculum, she was preparing to get the first communion. As part of the preparation and in order to get communion she needed to visit the confessional and declare her sins to the priest. She had no clue about what to tell the priest, her mind was blank, she began to experience the feeling of guilt towards the institution. But, what kind of sins can a seven years old girl commit?



The government declared that schools need to teach how to prevent pregnancy to the teenager students. It was a nun's school and they made clear to the students that the institution was against all those methods. So they taught the girls how important is to wait until marriage to have sexual relationships and start a family.

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<sup>iii</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All be Feminists*. (New York: Anchor Books, 2014), 32.



During the sexual education class, the professor talked about abortion and showed explicit video clips and images to persuade the girls that this practice was a crime and a sin. During the class, all the students said how terrible this practice was in order to pass, but outside of the classroom some of them did not think that way. For the final test there was only one way to pass: argue that abortion is a sin.



She went with her friend to practice an abortion. She felt really bad because her friend was committing a sin, killing someone. But her friend preferred to end the pregnancy than being judged by her parents because she was having a baby outside of marriage.



“In every culture in the world, female sexuality is about shame. Even cultures that expect women to be sexy - like many in the West - still do not expect them to be sexual. The shame we attach to female sexuality is about control. Many cultures and religions control women’s bodies in one way or another.”<sup>iv</sup>



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<sup>iv</sup> Ibid., 53-54.



He was married under the Catholic ritual. A few years later he wanted to get a divorce but that is not possible in Catholicism instead, he got a civil divorce. Being legally divorced, he started a family with another woman and has been with her for 40 years. They can't get married because under the Catholic Church you can only get married once.



She started a family with a divorced man; they have been together for almost 40 years and have three kids. She can't take communion because under the eyes of God she is living in sin. Evermore, her mother still asks her when she will get married.



“Because I’m female, I’m expected to aspire to marriage; I’m expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important. A marriage can be a good thing; it can be a source of joy and love and mutual support. But why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don’t teach boys the same?”<sup>v</sup>

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v Ibid., 28-29.



Her mother once told her “I rather prefer a daughter married to an alcoholic man than a daughter that is not married.”





“Gender roles are so deeply conditioned in us that we will often follow them even when they chafe against our true desires, our needs, our happiness.”<sup>vi</sup>



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<sup>vi</sup> Ibid., 19.



She remembers being at her mother's ceramics studio. She saw how her mother pours the slip into the molds, polished, painted and fired the figures.



Almost twenty years later she was working on an art project and was in a different country but her mother helped her cast her own face and sent the model to her daughter so she can develop her work.





“Sexuality now embodies this religious impulse in the form of the demand for love (considered to be an ‘absolute’ demand) that is distinct from both need and desire (a kind of ecstatic transcendence that eclipses sexuality altogether) lends further credibility to the Symbolic as that which operates for human subjects as the inaccessible but all-determining deity.”<sup>vii</sup>

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vii Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 76-77.



This book was printed

By:

M. Camila Escobar Velez

At:

Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Rhode Island

In:

May 2017

Using:

UV printer on acrylic

Storage:

In a wood box