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**The Virgin of Altagracia in the Intra Caribbean  
Migration Context; An Intersectional Study of  
Migration and Lived Religion of Dominican Puerto  
Rican Women.**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

This thesis is an intersectional analysis of gender, religion, migration, and race. It focuses on the experiences of Dominican Puerto Rican women in the context of Intra-Caribbean migration, focusing on their lived religious experiences in this transnational space. I specifically explore their intimate and social reflections on the virgin of Altagracia, as a unifying familiar figure in the new environment that provides comfort for women who have left homeland and reminds women of this devotion in the Dominican Republic.

The purpose of this research is to introduce a Global South, Intra Caribbean migratory perspective to current sociological debates on religion and migration (Vásquez 2016, Pasura 2016, Levitt 2009). In this thesis I argue that although many studies about religion and migration focus either on the fixed or hybrid understandings of religion from the Global South to Global North migratory context, this research contends that women develop individualized, situated, and personalized interpretations of religion and spirituality that interconnect with a broader cultural and social interpretations of Altagracia.

The thesis provides a contribution to an intersectional analysis of religion, gender, and spirituality, because religion in migration is a subject that has not been central for Social Sciences researchers in this Intra Caribbean context. It explores the relationship between intimate and collective meanings of Altagracia without focusing exclusively on the sociological meanings attributed to her by Catholicism. The research is informed by a feminist methodology, which attempts to address a gap in knowledge around women's experiences of Intra Caribbean migration.

The purpose of this methodology is to bring to the spotlight insights of women who live in the areas of San Juan and Canovanas, locations that have not been sufficiently researched. Original primary data foreground the reflections of Dominican migrant women in Puerto Rico on gender, race, religion, and migration. As suggested by the N vivo data analysis software, the data show that Altagracian rituals are connected to the sacred location of Higüey in Dominican Republic and to the colonial history of Catholicism common to the Spanish Caribbean. These rituals and devotions of Altagracia are reproduced, recreated,

and re-evaluated with a gendered personal and self-improvement purpose in mind within the transnational space.

This thesis contributes to theories of lived religion as proposed by scholars like (Pasura 2014, Jones 2019, McGuire 2016, Hirschman 2004). Its original contribution to knowledge lies also in the enriched understanding of migrant women's lives in the Caribbean and it proposes a new awareness of Intra Caribbean migration and its interconnections with gendered religious transnationalism. The data show that women prioritize everyday interpretations of religion and spirituality before organized religion.

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## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

María M. Saavedra Corrada

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This thesis is a sociological reflection about the interpretations of spirituality and religion in the context of Dominican Puerto Rican women living in Puerto Rico. Many scholars have theorized on how religion is relevant for people in the migrant context from economically disadvantaged countries of the global south to the global north (Pasura 2018, Levitt 2019, Orsi 1985, Vásquez 2018). This research is an attempt to do a Sociological analysis of one of the many migration scenarios from the global south to other global south neighbors. As Nehring reminds us, if compared with the Global North, the Global South is lacking on Sociological interpretations of everyday life's popular narratives of psychological resources used by women to solve their situated problems. (Nehring 2018). Spirituality and religion are resources for validating the experiences, providing purpose and self-improvement of women's lives.

The Intra Caribbean migration dynamic between Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico has been researched by many scholars focusing mainly on the economic and political events that make Dominicans move to Puerto Rico (Duany 2018, Graziano 2016, Guarnizo 2017, Nina 2012, Thompson, and Hernández Angueira 2008). This thesis is an attempt to make an updated analysis of Intra Caribbean migration considering recent circumstances that questions the idea that Dominicans migrate to Puerto Rico solely depending on the economic and political events. With this research, I address the following research questions:

- How does the migratory experience process from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico shape the understandings and meanings of faith, religion, and spirituality for women?
- How do Dominican Puerto Rican women produce and reproduced the virgin of Altagracia's devotion in the Puerto Rican context?

Studies have shown that the common language and the possibility of entering the US mainland are part of the reasons for the movement of Dominican women to

Puerto Rico (Guarnizo 2017, Graziano 2016). In this thesis I explore how women contest and provoke the boundaries of religion and prioritize faith and spirituality in their migrant experience. The purpose of this thesis is to provide a sociological and empirically based reflection on the religious and spiritual figure of Altagracia in the transnational context of Dominican Puerto Rican women living in Puerto Rico. I explore how this devotion is used in a custom-made way to fit the spiritual and material needs of Dominican Puerto Rican women in the Caribbean context.

The migrant experience is a time when women reflect on religion and traditions, and decide which aspects are useful for them or not. Scholars like Ryan and Vachelli make sense of migrant's individual narratives which are produced and reflected by collective experiences (Ryan, Vachelli 2013). Similarly, Pasura explains that in the migrant scenario women and children are made responsible for maintaining religious traditions and values, which are sometimes challenged by women who desire more control over their lives (Pasura 2014). This research, therefore, provides a contribution to the sociological reflections on religion because of the shared experiences of Dominican Puerto Rican women who adapt their religious traditions to meet their specific spiritual needs in the new transnational space that is forged through migration.

This research is centered on a feminist epistemological analysis which is both a methodology and a proposal to grant epistemological authority to the women who have the situated knowledge. Reflections on positionality and reflexivity helped me understand the process of trust, and the sharing of knowledge based on the social conditions that the interviewer and the women interviewed brought prior to the interview (Merton, 1972; Ryan, 2015). I explain this reflexive process in detail in Chapter three. I learned many things about the migration process from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico. I got the opportunity to know the women, through questions on the context and background of their lives, that started in Dominican Republic. I also asked about the reasons these women left Dominican Republic, how they integrated or managed themselves in Puerto Rican society, and their beliefs and reflections on religion and the Altagracia figure. The experiences these women had were connected to some aspect of their religious beliefs. In the following chapters I will explain exactly how the

migration experience is linked to the process of migration, integration, and their expectations of moving forward in life.

In this thesis, I detail the findings of this research, starting with the way in which the advocacy of Altagracia is explained by the literature and the popular ways of relating to her. Also, I will demonstrate the tensions that come from the migration experience and the caring communities that make this process possible. Finally, I will present a critical analysis of the empowering and disempowering aspects of popular religion and the further lines of research that may compliment this effort.

## 1.2 Development of the research question

The thesis addresses the following research questions:

- How does the migratory experience process from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico shape the understandings and meanings of faith, religion, and spirituality for women?
- How do Dominican Puerto Rican produce and reproduced the virgin of Altagracia's devotion in the Puerto Rican context?

The migratory context is a moment when women evaluate religious and social values, deciding which to keep, discard or adapt. Pasura argues that in the migratory context of Zimbabweans living in Britain, women and children are expected to safeguard religious values and traditions (Pasura 2016). This thesis intends to address the question of how women shape their understandings of faith, religion, and spirituality in the migrant scenario.

Many researchers describe how women prioritize the unity of the family as one of the cultural and religious values that serves as an obstacle for overcoming the violence women endure in the Latin American and Caribbean scenario (Hume and Wilding 2019, D'Alonzo, 2012; Stevens, 1974; Mendez-Luck, 2016). Data on femicides, the killing of women, that happen in the Caribbean and Latin American countries appear to support this (Horn, 2014).

How do Dominican Puerto Rican women produce and reproduced the virgin of Altagracia's devotion in the Puerto Rican context? Ryan and Vachelli argue that in the context of transnational religion, individual narratives are structured by collective narratives which are produced and reflected based on experience (Ryan, Vachelli 2013) These narratives travel with women in order to articulate their sense of belonging (Ryan, Vachelli 2013) lived experiences on the migration process to Puerto Rico shape women's understandings of the meaning of religion. With very little exceptions, religion was an important and meaningful aspect of the lives of almost all the women I interviewed. In this thesis there is evidence to argue that the migration process, changes the way religion is reflected upon from a learned experience from childhood to a chosen and reflected narrative. For example, many women expressed that after coming to Puerto Rico they felt as if they were left to their own devices when taking care of their children. This is when the women decided to migrate with their children or had them when they had already migrated. Some women left their children at the care of family in Dominican Republic, often with the maternal grandmother. However, the women who raised their children, without the support of family, relied many times on religion as a resource for enduring their sense of solitude. Religion acquired a different meaning for women who lived a migration process, thus I needed to understand the connection between the migration process and the acquired meaning to religion.

### **1.3 My Story**

In this section I want to explain how and why my research changed from a more structured notion of Marianism towards women's lived religion approach. My mother was a Catholic nun. She says she had a vocation since she was little and at the age of 19, entered the order of the Nuns of the Sacred Heart where she was educated during childhood. My mother did not do her formation in Puerto Rico but was sent to Argentina. At the moment Argentina was under military rule and she was present when some of her priest friends were murdered or disappeared, she had to be smuggled in the backside of a truck to pass the Argentinean border. She tells me that, although this may be hard to understand for some people, she was very happy there. She talks about enjoying a simple life with the peasants, and there is another story about when she saw a Jaguar in

the Pampa. To me she was like Saint Francis insanely happy or Oscar Romero in El Salvador.

There are other more interesting stories about how she sneaked out of the convent to hang out with some friends at the local bar. However, my upbringing was a little different I too went to Catholic school but none of my friends wanted to be nun, or did they care about social inequality or going on a mission. They all went to Ivy league Universities in the US and their view on Catholic church was, that it was a corrupt institution that just wanted women to feel guilty about having sex and spending too much money on clothes and champagne. I was influenced by both positions. Inside I wanted to be nun without having to live a life of chastity. So, I did my own mission, not as a nun because I was a mother already at 21, but I decided to work for an NGO where I stayed for 5 years and one summer went to do volunteer work in Haiti. I too saw my share of death, not by Argentinean military but by drug related struggles in a poor community in my country. I once went to a friend that was part of the community and asked her, how do you cope with all this violence and all this poverty and injustice? She said to me something that seems like a Martin Luther King speech, God is watching. Like her, I would say ninety percent of people from the community believed in God and went to church. Even the drug dealers would ask the local priest for his blessing, I saw that with my own eyes. But I came to another conclusion. God was not watching and if he was, he didn't care.

I was angry and burnt out, I just wanted to get out. It was not difficult for me to do that; I had a master's degree and started teaching. I came back to the basics of Social Science and started getting the desire to do my PhD. This is when I came across the work of Nicole Bourque. I didn't know research like that was possible, a serious sociologist who studies religion as an important aspect of society. This did not happen at the University of Puerto Rico, religion for sociologist is not even described as rational or a serious concern, with a mainly Marxist oriented Social Science department most Academics in Puerto Rico as good atheist and would never do research like that. Nicole passed away but before she did, she pointed in the direction of Dominic Pasura, who talks about religion being useful as social networking and as means of integration for Zimbabwean migrants in the UK. Arriving at Glasgow this list of scholars is becoming bigger and now I am certain, not all sociologist, but a fair number of

us think religion is crucial for understanding society. Religion was important in the context of the community where I worked and is certainly crucial in my own personal history. At first, I wanted to go back to Haiti and do some research about religiosity there. But after reconsidering my proposal, I came up with a more personal sociological research question. Why is the figure of Altagracia so important for women in Dominican society? How does Altagracia influence women's code of conduct in the context of Dominican migrants in Puerto Rico? Is Altagracia a model of womanhood that just makes women feel bad about having sex, or not being married while doing it? Is Marianism, making women feel guilty about themselves if they are not willing to forgive adverse circumstances with their partners? Is Marianism making women docile or submissive? On the other hand, is she that comforting figure that helps women endure violence and pain? Do these women feel weaker or stronger in front of her figure? I have theoretical reinforcement to make sense of these questions. There is Mahmood who thinks religious piety for women is something that is not an imposition but a personal way of empowerment. There is Mohanty who says there is a difference between a middle- or high-class women and being a woman in a context of poverty in a world defined by class struggle and hegemony. There is literature on how the figure of Mary works like a mirror for Latin American women who know pain and endurance. I come with my mind full of literature and my heart open to answer a basic question. Why is Mary relevant for these women? With their feminine Caribbean wisdom, I wish to answer maybe my own question. How do these women endure this society? What is it about religion that gives them solace and makes them strong? Or is this all a justification for women to endure violence and machismo?

## 1.4 Context

This thesis offers a reflection on migration that questions the idea that Dominicans *only* move to Puerto Rico running away from poverty and political violence. Some of the women who participated in this research are Dominican born women who migrated to Puerto Rico and just three months after hurricane Maria in times of scarcity and intense reconstruction work, these women decided to stay in Puerto Rico. I carried out the research between January and July 2018 in the backdrop of Hurricane Maria, a disaster which had a devastating effect on

Puerto Rico Stephen Castles argues that this reflection economic aspects of migration are considered the sedentary bias that affects a deeper reflection on migration (Castles 2013, Castles, 2010). This research can show that migratory movements are not exclusive to economic events that push and pull people away from one place to another. This thesis contemplates a more recent political and economic context of both Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico where Dominican Republic is on economic growth while Puerto Rico faces one of the darkest moments of economic debt, hurricane Maria, earthquakes and more recently a global pandemic of Covid 19. Most of the literature available on Dominican migration contends that this movement of people are mostly determined by economic scarcity and political instability (Hernandez, 2004). Literature on Dominican migration to Puerto Rico starts with the most important migration movement registered in the history of Dominican Republic in 1962 after the assassination of dictator Trujillo in 1961 and became a trend in the 1990s (Hernández, 2004, Duany, 1992) In conclusion, this research brings an original analysis of migration from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico in the context of 2018 to 2020.

Most of the women I interviewed came to Puerto Rico during the 1980s and 1990s, one of the most significant waves of migration as proposed by Hernandez, Duany, Guarnizo and Graziano (Hernandez 2008, Duany 2016, Guarnizo 2017 and Graziano 2008). The empirical data gathered and analyzed with the help of NVivo appear to support that very few women migrated during the 2000s and later because recent harsher migration policies, for economic reasons and natural events such as hurricane Maria. Based on the information gathered for this research, the most common migration reason why women moved from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico was because of family relations and transnational marriages that have been happening between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans for many decades. United States migration policies in this historical time period (1990-2018) make the migration process harder and more dangerous for Dominican women who sometimes resorted to dangerous maritime routes. At the time of this research, President Trump's migration policies and the policies since the 1990s have made migration conditions harder and more difficult Dominican women.



Also, with this research participants suggested that migration from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico in the 1970s and 1980s was easier and more flexible (see also San Miguel, Campos and Cabeza). As San Miguel explains, before 1961 Trujillo did not allow migration from Dominican Republic as a safety measure to prevent the organization of transnational political opposition (Martinez San Miguel 2001). This is important to understand because during this historical period of the 1960s and 70s US migration policies were considered flexible, that is, the United States relaxed their migration policies with Dominican Republic. (Cabeza and Campos 2016). When analyzing the data for themes and migration trends, the testimonies of Fela and Mercedes, who came to Puerto Rico during the 60s and 70s show that there was a more liberal movement of back-and-forth migration of Dominicans to Puerto Rico and vice versa.

The Spanish Caribbean independence process came after the Hispanic American war (1898) when the USA intervened to help Cuba in their war for independence from Spain. After losing this war on 1898, Spain, through the provisions of the Treaty of Paris, granted the USA the territories of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines as part of the peace agreement and the renouncement of Cuban territory (Duany 1992). Since then, Puerto Rico has been a US colony, where the population have US citizenship (since 1917), but with restricted rights.

About the island of Hispaniola, this was a shared French-Spanish colonial experience where the island was divided in two territories. Saint-Domingue belonged to the French and Santo Domingo to the Spanish. In Haiti was the first American revolution (1781-1803) that led to its independence in 1804. What was known as the French colony of Saint-Domingue became the Republic of Haiti (Duany 1992). Since 1822, Haiti invaded and occupied the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo and maintained its rule for twenty-two years. In 1844, after many Creole efforts, Dominican Republic finally became independent from Haiti. This war of independence, led by the Dominican Juan Pablo Duarte, was an experience that somehow has lasted in the cultural mindsets of Dominicans, who still talk about defending their sovereignty from Haiti.

Migration, within the Caribbean, is something that has been going on for more than 200 years. Despite the economic crisis in Puerto Rico, there is a significant number of Dominicans who move to Puerto Rico for a diversity of reasons. In

general, to get upward social mobility. Dominican migrants in Puerto Rico are mostly undocumented. Official Census Bureau numbers estimate that, only in 2015, there were 95,000 new migrants (US Census Bureau 2015). Since the 1990s, it has been estimated that more than 500,000 people have built handmade boats and tried to cross the Caribbean Sea from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico. The distance between the islands is only 60 miles (13 Graziano, Frank 2006). The transcultural experience, or the exchange of people and cultures, is evident between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. However, the Dominican community needs to be seen as a heterogeneous group of people who have different ages, occupations, and reason for migrating, as well as racial and gender diverse identities (43 Mintz, Sidney W. 2011; 42 Mintz, Sidney 2008).

On the most recent Dominican electoral polls of 2016, the government office that rules electoral events, the Junta Central Electoral (JCE), counted 384,522 votes in the diaspora (JCE 2017) that is 5% of the total votes casted in the election. This is done because the government of the Dominican Republic recognizes the importance of the diaspora, since the massive migration movements that have taken place since 1962. Dominican diaspora has been participating in elections since 2004, with the right to suffrage and the opportunity to run for office (Hernandez 2012). The participation has increased from 2004 with a total of 108,000 voters to 384,522 electors in the 2016 elections: a 356% increase in the last twelve years.

The Dominican diaspora is not only a political force; economically, the remittances proceeding from the diaspora represents 7% of the Gross Domestic Product of Dominican Republic IN WHAT YEAR, with a total of 30 billion dollars received in foreign remittances (Ramon 2017). This economic aspect of migration is regarded as an example of how the Dominican diaspora is committed to the economic progress of their homeland. Dominican migrants in the US are frequently the source of income for their families in the Dominican Republic (Guarnizo 2017, 2003, 1997). On the other hand, Luis Guarnizo warns us about the oversimplification of the migration process and the value of the diaspora in economic terms. There are cultural exchanges that are not quantified but are as valuable as the economic contributions (Guarnizo, 2017). Transnationalism is a two-way street. The Dominican diaspora is known to have the longing of returning to the Dominican Republic, sociologists use the term

return or reverse migration. Return migration is not exclusive to Dominicans, it also addressed by scholars about the European and African diaspora as well. Guarnizo brings as an example of return migration the experience of President Leonel Fernandez (Guarnizo, 1997), who lived in New York city, beginning 1962, and attended school there. He returned to the Dominican Republic in 1971, before becoming president. The Dominican Republic is a country that values their people in the diaspora and in Puerto Rico their presence has added cultural and political value to our transnational relationship.

## 1.5 Main findings and arguments

The main findings of this research are an attempt to understand the intersectional aspects of gender, race, migration religion and spirituality in the context of the Dominican Puerto Rican women living in Puerto Rico. This thesis supports understandings of transnational religion done in previous research similar to the works of Pasura, Orsi, Vásquez and Levitt (Pasura 2020, Levitt 2018, Orsi 1965, Vásquez 2016). Using a feminist epistemological methodology, I conclude that women relate to religion and spirituality by performing the rituals and devotions for Altagracia. These rituals are transplanted and translated in Puerto Rico developing new meanings and understandings of religion and spirituality. As Ryan and Vachelli argue, individual religious narratives are produced and reflected based on collective experiences of religion (Ryan, Vachelli 2013) Using grounded theory as a methodological form of acquiring knowledge and using the N Vivo software I came to the conclusion that the most important themes of this thesis are; Visa, residence and citizenship issues, transnational caring communities, shared Dominican and Puerto Rican identities, family support, faith, spirituality, domestic violence, love, death, machismo/gendered power struggles, religious values, petitions/ rituals for Altagracia and economic struggles.

The empirical conclude that Dominican born women living in Puerto Rico have strong economic, cultural, social, and religious connections to Dominican Republic further evidencing that transnationalism is a global practice. The term 'sociocultural transnationalism' is used by many scholars referring to the cultural practice used to incorporate the sense of identity when feeling in between the

country of origin and the host country (Faist, 2000; Glick Schiller, 2000; Itzigsohn, 2000; Portes, Guarnizo 2017 and Landolt, 1999; Tambiah, 2000). As Itzigsohn and Saucedo (2000) remind us, such activities can be private like maintaining a close relationship with family and friends from Dominican Republic. Although women travel on a regular basis from Puerto Rico to Dominican Republic, there are aspects of residence, visa and citizenship and economic struggles that can be very challenging in the migration process as explained in chapter four of this thesis. Economic aspects of migration are still important for the Dominican diaspora and most women are very committed to the economic progress of their families in Dominican Republic. This research on women migrants in Puerto Rico concurs with Guarnizo's findings that Dominicans in the US are also frequently the source of income for their families in the Dominican Republic (Guarnizo 2017, 2003, 1997, 2017). Evidence of research participants' support to their families can be found in all chapters of this thesis but more specifically on chapter four. Challenging aspects of migration are solved with family support, friendship and community ties and solidarity between family and friends. In conclusion, Dominican migrant women living in Puerto Rico practice transnationalism and their economic stability is important both for mobility and the wellbeing of their family in Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic.

The research shows how religion and spirituality, expressed in the rituals and petitions for *Altagracia*, remain relevant and important for Dominican Puerto Rican women. I agree with Pasura and Vásquez (Vásquez 2018, Pasura 2020) who argue that religion needs further research and religious manifestation are worth examining and specifically in the context of diaspora and migrant communities. For example, Vásquez and Marquardt used the apparition of the Virgin Mary in Clearwater, Tampa as a topic for the ethnographic work concluding that Marian expressions are an indication that religion is alive and kicking especially in the migrant scenario (Vásquez & Marquardt, 2000). In this vein, I can also conclude that religion is not disappearing, and although society in many contexts is becoming secularized, there is robust evidence to conclude that religion is important and crucial for Dominican Puerto Rican women.

When reviewing the literature there are many scholars that help deepen the analysis of gendered migration in a transnational context. Some scholars focus

on the political and globalization messages of religion (Berger 2004, Tweed 2008, Vásquez 2014, Levitt 2018, Pasura 2012). Others are concerned with the gendered and personal struggles of migration and religion (Friedmann 2014, Sanchez Walsh 2008). In terms of the Intra Caribbean migratory context this research is novel and contributes with a new understanding of the Dominican diaspora living in Puerto Rico.

With this research I am able to conclude that women who belong to Altagracian Associations serve as social connection for other migrant families and for their Puerto Rican communities. Other studies of Marian devotion in the migratory context evidence how Mary has been translated and tans nationalized by migrants all over the world (Orsi 2011, Vásquez and Marquardt 2000). This suggests that cultural and popular manifestations of Marian devotion play an important role in the integration of people to the host territory. For migrants, keeping their relationship with God and sustain their social bond with the church is crucial and this thesis is evidence that this is the case in the context of Intra Caribbean migration.

There are negative aspects of religious communities that this thesis failed to address, and I understand is a subject that deserves further and deeper research. Based on the analysis of the data, using the N vivo software aspects of gendered domestic violence, alcohol problems, divorce and objectivation of women in the job marker are reasons why women decided to move from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico. As Nina Estrella explains Dominican Puerto Rican who live in Puerto Rico many times came to escape personal and domestic violent situations to find a safer and more stable place to live (Nina Estrella 2016). This safe space this is not always found as this thesis provides evidence that women need to endure situations of violence in domestic and workspaces in a situation of vulnerability and lack of family support.

Although it is possible to conclude that faith, religion, and religious communities most times serves as safe place for vulnerable migrant women and girls, the negative aspects of sexual violence in religious communities are not something women did not discuss with me. In the case of Zori, a woman who contributed with this thesis, the cultural trust in religious men ended for her in sexual violence. Campos and Cabezas explain that religious morality is an obstacle for

Puerto Rican women to support public policies that defend sexual workers where the Dominican community of women is especially vulnerable (Campos and Cabezas 2019) Although sexual and domestic violence is a reality for many Dominican women, this was not an issue that participants of this research explored.

With this thesis it is possible to conclude that Dominican women living in Puerto Rico are mostly women who migrated because either friends or had family helped them move. This thesis supports the argument of Patricia Fitzpatrick, who argues that Dominican migrant women in Spain are stigmatized as domestic and sexual workers, but have also an important role in the market economy by working as health care workers, education system as well as in restaurants and beauty salons (Fitzpatrick 2013) Although some women who participated in this research arrived in Puerto Rico via maritime travels, and their testimonies are very important to shed light upon because of the violence and cruelties that they endured in process it was the case that most women came to Puerto Rico because of family or friends.

## **1.6 Justification**

The Marxist standpoint that religion is the opiate of the masses appeals to a sense of disempowerment of religious people. However, the importance of popular religion in the migrant scenario is something that some sociologists of religion interpret as misleading and ignorant. With this research, I want to expand this discussion. Through the experiences of Dominican migrant women, I want to understand their point of view on the empowering or disempowering aspects of religion. By using the example of Altagracia in the context of Dominican migrants, I have the opportunity to understand if the figure of Altagracia is something that the Catholic Church institution uses to educate in favor of their gendered understanding of women's position. According to Evelyn Stevens, the Catholic church uses the globalized figure of the virgin Mary in a locally, racially, and ethnically relatable way as is Altagracia (Protector of Dominican Republic), to promote the values of self-sacrifice and moral superiority, to endure the male dominated violence that still exists in Latin America (Stevens 1973). Using the figure of Altagracia to understand the role of

religion in the context of the Dominican migrant woman in Puerto Rico is a novel research ground, that can contribute to the field and may be of interest to social scientist that understand religion to be an important research subject.

Previous researchers of Sociology and religion have not considered the specific context of Dominican migrant women living in Puerto Rico, and the figure of the Virgin of Altagracia as a relevant topic of research. For example, one of the most important scholars on the Sociology of religion is Peggy Levitt. Her studies on the Dominican community in the US are an important consideration for this research (Levitt, 1997, 1998). Levitt's reflections on the transnational reach of the Catholic church in American communities is vast, from Irish to Brazilians. However, this research is different from hers, because of how the dogmatic aspects of Altagracia are incorporated; as well as the contextual difference between the Dominican religious communities in the US and those of Dominican Puerto Rican women living in Puerto Rico.

There is vast literature about the dogmatic impact of Marianism in the Latin American culture. The Virgin of Guadalupe is one of the most cited and reflected upon figures that I have come across during the literature review. For example, research has been done on the impact of Marianism in the sexual practices of Latino women (Mayblin 2014), and on the impact of Marianism in physical activity and self-care vs. care giving of Latino women (Mendez-Luck, 2016). Although there is much information on the Internet about the festivities and traditions surrounding Altagracia in Dominican Republic, there are not many academic publications on the influence of Altagracia in the diaspora Dominican communities. This research aims to fill that gap in the literature. For example, every year, the Dominican newspaper *Listín Diario* bring into the news spotlight the events that take place on the Basilica on January 21. Another example is the Catholic church official webpage of the Basilica, [www.basilicahiguey.com](http://www.basilicahiguey.com), where there is a brief explanation of the story of how the image of Altagracia was found, and other activities that take place in the Basilica. During our fieldwork, we came across three groups dedicated to Altagracia, in three different communities of San Juan. Their objective was mainly to arrange the festivities taking place on the 21 of January, but they gathered on a weekly basis. This aided me in my recruitment process of women who would be willing to volunteer for this research. It also gives a sense of the possibilities for further

research on the topic of Altagracia in other sites. For example, this research could be done in other parts of the world with a strong Dominican presence, like New York city where millions of Dominicans are estimated to live (Hernandez 2004).

This research may be of interest to scholars concerned about the positions of privilege, and or lack thereof, of migrant women and what their reflections are on religion. Gender studies are concerned with the power struggles between women of privilege and the marginal position of global south migrant women. There is a notion that migration positions women in a disadvantaged place, when the migrants are carrying out the domestic work. This makes it possible for privileged women carry to on with their privileged life (Aslan and Gambetti 2011). Migration positions women in a diverse spectrum of class and privilege. It is interesting to try to understand what the reflections on religion and migration are of those women who acquired a privileged position. That privilege can be acquired by education but also by power positions. For example, Cirielle is a Dominican Puerto Rican woman who holds a position of authority in an essential health service that makes her capable of either helping or no other Dominican born people living in Puerto Rico. Her reflections on religion are based on the notion that religion and faith are related to a lack of scientific education on life and social resources to face life's struggles. On the other hand, I encountered the reflections of a young under-privileged woman who faces adversity with her sick son and believes that religion has assisted her with her struggles. This research is a reflexive process, where I gathered data form a diverse group of migrants and analyzed this data with the help of the NVivo software. With the purpose of bringing light the religious and migration stories as the women understand expressed themselves. I tried to clearly state the difference between the literature, my own experience and the reflections and epistemic authority of the interviewed women. Migration, religion, and gender are vastly researched topics. Nonetheless, in the context of Puerto Rico, the Dominican migrant women's reflection on religion is under explored. This context is important to discuss in a shared Puerto Rican and Dominican context because of the physical proximity. It can be relevant for the context of scholars concerned with the Sociology of religion, because by studying the case of these small Caribbean islands depth and diversity is brought to the current discussion.



Another purpose of this thesis is to promote enthusiasm for answering further questions about religion and migration in this Intra Caribbean migratory context. A related but different type of context of this research question would be to explore the transnational practices of Altagracia inside the island of Hispaniola, that is between Haiti and Dominican Republic. At the time when I conducted the interviews, just three months had passed after hurricane María. There was a discussion about a call to resilience from the Puerto Rican government. The creation of the slogan #prselevanta (Puerto Rico Lifts itself up) was a social media hashtag promoted by the organization Bottoms up, which was created by the then first lady, Beatriz Rosselló, to attract funding for the reconstruction of the island. There was a generalized sense of dissatisfaction with the government response after the hurricane because of the many lives lost, and the resources were mobilized were too little, too late. The word resilience became almost an insult to people who felt they were as well left to their own devices to survive. My interview questions were not directed to the role of religion after the experience of hurricane María, but it is worth considering as a further line of research. As Ryan and Vachelli explain, religion can help people adjust to new setting and regain a sense of normalcy (Ryan, Vachelli 2013) Exploring religious communities as a resource who provide solidarity and solace in times of crisis seems like an important topic of this research and in need of further research. The social and political situation in Puerto Rico in a post hurricane and pandemic moment, left me to reflect on how understanding that there is someone out there who cares is fundamental for survival. Resilience as the neo-liberal strategy of lifting up the government's social responsibility assigning it to the individual. Hume and Wilding remind us that in a post political society, women are not manipulated victims but have the potential for change using their own resources (Hume, Wilding 2020) Religious communities, after hurricane María, were many times the ones taking care of people and serving as an internal resource for alleviating specific needs in a complicated scenario. This research is the starting point for answering questions about the role of migrant religious communities in times of crisis like hurricanes and later earthquakes and a pandemic. This research can be of interest for researchers who understand religion and transnationalism as an important topic for discussion. In conclusion, this research, answers questions about the dynamics of solidarity and personal agency in Dominican migrant religious communities.

## 1.7 Plan of the Thesis

This **first chapter** offers an introduction to the thesis in terms of research questions, objectives, and methodology. I present my research questions: How does the migratory experience from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico shape the understandings and meanings of faith, religion, and spirituality for women? How do Dominican Puerto Rican produce and reproduced the virgin of? Altagracia's devotion in the Puerto Rican context? With these research questions I translate the experiences of Dominican Puerto Rican women in the light of religion, migration, and gender. The objective of this research is to discuss the interpretations and adaptations of religion, and spirituality in the context of a global south context of Dominican migrant women living in Puerto Rico. I want to challenge the idea of religion as irrelevant for women with two arguments. First, the Altagracia figure is not interpreted as a dogmatic figure as Marianism literature might suggest but as a spiritual resource when building an individual and collective sense of belonging. Altagracia and spirituality can help overcome the difficulties that arise in the migration process. As Ryan and Vachelli argue, in the context of transnational religion, individual narratives are structured by collective narratives which are produced and reflected based on experience (Ryan, Vachelli 2013) These narratives travel with women in order to articulate their sense of belonging (Ryan, Vachelli 2013) The objective of this research is to fill the gap on the topic of the meanings of religion for women, and the integration process of migration. The significance of religious values for women is adapted during and the migration process to fulfil new spiritual needs. Altagracia has a Dominican national and popular cultural value in Dominican Republic, that is transplanted in Puerto Rico in a custom-made way to fit the new the migration scenario. This is because religious figures after going through the process of reflection acquire another spiritual meaning. This research contributes to a scholar reflection of a popular religious figure that is venerated by many but insufficiently analyzed by scholars. Mostly because as Ryan and Vachelli explain, most scholars most academics fail to acknowledge religion as important, because of their formation in secular societies (Ryan and Vachelli 2013).

In **chapter two**, I engage with literature on the different themes of religion, gender, race, and migration that informed this research. The first type of

literature analyzed in this chapter are the works of researchers and scholars that understand religion as an important topic of research in the Social Sciences context (Pasura 2016, Levitt 200, Orsi 1985, Stark and Finke 2005). This literature is important because it launches a conversation where I can bring the context of gender and religion to a global south context. This research brings attention the popular religious figure of Altagracia as way of introducing a debate about Religion and migration in the Dominican Puerto Rican scenario. There is very little literature available on this religious figure.

In order to understand the figure of Altagracia, literature about Marianism helps explain devotion and reciprocity between women and saints (Mayblin 2014). The seminal work of Marianism the other face of Machismo by Stevens, helped in developing my first research question about Mary as a model of resilience. As Stevens explains, the Catholic cult to Mary has permeated into culture so deeply that Marianism is almost an unconscious way of taking on gender roles (Stevens 1973). Her work is based on the idea that gender is not biological but a cultural construct. To better understand the Dominican migrant situation, I included some data provided by government agencies, like The US Census Bureau and the statistics provided by the government in Dominican Republic. The Dominican statistics provided by the Junta electoral, which is the agency that accounts for the election process of the diaspora, were more useful. This literature is important because it provides details of exactly where Dominican migrants live, how they vote and how do they contribute economically to Dominican Republic's economy.

**Chapter three** provides an overview of the methodological approach. I explore how my understanding of the research process changed through doing research from the creation of new knowledge to a proposal to grant epistemological authority to the women who have important situated knowledge. Literature on positionality, Intersectionality helped me embrace fully the empirical authority of my participants and acknowledge my own biases in the research process (Smith 2005, Irigaray 2017, Kristeva 2016). Methodological considerations on positionality, by Merton, and the challenging of that, done by Ryan, were important when understanding the positionalities between insiders and outsiders (Merton 1972, Ryan 2015). When approaching the subject of religion, first, I had to examine my position in terms class, race, age, and education. My initial

research question was directed toward the idea of *Altagracia* as the religious figure based on literature on Marianism. The field work process and my ill-equipped understanding of Positionality and Intersectionality brought many problems such as my questions not being relevant for the women I interviewed; methodology literature helped. Literature on Marianism explain Mary as a religious dogmatic example. The works of Manuel Vasquez and Nehring helped me understand of the Virgin as a resource for solving everyday problems and religion as a lived experience (Vasquez 2014, Nehring 2018). This chapter is about the methodological experience of gathering the data and changing our understanding of the research process. When reflecting on positionality I changed my way of relating with the women who I interviewed and became a better researcher benefiting an epistemological project that goes beyond gaining trust and building rapport.

**Chapter four** is the first of three empirical based chapters and has the objective of introducing some migration stories and the transnational dynamics women have between Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. As I point out in this chapter scholars focus mainly on the economic and political events that make Dominicans move to Puerto Rico (Duany 2018, Graziano 2016, Guarnizo 2017, Nina 2012, Thompson, and Hernández Angueira 2008). As I explain in this chapter economic precarity is one but not the only reason why women decide to migrate. Evidence of the importance of economic aspect is the sense of economic responsibility to their families and the need to regularly send remittances. In this chapter, I also provide examples of other aspects such as escaping gender violence as one the reason why feel they had to leave the Dominican Republic in the first place. Chapter four in conclusion, provides some migration context stories in order to get to know the women who I interviewed. Other themes analyzed in this chapter are, the transnational caring communities and the maritime travels. Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic are two Islands separated by a stretch of sea. The ethnographies of Guarnizo and Graziano inform and help analyze the danger and dynamics of this situated way of migrating (Guarnizo 2017, Graziano 2016). The survival stories of the women who chose to migrate crossing these 90 miles stretch of sea are especially significant for this research. Their testimonies are evidence of endurance in a very dangerous boat trip, the resilience before and during the migration process provide evidence of the invisibilised gender violence that I became an advocate against. Religion plays

an important role in every stage of the migration process. Sharing the testimonies of the way women use religion and faith at the early stages of migration is crucial as means for survival.

**Chapter five** is the second chapter based on the empirical themes as suggested by N Vivo where the significance of Altagracia's collective and personal ways as described by Dominican Puerto Rican women. According to Davis one of the characteristics of these types of Associations in the Dominican Diaspora is that they are mostly women led in contrast with other male dominated Catholic Associations (Davis 2012). The Associations of devotees of Altagracia is the place where women perform important work that benefits Puerto Rican society while serving as a learned Dominican identity process for younger generations.

In this chapter I explain the Marian devotion to Altagracia for Dominican Puerto Rican women as a personal relationship in. As Manuel Vásquez reminds us, Catholicism is usually reflected as the institution, when Marian devotion is mainly all about the joyful festivity (Vasquez 2014). Petitions are an expression of a personal expressions of religious traditions for Dominican migrant women.

Also, in this chapter five I analyze and explain the conservative migrant groups found in the revival movements. Rosemary Polanco argues that migration represents a contradictory experience, both traumatic as well as liberating, that produces an enhanced hybridization of the home and host cultures (Polanco, 2006). This experience of migration can be an opportunity for liberty or sometimes a new set of social morality or lack of it that can make a migrant more moralistic. In conclusion, this chapter is about the personal and collective religious communities of the Dominican Puerto Rican migrant women and Altagracia as the spiritual and collective symbol.

**Chapter six** has the purpose of analyzing the intersections of gender, race, migration, and religion. I explain how Dominican Puerto Rican women remember Altagracian rituals but also how they have adapted them to the San Juan setting. Many scholars contribute to the analysis of the way migrants integrate their collective and personal narratives to their acquired context (Pasura 2016, Ryan and Vachelli 2013) The Altagracian rituals and traditions serve the purpose of publicly integrating the experience of women who lived and performed the

rituals in Dominican Republic along with unexperienced members with the objective to keep alive the devotions for saint and virgins (Copeland 2000) These intersections of race, gender, migration, and religion are not fixed, for some women migration supposes an emancipatory space and others prefer to remain attached to traditional values. According to Pasura women and children are understood to be the bearers of traditional and cultural values in the diaspora and this supposes a struggle for women who desire an enhanced sense of control and boundaries in their lives (Pasura 2014). The presence of Altagracian associations benefits Puerto Rican society, by providing care and services from these women, without having to pay the government taxes for having them as employees.

**Chapter seven** is the last empirical chapter of this thesis. It has the purpose of analyzing the concepts of faith and spirituality in an expansive way as described by Dominican Puerto Rican women. When reviewing the literature, there are many scholars (Berger 2004, Tweed 2008, Vásquez 2014, Levitt 2018, Pasura 2012, Ryan and Vachelli 2013) who analyze the Catholic, protestant and secularized interpretation of faith and spirituality. In this chapter I describe how women prioritize on faith and belief as a resource improving their lives in economic and social terms. According to Nehring self-improvement discourses legitimizes contemporary capitalism's modes of social organization and socioeconomic stratification (Nehring 2018). Because there is a significant group of women who want to distance themselves from institutional religion interpretations of faith and spirituality seem to be important for self-improvement and purpose.

**Chapter eight** is the conclusion chapter where I provide a summary of the thesis. I explain the key arguments of this research and how the questions were answered. I explain the contribution of this thesis to the transnational religious conversation. Finally, I discuss further research that has the potential of deepening the analysis of this research.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

This research answers the questions: How does the migratory experience process from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico shape the understandings and meanings

of faith, religion, and spirituality for women? How do Dominican Puerto Rican women produce and reproduced the virgin of Altagracia's devotion in the Puerto Rican context? Answering this question has given me the opportunity to feel closer to a community that was already part of my everyday life. By reflecting on the way Dominican Puerto Rican women experience and reflect on religion, faith, and spirituality I contribute to the conversation about religion and transnationalism as discussed by Pasura, Vasquez and Levitt (Vásquez 2016, Pasura 2016, Levitt 2009). Making an updated analysis on the Dominican Puerto Rican community is a needed process in order to provide insight into recent understanding of Intra Caribbean migration. This research is a contribution to the field of religion and migration as a relevant topic for Social Sciences and the neglected gendered perspective. It is important to do further research in another cultural context in the global south. Research and discussions about religion and migration in the global south is a relevant topic especially for women who are central in this context.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 The experience of the Dominican diaspora and transnationalism**

There are contending views on the theoretical use of the term diaspora in Social Sciences. William Safran refers to how originally the use of the term described the Jewish experience exclusively (Safran, 2005). For Safran, the use of the term diaspora has a negative connotation because of its politically violent implication and the hardship of the Jewish experience which was altogether lacking hospitality. The term diaspora is used loosely and according to Safran, the situation should meet these four requirements: 1. A forced migration as a response to political or disastrous circumstances. 2. Collective memory of the reasons for migrating 3. Cultural heritage transmission 4. External oriented collective identity (Safran, 1999). Rogers Brubaker argues that the term has been overused but under theorized (Brubaker 2017), which is why I explain the use of the term diaspora is applicable for this research.

First, in the Dominican Republic, the diaspora is a relevant group, with a political force, because of their commitment to their homeland. Second, the massive migration that took place after 1962 should be analyzed. Finally, this thesis explores religion's role and the Virgin of Altagracia, as a collective memory figure, and the role of non-profit organizations as means for social integration for Dominican migrants.

On the Dominican electoral polls of 2016, the government office that rules electoral events, the Junta Central Electoral (JCE), counted 384,522 votes in the diaspora (JCE 2017), that is 5% of the total votes casted in the election. This is done because the Dominican Republic government recognizes the importance of the diaspora, since the massive migration that has taken place since 1962. Dominican diaspora has been participating in elections since 2004, with the right to suffrage and the opportunity to run for office (Hernandez 2012). The participation has increased from 2004, with a total of 108,000 voters to 384,522 electors in the 2016 elections: a 356% increase in the last twelve years. The Junta Central Electoral offers information about the votes in the diaspora in the electoral event of 2016.

The Dominican diaspora is not only a political force; economically, the remittances proceeding from the diaspora represents 7% of the Dominican Republic Gross Domestic Product, with a total of 30 billion dollars received in foreign remittances, as the World Bank organization has offered in data (Ramon 2017). This economic aspect of migration is perceived as an example of how the Dominican diaspora is committed to the economic progress of their homeland. Dominican migrants in the US are frequently the income source for their families in the Dominican Republic (Guarnizo, 2017 2003, 1997). On the other hand, Luis Guarnizo warns us about the over-simplification of the migration process and the value of the diaspora in economic terms. There are cultural exchanges that are not quantified but are as valuable as the economic contributions (Guarnizo, 2017).

Transnationalism is a two-way street, the Dominican diaspora is known to have the longing of returning to the Dominican Republic, a process described as return or reverse migration. Return migration is not exclusive to Dominicans. It is a dynamic addressed by scholars about the European and African diaspora as well.



Guarnizo brings as an example of return migration the experience of President Leonel Fernandez (Guarnizo, 2017), who lived in New York City beginning in 1962 and attended school there. He later returned to the Dominican Republic, in 1971, before becoming president.

Sociologist Ramona Hernández argues that there are approximately 600,000 Dominicans in the US alone (Hernandez, 2004). Most of the literature available on Dominican migration contends that this movement of people is mostly determined by economic scarcity and political instability (Levitt, 1998, Hernandez, 2004). The most important migration movement registered in Dominican history happened in 1962, after the assassination of dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, in 1961 (Hernández, 2004, Duany, 1992). There are several factors that explain why this specific massive migration wave occurred.

During the dictatorship it was difficult to leave the island because Trujillo thought population increase would be advantageous for economic growth. Another explanation is that Trujillo prevented people from leaving the island because he was afraid that migrants would organize and conspire against him from abroad (Duany 1992, Hernández, 2004). Dominican migration to the US has progressively increased: in 1962 the figure was 10,683; in the 1970's, 16,000; in the 1980's, 30,000; and in the 1990's, 40,000 (Hernández 2004). The Homeland Security Administration offers some important statistics about migration in their Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. In 2015, 338,009 Dominicans entered the United States with a visitor visa with a non-immigrant status. Of this number of visitors, 1,191 Dominicans were determined inadmissible to the US. On the same year, 1,865 Dominicans were removed from the US and 383 returned to the Dominican Republic. Also, in 2015, there were 50,610 migrants born in the Dominican Republic who became legal permanent residents of the US. There was a total of 10 orphans (5 male and 5 female) born in Dominican Republic who were adopted in the US.

According to the US Census Bureau data, in 2015, there were 59,677 Dominicans in Puerto Rico, which is the largest population of foreign-born people in PR. Other demographic large groups in the island are Cubans, with a total of 12,605 registered, and Colombians with 4,065. This data only considers official numbers, not the total of undocumented Dominicans and mixed nationalities

that are a product of Dominican and Puerto Rican births, often called *Domirriqueños* or *Dominico Boricuas*. It is interesting that, in the 1990's, the total of Dominican migrants entering the US via Puerto Rico was in the 40,000. Of these people, 17,830 of them were naturalized in Puerto Rico, from 1990 to 1999. Before the 1990's the estimated number was 19,405. From 2000 to 2009, a total of 16,715 Dominicans was naturalized in Puerto Rico. This number has dropped to 5,562 Dominican who entered Puerto Rico from 2010 to 2015, according to the US Census Bureau.

It would be difficult to approximate the Dominican presence in Puerto Rico, nonetheless it is large, important and under quantified. Sociologist Yolanda Martínez discusses this uncomfortable relationship from a cultural point of view by analyzing jokes made about Dominicans in Puerto Rico (Miguel 2003). According to Martínez, this joke culture is a reproduction of the xenophobic and racist dynamic where the migrant is the target. This resembles the jokes made in Germany about the Turkish; in California, about Mexicans; in France, about the Marrakesh; in Britain, about the Pakistani; in Dominican Republic, about Haitians; and in New York, about Puerto Ricans (Miguel 2003). All of these jokes create a migrant stereotype as people without education, working class and racially inferior to the nationals. "The problem is not migration itself, but rather the conditions of inequality under which most South North migration takes place" (Castles 2010). To say that the presence of the Dominican migrant is not conflicting or clashing with the host culture would be incorrect. There is some kind of positive interchange of identities, as Magali García Ramis, a Puerto Rican author, narrates in her story "The story of a Dominican who passed as a Puerto Rican to have a better life in New York". There has been a transformation of Puerto Rican society because of the Dominican presence. However, there is a sense that Dominicans arrived at the Island (Puerto Rico) running away from poverty and political violence. This idea according to Stephen Castles is the sedentary bias that affects a deeper reflection on migration (Castles 2013, Castles, 2010).

According to Luis Guarnizo there is a difference between assimilation, integration, and transnationalism (Guarnizo 2017). In all these terms, non-profit organizations have had an important role in facilitating these processes and the Dominican diaspora is not the exception. Non-profit organizations help

assimilation and integration of immigrants, while protecting identity issues and national cultural practices. "Globalization and assimilation are mutually constitutive processes connected by Transnationalism" (Guarnizo 2017). The nonprofit organizations' role is important for Dominicans in Puerto Rico because they promote integration and at the same time, they respect the collective Dominican memory and values. For this reason, participants included women of organizations like Casa Dominicana, Centro de la Mujer Dominicana and Niños de Nueva Esperanza, three non-profit organizations that offer support services for this population.

## **2.2 A Lived Religion Approach to Transnational Migration**

Why is the concept of religion so unpopular? Diego Malara reminds us that there is an Anthropological theoretical biased analysis on Christianity based on the assumption that a Christian person should behave consistently with Christian norms (Malara 2018). Malara attributes this bias to the "emphasis on Christianity's reformist and charismatic versions" while research has neglected what he calls the undisciplined Christians (Malara 2018). In this chapter I include a reflection on how the younger generations of Dominican Puerto Rican define their religiosity or spirituality. Scholars of religion and migration contend that the migratory experience is key to forming new meanings of faith and spirituality. Similarly, I contend that the intense hybridization process of migration has led to fragmented interpretations of religion and spirituality that showed up in my data especially when interviewing the younger women. Although many of the interpretations of religion, faith and spirituality were based on the ways each woman used prayer, service or hope to deal individually with their situated problems. Pasura explains that individual religion or spirituality are building blocks. Shared meanings and experiences, learned practices, borrowed imagery, the individual is able to experience" (Pasura 2020). In conclusion, this research is an attempt to examine the concept of faith, spirituality and lived religion in sociological relationship with each other. A Sociological analysis that takes women's individual experiences and traces what they have in common. That is: the need for an experience with God, the purpose it has and how they understand their faith has improved their life.

In this thesis transnationalism refers to way Dominican Puerto Rican women flow between Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico as a way of life. Their integrated way of understanding themselves as belonging to both cultures. The term transnationalism has been used by scholars like Levitt, Castles and Pasura to describe the economic, cultural, and political exchanges that migration flows bring into the social realms (Levitt 2018, Castels 2013, Pasura 2016). Stephen Castles claims that there is a direct relationship between people's movement across nation states boundaries and social transformation (Castles 2010, Castles 2013). This as a challenge to other scholars, like Alejandro Portes, who argue that social institutions are not changed by migration. In the context of this research, this research follows Castles view and understanding that Dominican migration has affected Puerto Rican society, mainland US, Spain, and other European societies.

The term transnationalism refers to the transcendence of the nation state, not limiting itself to territorial boundaries. The literature on religious transnationalism explains that the exchange of religious traditions and culture that transcend the nation state is a way of transnationalism as well. Peggy Levitt expressed it in these words: "My findings suggest that strong ties between migrants and non-immigrants give rise to a transnational religious sphere within which people, ideas, practices, and resources are exchanged" (Levitt 1998, page?). The study of transnationalism is concerned that there may be conflicting religious views with the homeland as well as between first- and second-generation immigrants. Sustaining social ties with the homeland is crucial for the diaspora because that makes them maintain a sense of belonging to a place and to their ancestors. The second- and third- generation's relationship with the country of origin is assumed as distant and irrelevant, but this is not necessarily the case (Levitt 2009, Pasura, 2012). Migration represents a contradictory experience, both traumatic as well as liberating, that produces an enhanced hybridization of the home and host cultures (Polanco, Rosemary 2006). This migration experience, as it was for Julia Álvarez and Junot Diaz (Polanco, 2006), can be at times confusing. There may be a sense of liberty and a new set of social morality or lack of it, that can make a migrant feel free from social judgment. The moral and social codes of conduct of the host land may be assimilated into the minds and hearts of the children and grandchildren of migrants, that is the second- and third generation. These younger generation

may lose the social values of the immigrants' homeland. This new host land moral and social code of conduct can become resented and conflicted vis a vis the immigrants. The migrant may feel out of place in this new social situation. Some may even go back to the homeland as a reaction to this experience. For this research, the Virgin of Altagracia example functions as model of womanhood, related directly with the collective memory of the Dominican diaspora.

The Virgin of Altagracia came to the Dominican Republic with Spanish colonialism. The popular story is that a Dominican peasant from Higüey was going to make a trip to the capital city of Santo Domingo for business. One of his daughters asked him to bring her the image of the Virgin of Altagracia. No one really recognized the virgin except for one man who gave him the image and said it belonged to the brothers Alonso and Alfredo, from the region of Extremadura, Spain. The man brought the image to his daughter and the image magically appeared in an orange tree where eventually the basilica was constructed (Rodriguez, 2017). An alternate story is that the image of the Virgin was brought by the Conquistador Nicolás de Ovando, who was originally from the province of Extremadura, Spain. He gifted the image for the first chapel of Santo Domingo construction and was named after the pious woman who worked at the chapel who was a black woman: Altagracia is a black pious woman (Rodriguez, 2017). The slavery economic system and the African diaspora used Catholic figures to continue with their religious culture. This religious syncretism came to the Caribbean in the form of Santería, Voodoo and La Regla de Palos, amongst many other branches that are still lived religions in the Caribbean (Mensaque 2016). Spanish Catholicism was creolized by transforming the Virgin's imagery into more similar images for the locals, in physical traits. Evelyn Stevens (1973) points out that race and ethnicity were used by the Catholic church to establish Marianism, defined as a code of conduct for women or as the veneration of the Virgin Mary. Stevens defines it as a local dogma. For example, in Mexican church, the Virgin of Remedios -who was European imposed- is not as popular as the Virgin of Guadalupe, who is mestiza. The same occurs in the Dominican Republic with the imposed Virgin of las Mercedes and the Virgin of Altagracia who is mixed race (Stevens 1973).

Colonialism and issues of race and class are always related to gender and literature on Marianism, by Latin American scholars like Stevens and D'Alonzo.

These studies are important for understanding how women perform the Virgin. The religious devotion for the Virgin of Altagracia has been translated and transnationalized by the Dominican diaspora in the US and other migrant settings, like Spain and Puerto Rico. My intention is to problematize the Dominican diaspora as a homogeneous group. I analyzed Dominican Puerto Rican, not from the usual standpoint of the domestic and sexual worker but in their religious aspect, as women who use the Virgin of Altagracia as a performative figure. In the context of the Dominican diaspora, this relationship with the homeland is manifested as the devotion for the Virgin and the festivities celebrated by the Dominican diaspora in various migrant settings, which I examined by gathering empirical data for this research. In the diaspora context, there is a relationship with the homeland manifested in the devotion for the Virgin and the festivities celebrated by the different migrant religious associations, which I explain in the empirical chapters of this thesis as a lived religion approach to transnational migration.

## **2.3 Marian devotion and religious Transnationalism**

Catholicism is a globalized religion. It existed in Europe long before colonization. The devotion to the Virgin has proven to be a female prototype and model in present day Europe, and in America, Africa, and the world in general (Armstrong, 2007). Catholicism is not the only globalized religion, Islam, Buddhism, and Protestantism are also found in transnational perspectives. This interest for the Virgin springs up through the strong presence on a specific cultural context, the Spanish Caribbean. The Virgin Mary, as a transnational figure, can be found in diverse cultures; each one adapts her image to resemble their own women. It is a debatable topic to judge if the Virgin Mary is a figure of empowerment or a figure that legitimizes women submission. It is important to reflect upon how the Virgin is related to social theory and, specifically, in feminist trends. With this literature review, I evaluate different ideas and social contexts, where Marianism is the focus of scholarly discussion. She has been viewed by some as a transnational figure. The important feminist reflections on the topic of Marianism as a code of conduct. There is a difference between

discussing devotion to the Virgin in transnational scenarios and the influence of the Virgin as part of the female psychological and social way of living and behaving. One cannot separate the discussion of one topic from the other. Just as religion is a cultural construct, the Virgin is an important psychological and cultural construct for women, devout or not.

The study of Marian devotion and how it has been translated and transnationalised by migrants all over the world suggests that religion plays an important role in the integration of people to the host territory. For migrants, keeping their relationship with God and sustaining their social bond with the church is crucial (Orsi 2011, Pasura 2012, Levitt 2004). About the transnational practices of religion, the research done by Dominic Pasura on the case study of the Zimbabwean Catholics in Britain is relevant, because of the similar dynamics Zimbabweans have with their homeland and what I intend to prove with this research of the Dominican diaspora and Virgin of Altagracia's presence. The translation of religious festivities in the context of migration may be conflicting, since there is an official church discourse about religion and a reality that needs to incorporate new approaches to religious tradition as presented by Pasura (Pasura, 2012). There are many approaches to understanding these migrant dynamics with religion and Marian devotion.

One of the most important works on religious transnationality and Marian devotion is the work by Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th street* (Orsi, 1985), where he presents the case of the Italian diaspora in Harlem, New York. The role of women in this context is defined by Orsi as powerful and powerless at the same time. His approach is that migration has a political as well as a spiritual context that is crucial to understanding the complex reality of migration. For this research, I examine the collective values that relate the Dominican diaspora with the Virgin of Altagracia as a model for womanhood. Migration can be explained by political circumstances, but then there is a loss of the important and unheard struggles that migration implies. Marian devotion may be a cultural code of conduct, defined by religious nationalism, and it may limit women's freedom, but at the same time it presupposes a matriarchal set of social dynamics.

"Our task is now to explore the consequences of the power of women in Italian Harlem, to go deeply into their power in order to understand their powerlessness" (Orsi, 1985, page?). Marian devotion in transnational communities has been a concern for researchers in different cultural contexts. For example, in an important ethnography study by Terry Rey (Rey, 2004), he explores how Catholic Haitians in Miami celebrate festivities in honor of Virgins, like the Immaculate Conception, Our lady of the Carmel and our Lady of Perpetual Help. Terry argues that these Catholic celebrations are not understood as Catholic, because of spirit possessions and mixtures of symbols and rituals associated with Voodoo. He argues that during the transnational experience there is a redefinition of religious orthodoxy because it is no longer practical for community-based religion. There is a direct intersection of transnational religion and gender because as political and national state boundaries lose context, there is a need to adequate religious practices to the new gender relations in the host country.

One of the most interesting works on religious transnationalism and Marian devotion is the story of Sister Ita Ford, who was a Catholic missionary, that died in El Salvador after being raped and tortured by the military regime. She was a sympathizer of the political views of Bishop Oscar Romero, one of the most critical voices of the Catholic church, who also died after having an active role against political abuse and violence against the peasantry and the poor in El Salvador. In an article, published on the 16th of March 2017 by Marian Mollin (Mollin, 2017), she argues that despite the important social debate about how missionaries have been a form of imperialism, there have been exemptions to this argument. Although Catholicism has responsibility for eradicating aboriginal religious practices in America, at the same time, there are figures like Sister Ita Ford, who was born in New York, who made important contributions on solidarity. She had a critical voice and an important role as an activist fighting in favor of women rights, taking a stand against violence in a country that suffered the struggles of a civil war, which lasted from 1970 to 1992 (Mollin, 2017).

The concept of Marianism can be understood in different contexts. The one influenced by feminist theory and used by many Latin American scholars is one that describes the code of conduct adequate for women. The second, and the most literal interpretation, is Marianism as the devotion to the Virgin Mary.



There is literature that documents how religious people express this devotion in the form of rituals, processions, and rosaries, among other forms of religious performance. For example, the work of Deirdre de la Cruz (2009) describes this as a reality in the Philippines, in 2009. De la Cruz describes how, historically, the Virgin came with the Spanish colonization. She also details how her figure was accepted and creolized by Philippine culture more easily than the figure of Christ. Furthermore, she describes important instances in which it was believed that the Virgin made apparitions, for example in war context and contemporary media as well. She describes pilgrimages and the use of images by young people who are devotees in the Philippine modern context. People who venerate the Virgin Mary are described as:

"Young, urban, professional, educated, upper middle and upper class, this group was the antithesis of the 'folk' figured by 'folk Catholicism' the paradigm that has long-dominated studies on Filipino Christian devotion and experience" (Deirdre de la Cruz, 2009, page?)

In a similar way, there is literature of this Marian devotion in the transnational context. The work of Josefina Flores (Flores Tondo, 2014) is about the experience of Philippine Catholics in Malaysia. How people practice their religion, in the Cathedral on Saint John in Kuala Lumpur, is an example of how transnational dynamics help Pilipino migrants cope with social integration and the migratory experience. Flores argues that the pastoral center work, named CAPE, has been central for helping these migrants empower themselves and claim control over their experience in Malaysia.

The CAPE training classes are open to all migrant groups and offer a variety of courses on English, yoga, care giving, touch therapy, the Bahasa Melayu language, blood screening, beauty culture, computers, guitar playing, and baking, among others. The program offers a venue for migrant interethnic cooperation. The Malaysian civil society's campaign also actively supports for better recognition of migrant rights in Malaysia (Flores Tondo, 2014). Thomas Tweed is an important researcher on religion and transnationalism.

Among his many works, *Crossing and Dwelling* is the story of the Cuban American diaspora and their Catholic religious rituals, at the annual festival at the Virgin's

shrine in Miami. Marian devotion for the Virgin of the Charity or Caridad del Cobre is one example of the spiritual protection Cubans perceive in their migration process, which is directly influenced by the particular political Cuban circumstances. Religion and politics are always related (Tweed, 2008). In the case of the Cuban diaspora, there is a sense of profound love for Cuba, their homeland, and a strong faith in the Virgin. This religious devotion helps cement the diaspora community and its support system and networking. Tweed proposes a dynamic and relational theory of religion, where there is always movement and negotiations with locality and religious orthodoxy.

The apparition of the Virgin Mary in Clearwater, Tampa, was a topic for the ethnographic work by Vásquez and Marquardt (Vásquez & Marquardt, 2000); who state that this religious manifestation is worth examining, as there is a strong belief that American society is very much secularized. Socialization, rationalization, and social differentiation are what the modern paradigm assumes to be the reason for this secularization process according to Vásquez and Marquardt (Vásquez and Marquardt 2016). According to social theories like Marxism religion is a mechanism of the bourgeoisie to legitimize and keep a social climate of passivity among the proletariat; religion is something we would do better without. Although the Evangelical Church is the fastest growing religion in the USA, the apparitions of the Virgin Mary problematize if the excess consumerism and individualism of US society has brought in this new way of expressing the need for social connection and a sense of community. This idea of the collective consciousness related to capitalism and religion was brought into the Social Science discussion by Max Weber (Weber 2001), who contributed to Sociology by arguing that the economic system of capitalism had to be sustained by a sociological aspect of work ethic and individualism that the protestant values exhorted. It is interesting that at the site of the apparition of the Virgin in Clearwater, although the parishioners from the local parish of St. Theresa are mainly Mexican and Latino immigrants, the site was covered with flowers and messages in languages such as Spanish, Italian, and German as well as English, reminding us about the global and transnational dynamics of Catholicism. The apparition of The Rainbow Madonna occurred in one of the buildings in Tampa. It was an image that had the resemblance of the Virgin Mary, reflected in a multicolor image, and named after the colorful site; but the Rainbow is a

metaphor for the diverse, multicultural, and transnational crowd that gathered to see the place where Mary made her presence felt.

Another theme worth considering in the Marianism cult is The Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron Saint of Mexico and also the patron Saint of New Spain. There is much literature about the acts of veneration that make her sacred for the Mexican and other Latino migrant's subjectivity and identity. In an ethnography by Elaine Peña, *Beyond Mexico: Guadalupian Sacred Space Production and Mobilization in a Chicago Suburb*, the researcher explains the complex relationships of Mexican immigrants in a Chicago suburb with other Latinos that have migrated to the US. Peña argues that La Gadalupana, as the virgin is called, is not just venerated by Mexicans but by many Latin-Americans from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. For Mexicans, the Virgin is a national symbol. The apparitions of the Virgin to Juan Diego happened in Tepeyac. Migration is difficult in many circumstances; in the case of Mexicans and Latinos in Chicago, life is particularly a struggle, especially difficult and violent. Crossing the border is life threatening. It is only the tip of the iceberg, compared to the social abuse and discrimination undocumented migrants live daily. Transnational events like the Via Crucis (stations of the cross) on Good Friday is a massive event that brings together documented and undocumented migrants and become a safe haven from anti-immigrant life conditions in the US.

Oh, young, dark-skinned virgin! Guadalupe, my hope, your love reaches down from the heavens and alleviates my worries; take care of me with your good soul and give me your sacred blessing, your constant affection, I came as an immigrant, I brought you, my heart.

– “Virgen de los Migrantes,” prayer recited at the Second Tepeyac of North America (Peña, 2008).

Just as the torture and execution of Christ on the cross, Peña argues that Latinos feel their suffering as the enactment of the violent drama of the immigration process. (Peña, 2008b). Far from a unified and homogeneous suburban Chicago migrant community, achieving this is not an easy task. Maintaining a culturally diverse sacred place requires among other things great

money investment. Apart from the shrine in honor of the Virgin, there is a recreation of the scene of the apparition in "El Cerrito"(Peña, 2008b).

After reviewing the literature on Marian devotion on transnational ethnographies and social research, the literature is so vast than it cannot be summarized in this brief paper. I understood that Transnationalism is interpreted as a migrant experience in the majority of cases. The Virgin Mary herself is a working-class woman, living under the Roman empire political circumstance, which is no less violent than much of the migrant stories gathered from the social researchers. Her lifestyle is appealing because of her as model of sacrifice and stoic endurance women. The impact of her example on the female psyche is something that is best explained by feminist theorists that I will now explore.

## **2.4 Feminist Literature on Marianism**

A feminist approach is crucial to understand migrant Dominican Puerto Rican's image of the Virgin of Altagracia (Patron saint of the Dominican Republic) and Marianism. It is important to understand the social context and the impact religious views, specifically this Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary, have on these women's self-image, social dynamics, collective values, power relations, and agency. Feminism is a theory that had its origins in Europe and at the same time was as a political movement of women's struggle for gender equality. Chandra Mohanty and Yuderkys Espinosa (REFS) state that there is no longer feminism but feminisms, this is to say a theory problematized by class and race. Most researchers agree that feminism is relevant, since the political crisis in Europe and the neoliberal project with unequal distribution of resources is a problem that is gendered and needs feminist outlook in order to be understood. Especially in these political times when the UK is about to modify or limit its policies on migration, it is important to look at women's perceptions to understand why problems like violence and underdevelopment affect women in very specific gendered ways.

With this literature review, the Virgin of Altagracia is analyzed as a feminine performative figure for Latin American women, specifically for Dominican migrants. Although the Virgin of Altagracia is a Catholic figure that was brought to Dominican Republic with the Spanish colonial experience, much of the

literature inform us that the way women conduct themselves in everyday life is influenced by models' women try to follow. Our purpose is to understand the Virgin of Altagracia as a sociological, political, and performative figure, not just from the religious viewpoint but by looking at it from a feminist approach.

Aslan and Gambetti claim that western feminism is responsible for women's actual situation, where there is a false sensation of success when what has happened, in fact, was an increase of inequality among women (Aslan and Gambetti 2011). Western feminists pointed out capitalism as the source of women's inequality but did not contemplate the transnational power of neoliberalism as a means of oppression for women (Mohanty 1988). Women's integration to the labor market meant that white upper middle-class women were able to pursue their careers while the poor, mainly women of color, were the ones carrying out the domestic work in what Aslan and Gambetti (2011) call the "nanny state". This is related to the marginal domestic work performed by migrants in first world countries and in third world countries as well.

While at home, poor and women of color were doing domestic work, in academia the intellectual, the first world women trying to enlighten the marginal position of women against men, without considering the power of women against other women. For some women, Patriarchy is a concept that is no longer applicable, according to feminist studies, because women liberation, as an issue, is no longer a battle between men versus women (Walby 1990). Feminist issues also concerns those of race and class. In Dominican migrants' case the challenge may be to fight violence and abuse in the private, domestic, and sexual worker realms. Comparing western women's position to those of Dominican Puerto Rican migrants, the latter's position, as the domestic worker and the sexual laborer, sustain those patriarchal dynamics are still applicable for these women.

Gender is always linked to race and class. It is not possible to separate these forms of analysis when considering a gendered study (Mohanty 2003,1988). The global economic forces that influence women in a transnational perspective and how the gendered body of the migrant is allowed to cross borders, according to specific nation state necessities, is a global trend. The Dominican migrant's female body has been used as a domestic and sexual labor, as male figures dominate political influences in making that migration possible. The historical

context of this specific gender study is to also make a political standpoint on gendered justice. A social scientist's work is not only to make theoretical claims but to do political activism in order to impulse gender justice by fighting patriarchy and heteronormativity (Mohanty 2003). In this sense, it's impossible to understand Dominican migration without the political context of the slavery experience and the massive migration after the fall of Trujillo's dictatorship.

Dominican women's migration has been marked by the colonial stereotype of the domestic worker and the sexual concubine (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Important research by Patricia Fitzpatrick, who discusses the Dominican woman portrayal in Spain, analyses the Dominican migrant's roles in Spanish filmmaking. However, the Dominican migrant in Spain is not only doing the domestic and sexual work but has also an important role in the market economy by working in restaurants and beauty salons (Fitzpatrick 2013). The transnational capitalist system is still reproducing colonial dynamics in the 21st century. The Spanish colonization eventually led to a reverse migration, from the colonized land to the metropolis. Especially after the dictatorial regime of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo in Dominican Republic in 1961, as well as a migration to Puerto Rico and USA. Dominican migrants have been, for a long-time, victims of sexual violence and there is much literature about the Dominican Republic being a popular place for sexual tourism (Fitzpatrick 2013). Dominican women, as migrants, have been used for sexual abominable practices for US and European consumption. This image of Dominican women, as a migrant body of subordination, will help understand the importance of the Virgin of Altagracia as a performative figure for them. The use of the term performative refers to the concept used by Judith Butler to describe how gender is an enactment of role models, that we use as a reference to the gender type, we wish to become (Hurley, 2015).

The possibility for agency in the context of the pious woman has been a concern for some feminist theorist. Freedom and intention to lead one's own life is something that feminist bring into our attention with work on subaltern studies and religious piety (Morris, Mahmood, 2001, Ryan, Vachelli 2013). Ryan and Vachelli argue that this happens because of the visible and embodied use of the hijab or head scarf. There is a false assumption that Muslim women who use the hijab are not well suited for understanding gender equality as Western women (Ryan, Vachelli 2013) Similarly, Mahmood argues that the pious woman has as

much control over her destiny and her economic and social conditions as other non-religious women. Are her actions directly related to her intentions? Is her social, economic, political, and psychological position guiding her life unintentionally, to an undesired position of submission? Mahmood's contribution is that Islamic Egyptian women's position is directly related to their moral and social intentions, because agency is something that can come in different forms, even in ways that may be understood as submission (Mahmood 2004). The Virgin Mary, Altagracia included, is a figure that for some feminist may seem like the justification for submission and the glorification of the religious patriarchal discourse of colonialism (Stevens 2016).

## **2.5 Altagracian Devotions and petitions**

In this literature review, basic aspects of the Virgin Mary will be defined; these are: the virginity and moral sexuality of the immaculate conception, and the endurance and resilience of Mary during the passion of Christ. It is very important to clarify that there is a spiritual and emotional significance regarding Mary, which may not be explained with scientific arguments or ecclesiological explanations. Rather, psychological, and sociological terms will be used to explain some aspects about Mary's figure. There is an aspect of race that has been explained by many scholars that needs to be addressed, as well, and in addition there is a close connection with national collective consciousness that needs to be considered.

The virgin of Altagracia is an important Dominican figure that can be found in local and migrant Dominican communities all over the world. She is understood as the mother of Dominicans, and her images and traditions have been reproduced in the Dominican diaspora. Penny Barham argues that versions of the virgin Mary as Altagracia are actually former local deities that came as result of the Christianization process (Barham 2003). One example is this theory is the virgin of Guadalupe, who is said to be the Corn mother, an Aztec Goddess. This would make Guadalupe not a virgin but God itself. This is important for doing research in the Dominican diaspora context because of the relevance of religious syncretism lived in the Caribbean. Historically, African slaves, in order to keep their religious beliefs and rituals alive, used Christian saints and virgins as a

disguise for their African deities. For example, according to popular culture in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Altagracia is not only a Catholic figure but an important venerated deity for Voodoo religion. Evidence of this can be found in the yearly pilgrimage to Higüey where Haitians come all the way from Haiti either to give thanks, or ask for Altagracia's favor, or simply to show devotion.

Altagracia is for the migrant religious communities understood as an intercessor in times of trauma, loss, or hardship. In the catholic tradition, during the Passion of Christ, the agony of Christ was felt and lived by the virgin as the *Mater Dolorosa*. This agony brings to mind the sculpture by Michelangelo Bounarroti, *La Pietà*, where the mother, holds dead body of Christ (Haskins 2008 et al.). This "Virgen de los Dolores" is used in most enactments of the *Via Crucis* or crucifixion of Christ, that takes place during Good Friday in most Latin American and Caribbean countries. Similarly, Altagracia accompanies Dominicans during difficult times. This aspect of Altagracia is especially significant for migrant women, who ask for help and comfort when dealing with death, separation from family, financial hardship as shown in this thesis. Stevens (1974) argues that this suffering in the context the Latin American make women feel morally superior to men. Altagracia is a figure of comfort for the troubled woman and at the same time a role model that makes troubled times as meaningful and dignifies their suffering. Faith in Altagracia may be for migrant women means for resilience, in the midst of violence and suffering. In a society so full of injustice against migrants and women, there seems to be no other option than to continue working and enduring hardships. For the religious Dominican woman, sacrifice and hardship is something that does not go unnoticed in the eyes of Altagracia.

In the migrant scenario women are expected to behave according to Dominican sexual and family values. Diaz argues that this aspect of moral sexuality in Marianism as something that damages women, because it is unreal and unhealthy to think of marriage without sexuality, or to demand of women (Comas-Díaz 2008, Colón-Burgos 2014). Scholars explain that the virgin Mary did not remain a virgin forever. It is understood that Altagracia gave birth, as any other woman would have, by the baby passing through the cervix and the vagina. This makes the hymen not intact, notwithstanding Altagracia's sacredness. Sometimes ecclesiological explanations are not scientifically supported (Mayblin 2014). Sexual morality among migrant women is one of the aspects that women



negotiate in the host society. While some women hide the truth about their relationships, maybe because of the risk of falling into a moral judgment by others. Other women, especially older women feel the need to become more virtuous and pious, since there is not much of a sexual life to feel guilty about. As Mayblin explains: "Once again, the older female 'devotional virtuosi' are discernible predominantly by age and by their distance from childbearing" (Mayblin 2014).

The power of Dominican family values over the migrant woman and how a Dominican household should be carried out, are negotiable aspects of migration that should be analyzed. These are the moral imperatives of Dominican culture where the woman needs to conform to male dominated relationships. However, this sociological research is not based on how the Catholic institution believes women should act, but rather how women actually live and interpret Altagracia's figure. It is relevant that many immigrants' Catholic households are not all composed by the man and wife, but the woman is the sole head of the family. The father figure is absent in the Caribbean and Latin American cultures.

Catholic theologian Jose Antonio Pagola (Pagola 2009), argues in favor of the position in catholic dogma. Similarly, it would be a mistake to assume that in Dominican society women were always subservient to men. The importance of the figure if Altagracia can be interpreted as evidence of female religious power.: There are three aspects which are fundamental: race, class, and endurance -this are aspects that makes Altagracia so intimate and venerated. This is something that brings intimacy between Catholic devotees and figures like saints and Altagracia (Mayblin 2014), like Mayblin explains as Saints are referred to as ordinary simple people. Altagracia is in many aspects alike Dominican migrant women, her capacity for resilience in a simple and powerful way.

Nationalism is a social construct employing language, territory, and the Virgin as a unification figure to consolidate different ideologies (Mariani December 12, 2016). This is something that can be appreciated in many different scenarios like, for example, the case of the Mexican, Peruvian, and Brazilian nations who use the figure of the Virgin to unite and strengthen national identity. This national identity renders the population, in each one of these cases, especially

proud to have been born in their respective homelands in these Latin American or Caribbean countries. This may seem like a Catholic marketing strategy, but it has been interpreted as more than that because the Virgins transcend the religious to become a racial and political symbol. Apparitions of the Virgin tend to stir up nationalist sentiments (Zlatko 2005) because the national scenario was chosen by the Virgin to make an appearance. This is the case of the Virgin of Medjugorje and her apparition in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Zlatko Skrbis argues that these events made Croats feel special and chosen. The Virgin has not appeared exclusively in Bosnia Herzegovina, also in Portugal, Mexico, France, and Ireland. In these locations she is known as Fatima, Guadalupe, Lourdes, and Knock (Zlatko 2005). In the case of the Virgin of Altagracia, her image, not an apparition *per se*, but for some sort of mystical reason, her image appeared on top of an orange tree where the Basilica was later constructed in Higüey. In each of the Virgin's apparitions there is a relationship between the Virgin and the ethnic and national attributes that make her look and talk as a French, Mexican, Portuguese, Croatian and Irish woman, as has been described by its witnesses (Zlatko 2005). In popular religion, this is significant because the virgin becomes part of the people. In the Mexican case, she revealed herself and had a conversation with Juan Diego, a poor Indian peasant.

Another aspect of nationalism that coincides with the Virgin as a flexible figure is that her figure is significant for many nations and every one of them feels special, vis a vis their Virgin. As an example, the festivities of the Virgin of Guadalupe, described by Valentina Napolitano, an anthropologist, who examined the national symbols used in the procession of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Rome. She points out the presence of national Mexican folk dancing and mestizo or mixed raced priests marching in Rome, under the slogans of "patria y fe", meaning homeland and faith. Although she describes the pilgrimage as a transnational space, the Virgin is still a figure brought forth by colonization and it is also considered a Pan American symbol of caring. Napolitano emphasizes on the details of the parties with Mariachi music, the people dressed in indigenous textiles, and the beans and tortillas as part of the food fest (Napolitano 2009).

Machismo is defined by Evelyn Stevens as "the cult to virility". This cult's chief characteristics are exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships, and arrogance and sexual aggression in male to

female relationships (Stevens 1965, 1973). The fact that women have a secondary position in society and are subservient to their male counterparts is another way of enduring pain, which brings Mary as that woman who understands and cares for those who suffer injustice and inequality. As Mayblin explains: "Once again, the older female 'devotional virtuosi' are discernible predominantly by age and by their distance from childbearing" (Mayblin 2014).

The Catholic Church has been recognized for their active campaign against abortion (Skrbiš 2005), the restriction of power to women and intolerance toward homosexuality. At the same time, there is an inclination to sexual conversations and sexual humor in the Caribbean, both in Puerto Rican and Dominican culture, in general. Sometimes this sexual humor addresses profound social morale, like prejudice against homosexuality and sexual violence against women. Anthropologist Donna Goldstein argues that this sense of humor is a way coping with frustration and anguish in the middle of violence and poverty her ethnography on the Brazilian Fabela (Goldstein 2003).

There is literature available on Race and Marian devotion, for example, phenomenon of the Black Madonna is not exclusive of the Caribbean. There are Black Madonna's in Europe as well. In England, there is the Virgin of Norfolk; in France, the Vierge Miraculeous; the Polish have the Virgin of Czestochowa; Our Lady of Aparecida in Brazil; and in Latin America, the Virgin of Guadalupe. There is no account in the studied literature of the Black Madonna of the Dominican Republic, the Virgin of Altigracia. This research might be considered as a contribution to the existing literature on race and class feminist theology because of the insight of how faith and spirituality are understood. One of the explanations for Mary's features, which are not Caucasian, is the Catholic Church's reformist plan to make the figure of the Virgin more intimate and appealing to the colonized, the poor, and indigenous people. This is a powerful political strategy according to Janet Favrov (Harris 2016), who argues that this was a way of expanding the European boundaries of the Catholic Church, to become more inclusive and appealing to the poor. The Virgin Mary, in many senses is not considered a religious figure because her local version may be portrayed as a national symbol; at that point, she loses her categorical religious charisma to become a symbol for everyone who believes, Catholic or not.

Latin America and the Caribbean can be a place for gender struggle against patriarchy. In a way, the Virgin is a female energy that is not secondary to God, she is a Goddess and queen to many. The Virgin of Aparecida in Brazil, the Caridad del Cobre in Cuba, are examples of Black Madonna that know suffering and bring an example of love and faith to humanity. The Virgin of the Immaculate conception is compared with Yemaya (the African deity) and the Virgin de la Caridad del Cobre with Ochún, one of the most powerful deities of Santería. The Virgin is compared with the Pacha Mama which is mother nature, the fertile earth, and the one responsible for birth and life. Our contention, like Napolitano, is that Mary's figure is a mimesis of Latin American women. The strength and faith women have for the Virgin is the same strength and endurance they themselves have, as a result of knowing and understanding love and pain. In a culture where fathers are absent and faced with violence, the mother becomes even more powerful than the father. "Empathy is fundamental for Catholic forms of visual piety that work through principles of mimesis and analogy" (Mayblin 2014).

One of the most important works on Latin American women's femininity is Evelyn Stephen's work "Marianismo the other face of Machismo". She describes Latin American women's dogmatic Marianism as spiritual superiority. She states this has its roots in the Catholic cult to the Virgin Mary but makes the argument that the figure of the Virgin has permeated into culture so deeply that Marianism is almost an unconscious way of taking on gender roles. Her work is based on the idea that gender is not biological but a cultural construct. She describes Marianism as a way of glorification of motherhood, sadness, self-sacrifice, and moral sexuality. The Virgin's virtues are considered as the real feminine, as opposed to the evil liberated un-feminine woman (Stevens 1973). The argument is that this Marianism is a way of empowerment. Nevertheless, it is seen as a cultural force that permeates Latin American women, who basically have little choice. In her argument, although an empowering view of Latin-American women, they are victims of history and cultural circumstance, and not viewed as subjects capable of making choices.

To become the ideal woman means that one has to become one. It is a work on the self that was presented by the theory of performativity of gender, that Judith Butler brought into discussion (Butler 2010). This theory of performativity

was informed by the discourse theory by Foucault, where the individual becomes the subject and the ideal self.

In an interesting ethnography by Karen D'Alonzo, she wanted to understand if Marianism was a cultural factor in why Latinas had a propensity for being overweight. Marianism can be understood as a code of conduct for Latinas, where family and a sense of duty and obligation to the husband come first, and physical activity is seen as a selfish commodity (D'Alonzo 2012). The results of the ethnography were interesting, because Marianism was not related to being overweight. She used the phrase family comes first as the phrase to describe why women thought that physical activity was an act of selfishness. Instead, the findings were that acculturation, stress, and lack of support were the reasons why women did not do physical activity:

Physical activity interventions for Hispanic women should capitalize on the strengths of the Marianist, address factors leading to acculturation stress among women and their families and establish bridges of social support among new groups of immigrants (D'Alonzo 2012).

Power can be found in the ability to choose. If fitness is something important for women, then that should be respected; if a woman decides to prioritize on her family, that is her choice. Feminism should not blame religion for it. On another study about Marianism being the root for social obligation and the norm for women to assume the role of care giving for Mexican migrants versus Us born women (Mendez Luck, Anthony 2016), there was no relationship found between Marianism and the sense of obligation to be the caregiver.

The essentialist vision of women contemplates the repression of her sexual needs or desires. This is opposed to the essence of men as being the ones who need sex in the way an animal has need for food or shelter (Beauvoir 2009). One of the many virtues of the Virgin of Altagracia is her sexual morality or virginity. This may be of contrast to the fact that the change of location for migrant women may imply the break from a marital bond or to leave the husband behind in the homeland. Research on the aspects of gendered migration is important because these changes can lead to moral dilemma of being faithful to the Virgin's virtues or not. The Catholic church is known for promoting marriage as a

legitimate way to form a family, but the dynamics of the Dominican diaspora is that relationships are sustained marginal to the law (Yeoh 2014 Toro-Alfonso 2012) and to the official church discourse of the celebration of marriage. This type of situation may cause conflict for women in the Dominican diaspora, forcing them to form new ways of performing the rituals and thus creating new performances of gender (Pasura 2012; Pasura 2008). According to a study on sexuality, one of the virtues of the Virgin Mary is sexual morality. In a psychological study, by Hussein et. al. (year?), the aim was to understand if Marianism was related to less sexual satisfaction, by understanding that pleasure is seen as immoral for Latinas. The researchers acknowledge that sexuality for Latinas is seen as problematic, in the sense that it is mainly understood as aggressive from the male part, and submissive and moralist from the feminine side. In this research, Hussein et. al. wanted to implement a new sexual narrative and increase sexual freedom and satisfaction.

The client will acknowledge circumstances in which she was able to ignore 'the problem', accept herself as a sexual being without guilt, engage in sexual activity where she felt free to explore herself and partner, and was able to voice her sexual desires to her partner (Hussain 2015).

The figure of the Virgin Mary has been associated with submissiveness by many scholars, especially in studies that use the Virgin of Guadalupe as the submissive figure as opposed to the Malinche, who was said to be the conquistador Hernan Cortés's mistress, a hyper sexualized woman, a sexual concubine, but free of living life according to social establishment (Lara 2008). In this sense the Virgin Mary is seen as the establishment and what many scholars refer to as Marianism. Which is:

Marianism derives from the devotion shown to the Virgin Mary, whose humility and virtue exemplify the decorum, care giving, and often stoicism required in the female... For some Latinas, the importance of motherhood may be culturally sanctioned as a rewarding role in and of itself. Femininity is emphasized, but female sexuality and acceptance of sexual feelings are repressed (Mendez-Luck 2016).

How women assume the virtues of the Virgin has been preserved and passed from generation to generation as a cultural tradition. Devotion for the Virgin or the cultural practice of Marianism does not respond to a reasonable logic or a scientific epistemological scheme. Religion has to do with faith and beliefs that are in many ways mysterious, but certain to those who believe in it. In this sense, it is matter of social respect for other cultures to consider religious devotion as sensible for the one who believes, and not judge from an ethnocentric and epistemological standpoint.

Feminist theories represented at first an anti-establishment discourse that in time has become the establishment. There is something problematic about the interpretations given to the Virgin figure and her virtues, as a way to consolidate colonial and patriarchal dynamics. For the Dominican migrant woman, the Virgin is not necessarily analyzed as a colonial and neoliberal subject. The transnational Dominican migrant is a religious actor. There are exciting new ways of interpreting the Virgin Mary as an empowered figure, for example with the works by artist José Durán, who portrays the Virgin of Guadalupe in sexy clothes or as an action figure (Appendix 1).

In the classical Marian concept, the Virgin is seen as the one suffering in silence, described by the Hellenist concept of stoicism. The image of the Stoic woman has been regarded as far from liberating by western feminism and is not the ideal lifestyle for anybody. However, the stoicism found in the Virgin Mary is also a way of endurance and resistance to the migrant bodies that are so many times victims of violence, and moral superiority is a valid way of empowerment. This Marian moral superiority is not regarded by all feminist as liberating, but I argue as Mahmood did that sometimes acts of resistance can be interpreted as submissiveness.

Migration is full of stories about sexual workers. In this sense women who work as domestic workers feel their jobs is more dignified than the other. The status of the Dominican migrants can be changing and their role in market economy is growing. However, sexual tourism and violence against Dominican sex workers is in many ways a patriarchal problem. European males travel to the Dominican Republic because of the government permissiveness on prostitution. This type of prostitution is the opportunity for these men to perform the most perverse

sexual encounters, ones that they would never dare with their white western women (Fitzpatrick 2013). This vision of the Dominican migrant as a sexual worker is a means for survival. There are forms of alienation from this reality and religion can be one of these forms, not necessarily as a way of enforcing guilt and shame on the sexual worker, but as means to preserve the migrant's importance before a God that is forgiving and comforting. There is a discourse on morality that may be used to say that the figure of the Virgin of Altagracia is the archetype of what a good woman should be. This moral discourse is also a discourse about being good and dignified to oneself. This has not much to do with morality as shame inducting, but as personal satisfaction. There is, as well, a form of power about being an object of desire in the Dominican society. The sexual worker can be a subject of agency and also use her sexual power to make men suffer, as a form of femme fatale. But even this type of woman is not opposed to, in real life, be a believer of the Virgin.

By studying the Dominican migrant as a religious actor, and connecting religion, culture and gender dynamics, feminism can be seen as epistemologically useful, provided feminism is not another way of colonialism where women in third world countries are seen as more oppressed than western white women. There are limitations to our understanding of global south women, our own position in society and culture, can be a way to get lost in translation, because of the lack of understanding of the social context. Gender violence is lived in many ways by Dominican migrant women, from an unjust division of labor to using women's bodies as objects; it can be a very disadvantaged position to be in. Far from seeing Dominican migrants as victims, I propose, like many other third world feminist, to see them as women with agency and power. The Virgin of Altagracia is an important figure for Dominican migrants because religion and culture, understood as a symbolic message of the sacred and the profane, are one of the most important relationships that women have with them when becoming a gendered subject. To decide if these women have been denied their freedom of choice or not is something that cannot be answered in a simple and direct manner, maybe it will remain a debate.



## Chapter 3: Feminist methodologies

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology of the thesis. Feminist researchers have led me to ponder on Standpoint theory and Postmodern feminism theories in a way that directly developed my methodological approach.

Feminist epistemologies helped change my perspective by understanding how my own social biases shaped my research questions and recognizing the sensitivity of the fieldwork I was conducting. By interviewing Dominican migrant women, I needed to recognize their epistemic authority by giving importance to the meanings they attribute to things like religion and migration. Feminist epistemologies is the only approach that recognizes Dominican migrant women as an important source of knowledge because of their privileged position to speak about their experience using their own terms. Their point of view is privileged because it is exclusive to them. Even the most well intended researcher will never be able to experience the world as they do, the situated knower, in this case Dominican migrant women. The term situated knower is used by feminist epistemologist to describe the privileged position of the knower in their body and the location of their body in social terms (Walby 2011; 463 Nazarea 1999) This theory demonstrates that there is epistemic authority and value to women's experience. Feminist epistemologists demonstrate that there is a social epistemic hierarchy that benefits scientific logical and reasoning over experience as a source of knowledge (Haraway 1988, Hartsock 2006). The source of knowledge when using a feminist methodology justifies women's activities and interests as a valid source of research (Hartsock 2006). Nevertheless, according to Standpoint theorist, Nancy Hartsock experience is not enough when taken apart from a social context. The

Gramscian concept of the subject as the "social ensemble" explained by Hartsock is that individual experiences cannot be divorced from social circumstances (Hartsock 2006). There is a mediator between the experience women have and the finished discourse they present. The coherent meaning of reality is always influenced by social circumstances. The way meaning is

mediated by experience is something widely discussed by feminist standpoint theorist which I will later explain in detail.

This chapter on feminist epistemologies is an invitation to reflect not exclusively on the women's point of view but on epistemology as a universal way of knowledge. One of the most important critiques feminist epistemologies has done is on the objective and rational epistemology or way of thinking. Donna Haraway suggests that objectivity in sciences and the scientific method are a limited way of acquiring knowledge (Haraway, 1988). She is reflecting on the understanding in constructionist Social Sciences that scientific knowledge is something like the process of revealing the truth that can be achieved when following the strict standards of objectivity. This is something I thought I was aware of but did not recognize in myself at the outset of the research. In terms of religion although I might share a similar catholic doctrine with the women, I interview there was still in me a respect for scientific reasoning that does not necessarily correspond to the meanings and experiences Dominican migrant women attribute to religion. Because of my Catholic religious background, I consider myself a religious person at the same time and not at all a contradiction in my opinion, I question the direct intervention of saints and God in our lives. Haraway's (1988) claims demonstrate that the knowledge social scientists acquire is definitely limited. She calls this type of epistemologies a chauvinistic discipline and a bad guide to doing science. Because my research is based on the knowledge and the reflections of the migrant women have on religion and migration, the objective scientific method is not relevant or a desired methodological approach. Donna Haraway expresses herself on objectivity saying that when adopting a feminist methodology, objective knowledge is not only not possible but irrelevant:

Social constructionists make clear that official ideologies about objectivity and scientific method are particularly bad guides to how scientific knowledge is actually made (Haraway, 1988 p.421)

Although I consider myself to be a religious person, I don't think of the virgin as a real intercessor of daily life in very concrete terms. The problem I saw with this is that there is no proof that the virgin is actually acting in favor of our circumstances. For example, if a woman tells a story about how she was having a

very bad boat trip from Santo Domingo to San Juan and prayed to the virgin for help. In the end she feels her prayer was answered and she came through to the other side alive with a sense of gratefulness to the virgin. According to Nehring some people use religion as way of making sense to events that are otherwise illogical (Nehring 2018). What is relevant for this research are the meanings and significance the Virgin of Altagracia has for the women I interview. In the later example why did it matter to the interviewee that Altagracia helped her in that circumstance, what is the meaning of this event for her? Reflecting profoundly on this idea and understanding the epistemic authority of the women I interview has led to me to take into consideration meaning over scientific explanations. Something that I thought came from an educated and academic point of view became for me a methodological barrier I had to overcome. For this, Elizabeth Anderson's review on feminist theology is one interesting piece of literature, she reflects on the theologian's political agendas and the writing process. Anderson quotes Heather Walton, a feminist theologian as saying that the process of writing requires faith and that we neglect other important responsibilities and obligations (Anderson, 2009). This argument makes me think of the position of the academic woman as privileged in society because of the possibility of education and the respect one needs to acknowledge of caretaking and working-class women. There has to be an acknowledgement for women's time, obligations, and needs. If their priority is to take care of others and there is limited or no time for an interview, then I needed to respect that. After all, this academic reflection is important for me, and I would like to think that it is for the women I interview but I will be acquiring a degree out of it and my informants will not. Therefore, these interviews are not more important than taking care of actual real-life responsibilities. About the religious beliefs and practices that woman perform in their daily life Anderson suggests that it be analyzed not from a judgmental objective rational epistemology but from a feminist and situated position.

Herbert Rubin (Rubin 1995) emphasizes the importance of careful listening in order for there to be an understanding about what is important and relevant and how to capture that during the interview. Especially after using the N Vivo software sometimes themes emerged that I did not plan for; for example: a story about health complications or some anecdote about their workplace or a dispute with a neighbor. Everything is important and might be related to the meanings

and aspects they consider to be influential in their life, so I had to be alert to how they framed their stories, beliefs, and experiences.

The interviews were recorded, unless the participant objected that this be done. In order to take seriously Rubin's suggestion, at the time of the interviews I decided not to take notes, this means that the person in front of me is having my undivided attention. Any notes were written immediately after the interview (Rubin 1995). An interview is not a just a mere way of sitting with a participant and extracting data from them, this type of interview is unreliable (Oakley 2016). There has to be some space for building rapport. Of top importance is the openness of the interviewer to become empathetic with the feelings and topics brought up by the interviewees and to articulate that empathy. The value of the data is based on the situated experience of the women. This experience can only be expressed by the situated knower and because I have not lived it, I can only be guided into it. The careful reading and study of previous literature reviews have been relevant for the formation of my own biases like scientific reasoning and other sociological works of Saba Mahmood, Chandra Mohanty, and Evelyn Stevens (Mahmood 2001, Mohanty 2003, Stevens 1973, Mahmood 2004, Mohanty et al. 1991; Stevens and Soler 1974). From the perspective of feminist epistemologies, I need to be aware that this previous literature review does not position me in an epistemic privilege, only the situated knower can have that position. In each and every case there needs to be absolute privacy, there may be some exceptions. For example, if the woman to be interviewed needs to be taking care of children or in need to be contact with any family member and prefers to be accompanied by children or any other family member. Another advantage of the face-to-face interview is that there is a body language dialogue that can add an important piece of information in a nonverbal communication channel. Facial expression, tone, posture, or other body expressions will be recorded after the interview. This body language is important for the context of the interview and will be included in the transcript. There is as well the use of bodily expressions that can only be interpreted and transmitted on the reflection that takes place after the interview.

### 3.2 Review of respondents

For my fieldwork process I used the snowball method that originated from a total of four places, Rio Piedras, Canovanas, Sabana Seca and Puerto Nuevo. Because women belong to these four places, I understand it is important to describe Sociological aspects of the places and the religious communities. The first place I started with is my old high school which is located in Rio Piedras and is known for having a high population of Dominican people in their church, San Antonio de Padua. First, I attended on the 21st of January, the festivities for Altagracia that I described in many chapters of this thesis. On the day of the Celebration, I gathered the information about the locally based Association of Altagracia, when and where they met and who was able to attend the meetings. Immediately I met Eva, who I mentioned in many parts of the thesis because of her leadership and her reflections on Altagracia based on her philosophy as part of a recognized revival movement in Puerto Rico which I decided not to reveal because her position in the movement might reveal her identity. An important aspect of this research is to ensure confidentiality. Eva referred me to her aunt Minga and her cousin Maria who were all part of the same catholic revival movement. This group of women are active members in San Antonio, and I continued to see them taking active parts in the church activities.

The Centro para la Mujer Dominicana was another place where I was Introduced to women that contributed to this thesis. This organization is a place for advocacy and support for Dominican Puerto Rican in issues such as Domestic, workplace, institutional and gendered violence. They are dedicated to raising awareness of the injustices that women suffer from maritime travels to workplace exploitation to more private and psychological repercussions of violence. At el Centro I met Marta Sanchez, Noeli, Yandra and Aladina. This group of women had diverse migration and life histories but in general they were critical and articulate about the questions and reflections about religion and migration I discussed with them. I enjoyed being challenged in terms of presenting a very clear picture about the position of the Dominican migrant women living in Puerto Rico as the ones who build resiliency in a male dominated society. The Centro provides many services like for example paid and pro Bono lawyers that work for women who need Judicial support. Also, they provide psychological and life support for women undergoing from migration

trials to domestic violence and economic necessities. The women that I met from the women at el Centro are progressive in terms of advocating for women liberties and rights to living safe and meaningful lives and calling out the challenges that migrant women deal with not just in the Intra Caribbean migratory context but around the world.

A considerable number of women who contributed with thesis such as Doña Carmen, Doña Francisca, Cirielle, Puchiri, Vilma, Mileidi and Mariana are part of the community of Villas de Loiza. According to Dominic Pasura members of diasporic religious communities support each other from common issues such as racism and build solidarity from experience (Pasura 2008) The significative Dominican presence in Loiza combined with the similarities in economic, racial and migration circumstances seem to have developed stronger ties between the women in Loiza. In Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis, I was able to provide examples of how women would describe their faith and spirituality as a product of the experience in their communities as a homogeneous traditional and Catholic culture with common values and understandings.

For this thesis I interviewed women like Olivetta, Juana and Wanda who are Protestant and do not belong to the predominantly Altagracian and catholic communities of Loiza and Rio Piedras. Engaging with Protestant women was a great contribution for this thesis because I was able to understand that modernity and religious pluralism as explained by Peter Berger means that Catholicism can no longer taken for granted as the hegemonic religion in the Intra Caribbean migration context (Berger 2014). For example, Juana belongs and follows a Facebook Pentecostal community called “Restaurando Corazones”, Wanda is a pastor and leader of her own small community in Bayamon and Olivetta is Protestant but is not affiliated to any religious community. They had in common that they understood self-improvement to be at the core of their religious values which is something I discussed in detail in chapter 5. On the other hand, Cirielle and Vilma who are both younger and related to the women in Loiza but do not live there articulated their negotiations and struggles with their catholic religious understandings.

The community of Villas de Loiza is a low-income suburb that is part of the Municipality of Canoanitas located in the north-east coast of Puerto Rico and for

a place where many people of the Dominican diaspora in Puerto Rico live. Attracted by the local gastronomy, my initial contacts were related to my personal interest in looking for fresh local and Dominican style seafood. Predominantly a Black community, Loiza is recognized for being historically one of the first free slave communities in Puerto Rico. According to anthropologist Peggy Brunache slave nutrition was understood to be passive in terms of serving themselves from plantation remains based on starchy crops and pig and cow remains (Brunache 2019). Brunache argues that before and after emancipation in the French Caribbean, slaves would nourish themselves with a seafood-based diet (Brunache 2019) a reflection that resembles the community at Loiza. Located near the northern coast of Puerto Rico, Loiza is one of the favorite places for people looking for some Mangú or mofongo (Dominican/Puerto Rican plantain-based dish) with shrimp, cod fish or crab. In conclusion the women who participated in this research live in places of the metropolitan area of Puerto Rico. With some of these women I developed a friendship and some of them encourage me to finish the process of successfully submitting this thesis.

My research findings are a developed and complex discussion about the role of popular religion as simultaneously empowering and disempowering, as expressed by the experience of migration from a gendered perspective. Women can be critical of the religion they feel part of. This research pursued precisely that complex reflexivity, which gives richness to the investigation process. In order to gain access to a wider sense of the role of religion, I had to be open to the idea of women being critical of the Catholic church, religion in general, and listen to those stories. The concept of lived religion as used by Robert Orsi suggests that there are misleading interpretations given about Christianity (Orsi, 1985). The relationship migrant women had with religion was not the way that institutionalized religion intends for it to be. Religion played many roles in many different circumstances, and women attributed meanings to it that had little to do with the dogmatic aspects I was trying to pursue the trace of. The virgin of Altagracia as a dogmatic figure, that serves as an example for the life of all Dominican migrant women are a generalization that I had to abandon quickly. With this research, I want to elaborate on the interpretations that women have about religion, how they dislocate the institutional intention. The difference between the interpretation given by Orsi and this research is that I understand that there is a value to these misleading interpretations, if in the end they

become empowering for women. Why women associate themselves with a particular religion? Why are some women critical of their own religion? These questions cannot be answered with a yes or a no, but with stories that relate experiences of migration with devotion, disenchantment, community, relationships, and a complex understanding of the role religion plays in the lives. This can be of interest to the social scientists who understand religion to be a relevant subject of research that needs to be explained in a complex and critical manner.

Altagracia is venerated by Dominicans and has a significance that is translated as anecdotes of petitions, the national fiestas Patronales, and in very few cases reflected as an example. For example, a nun reflected on the virgin Mary as a woman with a capacity for understanding the needs of others, and as a collaborative figure to Jesus. This was meaningful for her because, understanding the needs of others, it inspired her to pursue a life of service and become a nun. Likewise, in a very specific instance in life, when a woman felt in desperate need of help, when she could not help herself in the boat trip to Puerto Rico. She lost the sense of feeling in her legs at a time when she needed to run, she turned to Altagracia as a daughter, and was saved. Petitions are related directly to Altagracia because many people have anecdotes about how petitions made to Altagracia are granted petitions. In two similar cases, the mothers petitioned Altagracia for the health of their daughters, the women I interviewed. In both cases, the women witnessed the miracle, and the petition was thanked for by doing a pilgrimage to Higüey and leaving their white dresses as an offering to the virgin. There is a cultural significance in the figure of Altagracia. The national festivity that is celebrated in Dominican Republic as Fiestas Patronales is also celebrated in Puerto Rico, at churches with a large presence of the Dominican community. I personally attended one where to Dominican consul gave a speech about the importance of celebrating Altagracia, there was food for everyone and a Dominican dance after mass, massively attended. In conclusion, there is a cultural value of the festivities of Altagracia and sometimes a reflection of her example. However, there is also a sense of losing the cultural value of Altagracia. In a way, it is as if Altagracia is the reminder of what is culturally Dominican that is getting lost by migration and secularization. Altagracia, the Spanish Catholic legacy is being replaced by other



figures such as God or Jesus, found in the American protestant tradition or even in the secularized society.

Simultaneously, the religious figure of Altagracia is a complicated subject because of a disconnection between the social and cultural importance attributed to Altagracia, and the individual value women assign to her. The 21 of January is a display of National and religious fervor that latter may show to be of lesser significance than attributed to it in the day of the festivity. As many women expressed, God is the most important in my life. Talking about religion with women who have migrated and reflecting on the significance of religion, faith and Altagracia I understood that in their life is more complicated than what I can express in this thesis. Even religious women at some point had some bad experience or something they wanted to express against institutional religion. For example, some talked about churches being a business and feeling outraged at religious leaders who take advantage of that. In one case, a woman was a victim of abuse by a taxi driver, who took her to school and would stop on the way to touch her. That experience lasted for years. When she tried to get her grandmother's attention, she did not think of it as a possibility because he was a religious man. Other women talked about the danger of becoming moralistic when being religious. They brought up an example of a family member who was changed by religion, in a way that stopped them from relating to their family anymore.

The spiritual needs of Dominican migrant women are sometimes material needs, and the Catholic church is not necessarily open to this material way of interpreting the dogma. As a Catholic nun expressed herself, the devotion around Altagracia many times is a show of self-harm. This, I understand, comes from the belief that Altagracia is an intercessor for acquiring what is needed. Some women pray to ask for a better faith, but many times what they ask for are specific material needs that are not being met. Instead of embracing life's difficulties as part of a predestined fate, like Stevens would argue Marianism promotes, many women use the dynamics of the petition to change their fate. If you ask with faith, anything may be granted. This statement repeats itself in many of the interviews. According to the dogma promoted by Marianism, the virgin Mary becomes the mater Dolorosa when the crucifixion of Christ happens, and this sets an example for embracing the suffering of death. Instead of

embracing suffering, women pray and bargain with God and the virgin for the prevention from suffering, sometimes by inflicting self-harm like walking barefoot, fasting, or other creative way of showing off their devotion. This, according to a Catholic nun, comes from the false belief that God can be bargained with, and he needs people to inflict self-sacrifice.

Religion plays an important role, in the integration of Dominican migrant women in Puerto Rico, because they provide spaces for inclusion such as the choir and the summer camp, but also emotional support in times of need. For example, a woman, who dedicated herself to housework, found herself at the age of 50 with time to spare. She spent it working and volunteering for her local Catholic church. She committed two days a week to giving catechism classes to young children, she belonged to the church choir and rehearsed twice a week and went to Sunday mass. Because she was such a strong supporter, she was given a job at summer camp to cook. In addition, she was given the opportunity to take classes at the Catholic university of San Juan, called the Sacred Heart University. She regretted having left her studies and opportunities in Santo Domingo, because she would have had the family support network to keep studying and working. In her case, church activities make her feel productive and part of a community that is giving her economic support, and value to her skills. As mentioned before, many migrant women understand that they have been left to their own devices when taking care of their children. When children are sick, this is especially stressful and hard for women. In the case of a young woman who had trouble with her son since birth, she had to give up her job to take care of her son. At that moment, the father left her alone at the care of her dying child, and she found a support group in a pastor that had a radio show called “Restoring Hearts”. She attributes the recuperation of her son’s health to an act of God, and the pastor as her support system, when she needed it. In conclusion, the church is the place to find support when going through rough moments, like illness or a difficult legal process, but also is the place to give support to others and feel more integrated to the community.

The migration process from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico involves a lot of legal steps that are permeated by the political aspects of both islands. Puerto Rico has had since 1898 a colonial relationship with the United States. Dominicans who wish to become residents or US citizens need go through the US migratory

processes that involve economic resources. Similar to the UK visa process, the US requires that there should be enough economic resources to not be dependent on the state's economy. Many women migrated in the first place because they were searching for better economic opportunities. The strategies to overcome the state hurdle involves a lot of support from family members and friends. Many years of hard work and patience to deal with a slow government office, that is becoming slower, as the current government policy is to make the process more difficult for migrants who wish to enter the US. Although there is an economic crisis in Puerto Rico and a growing economy in the Dominican Republic, the value of the US dollar next to the Dominican peso is still a better deal for the working class. Also, as Dominican Republic economy is expanding, there is still a problem of inequality. As one of the women expressed "Yeah Dominican Republic's economy is getting better, but our salaries remain the same. Santo Domingo looks better, and the rich people take advantage of that, but for us there is no crisis here. Because no matter how much you work, the salary there is miserable". In conclusion, the value of the national currency is something taken into consideration when migrating.

Because of the physical proximity of Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, the most dramatic migration stories are the ones where women decided to migrate in a boat. These were moments of spiritual need. Not every woman came this way to Puerto Rico, but the ones that did talk about that experience as a survival story. As one of the women expressed: "It felt like the survival of the fittest when on the boat". Another woman said: "I thought I was going to die and never see my daughter again", "if I had known it was going to be like that, I would never have done it". Some women regret even migrating, breaking up with their families, and others say that they feel like Puerto Ricans already and feel uncomfortable with the word migrant. Most women left Dominican Republic to pursue the American dream; but they were not willing to live in the cold weather, or they didn't know how to speak the English language. Many women said that, in Puerto Rico, they felt like at home. I could feel the discomfort, when mentioning the word migration, when reading the consent form.

The caring dynamics, before and during the migration process, many times involved a grandmother or family members taking care of the children. This is an important topic that women like to talk about, because many times this caring

dynamic is controversial as they expressed. Not all women are willing to leave their children behind, and sometimes they become advocates for not leaving children behind. The women that have left their children behind did not seem like they felt shame for doing so, on the contrary, they expressed that they were left with little choice because of economic scarcity. Through our research, we found out that there are other factors that lead women to leaving their children behind. In the Dominican culture it is very common for women to leave their children in the care of grandparents, even when they have not migrated. It is very common that women leave their young ones in the care of the maternal grandmother during the summer, or for some periods of time when they need to be working. Sometimes second-generation Dominicans are eager to go back to Dominican Republic. As one of the women expressed: "They used to spend the summers in Dominican Republic, they liked the fact that they were surrounded by family and where free to do what they pleased. Now that they are all grown up, they want to live there". We concluded that, in this discussion, the woman's reflexive process and the social upbringing was relevant.

The Dominican migrant woman is many times a sexual object. This is something women need to cope with, in order to survive economically and when entering the job market. This finding goes along with the objectivation theory brought up by Frederickson and Roberts, which states that society attributes a social value to the woman's body according to her physical appearance and sexual desired qualities. (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) This came up in basically all the interviews in one way or the other. Whether there was a desire of feedback based on the age appearance, or the concrete ways in which objectivation impacts the life of women. In one of the cases, a woman talked about the social bullying she lived because of her weight in Dominican Republic. She was asked to pay double on public transport and could not do activities such as going for a swim on the beach, because people would call her whale. She left Dominican Republic because she could not find a job because of her weight. Plastic surgery is a common topic among Dominican women because of the generalized access to it. As women expressed, plastic surgery or bariatric surgeries are used as a strategy to keep up with the expectations of Dominican men and employment considerations. Migration, in some of cases, provided the conditions to escape that objectivation, because of the possibilities of escaping a male dominated family dynamic in order to be self economically resourced.

The cycle of violence continues during and after the migration process, when women are led to believe that any violent act committed against them will not be held accountable because of their migratory status. For example, in the boat trip, many women talked about other women being thrown into the sea, sexually abused, without any consequence. The reason why some of these stories are never heard of is because coming in a boat trip from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico is illegal and admitting to being on the boat can get them into legal problems or being deported. For example, the organization Centre for Dominican Puerto Rican works with these types of cases, educates women into human rights laws, and even provides legal support for some cases. However, violence is not always physical violence, there are psychological and verbal acts of violence that are more common and documented. For example, women are exploited by their employers by giving them unfair hours of work and not held accountable for that. Another woman expressed how her fake husband would ask her for money and blackmail her with the migration office. Examples of how women endure violence during and after migrating to Puerto are vast. This leads us to understand that migration, many times, is not the answer to breaking the cycle of violence, and only makes it less visible.

### **3.3 Rethinking the insider outsider perspective**

The research process is one that can be reduced to the reflections of the researcher and that is something that must be avoided (Ryan, 2015). There are ethnic differences between the women I interview and myself. One of the opening lines of my consent form and the plain language statements is "You have been selected to participate in this research because you are a Dominican migrant woman over the age of 18". That being said, everything we talk about from that point forward is to question those categories. What does it mean for these women to be a migrant, a woman, and their religious perspective? Reflecting on the multiple positionalities is important because the data that I gather in this research depends mainly on the way participants contribute to my research. The trust and in the position, they understand me, and I understand them is crucial (Ryan 2015). The concept of positionality refers to the work done by Robert Merton in which he questions the research process where there is an assumed mistrust between groups that privileges the insider when social

research is being done (Merton 1972) In the case of this research I perceived myself in a privileged position because I have spent some years working in communities where I have met and befriended Dominican Puerto Rican women. Before going into the field to do my interviews I made a methodological determination. I would not interview exclusively Catholic women. I wanted to test the reach of the figure of Altagracia outside the Catholic church grounds. The reason why I decided this was because I wanted the research to be an honest process where I would not find the answers divorced from my own religious ideology. To prevent this research be about myself, my focus was on the language women used to define themselves as relevant in their own terms in a world that is considered secular. As Ryan and Vachelli argue, scholars who study migration have neglected religion because they emerge from secular societies (Ryan, Vachelli 2013).

However, I decided not to give up on the figure of Altagracia. Why? Because it served a very helpful purpose it facilitated the conversation into the social and political aspects of women in religion. Not only was the conversation about the Virgin of Altagracia relevant when talking to Catholic women, it was helpful when talking into the much broader sense of religion. The vast majority of the women I interviewed were religious women. The reality is that when returned to do academic research I understood quickly that although I thought of myself as an insider. There is a general lack of trust in the academic research process and the way my own friends referred to me was different. This in many ways is just something I gathered from facial expressions and body language but unfortunately like most researchers I will not be able to know exactly what my position was for them (Ryan,2015). There was a huge change in the way I positioned myself, from basically thinking that this research would be an insider perspective to feeling more like an outsider with only one privileged position, our shared language and only sometimes a shared religion. Being an outsider does not invalidate research. Since there is not the assumption that there is a shared knowledge, there is an opportunity for a better verbalization of concepts and grasp the experience of the insider's perspective (Ryan 2018) The sense of communality can be many times based on ethnicity or nationality, age, or religion. It may be beneficial not to be an insider because there are no prejudgments on the way that a migrant woman should understand the world especially when dealing with differences based on ethnicity (Schiller 2011). In

our conversations not much was assumed so there was an opportunity for these women to define themselves in terms that were beyond ethnic differences, at least I tried to do so. One of the most important categories in which women had the opportunity to define themselves was in their religiosity. That sometimes was assumed as a common ground depending on the way that we were introduced and what type of people we knew in common but basically, I tried to remain open to questions beforehand about my own religiosity. Before starting the conversation, I asked if they had any questions and the usual one was, are you a religious person and to what religion do you belong to? I felt that was part of the measuring up that goes on in the interview process where the women I interviewed and myself were getting to know each other. This is the simultaneous reflective process that Schiller and Peggy Levitt refer to about the methodological process (Levitt, 2004). This reflexive process got me to reflect that I could be an outsider in my own religion and that sometimes being religious was the common ground most of my participants were looking for in order to talk about themselves or not. Negotiations about the term like religion, and the figure of Altagracia were done in this process. Next, I will explain more about how the concept of religion and Altagracia were negotiated.

### **3.4 Reflections on religion and Altagracia**

If you know me, you know that I have this deep connection to God. Is it crazy for me to say that I used to ask God to please help me? The strip club really helped me. I can say that it saved me...God put that in my way (Cardi B - God Brought Her to The Strip Club to Save Her Life". YouTube. February 21, 2017. Retrieved July 17, 2017).

Cardi B is a Dominican and Trinidadian rapper who escaped domestic violence by working at a strip club. The meaning she attributes to religion are very contrasting with the Catholic dogma. The research process should not be a catharsis of the researcher's reflexive process (Ryan 2018) but certainly during this research I discovered how my religious Catholic upbringing shaped my original research question. The figure of the Virgin is something that is not reflected upon as an example of womanhood, mainly that is not the experience of the women I interviewed. In this part of the research, I want to explain better my positionality as a Catholic and how this becomes important in the research

process. First it is important to define positionality as the relationship between myself and the women I interviewed. How they perceive me and how I position them in the research process (Ryan 2018). There are some very important differences in catholic women and the way they see their faith and the catholic dogma. Every January 21st when in Dominican Republic a considerable amount of people goes to Higüey mainly to do two things to ask favors from the virgin or to give thanks for the granted wish. This brings me to an important reflection about how religion, in this case Catholic religion can be a set of cultural traditions that pass from one generation to the next and that has mostly to do with culture and the expression of the sacred and less to do with religious dogma.

In the Catholic tradition there is the Anthropological figure of Mary that is portrayed in the bible as a humble servant, the mother of Jesus and slave to God. The questions I started doing during my first interviews were directed toward this aspect of the Virgin as an example of resilience. When is Altagracia resilient and what does that have to do with being a Dominican migrant? Is being resilient not valuing enough the political and social aspects of inequality? There is something about being resilient that resonates with both Dominican and Puerto Rican culture. Our experience with slavery and colonization may have something to do (Duany 1992, Fanon 1965) Sometimes resiliency is absolutely necessary for survival but seeing resilience as a choice is not considering aspects of inequality and violence in Caribbean society. There is the aspect of choice and how women see their role in society as domestic workers and caregivers. (Fitzpatrick 2013) This research is about if Dominican Puerto Rican see a relationship between resilience and religion. The reflexivity process is about recognizing the political standpoint of these women and my reflections about religion and how we negotiate those terms. Recognizing the value of experience and their relationship to religion and faith.

Religiosity is very much alive in Caribbean society and the sociological study of Religion is relevant even for this secular times according to the Gallup world Poll (Stark and Finke 2005) In this sense I agree with Stark, and Finke I that secularization theories are not considering the emotional meaning of religion and academic studies instead focus on rational more objective aspects that explain why religion in this case Christianity is like an endangered species. Some scholars



like Voltaire have predicted the end of a religious society and that has not happened yet (Finke 2001) Maybe the problem is that the concept of religion has been diluted into so many interpretations that it has been mistaken with the concept of faith. In the case of this research, I opted not only to use the concept of religion but the use of a Catholic figure such as the Virgin of Altagracia to enable an open conversation about faith, religion, and the political position of women in the context of Dominican migrants.

When introducing the religious figure of Altagracia into the conversation, I immediately realized was that this religious figure is not reflected upon as meaningful by virtue of being an example as much as being an intercessor. This is aligned with the literature presented by Rodney Stark that states that 81% of the worldwide population is aligned with one of the major religions in the world. I would say that in my experience more than 80% of the women I interviewed were religious. If I were to say why is this true for Dominican migrant women as well as for people in the Caribbean in general. Faith, but not religion is seen as means of survival in a society so violent and adverse for the wellbeing of women. Faith is a form of resilience. Is keeping the faith alive and maintaining a sense of divine justice a form of resilience that is preventing women from understanding and dealing with gender inequality and violence. Is religion the opiate of the masses like Marx would say specifically in the context of the Dominican migrant women? The concept of religion is important in the conversation. But when talking about religion, other concepts come into the conversation, concepts like faith, spirituality, Christianity, Protestant, Catholic, saints, virgins and God are relevant. In the case of the Dominican Republic, according to the Catholic figure of the Virgin of Altagracia is still relevant to this research because the Dominican Republic is considered a Catholic country, this is like this because there is an agreement between the state and the Catholic church that grants the church special privileges. According to the Dominican Republic state website where the Dominican constitution is found,

Although the Constitution specifies that there is no State religion, and allows the freedom of religions and beliefs, the Government signed a concordat in 1954 with the Vatican, designating Catholicism as the official religion and extending to the Catholic Church special privileges that are not granted to other religious groups. These include the recognition of ecclesiastical law, the use of public

funds to finance some church expenses, such as the rehabilitation of religious facilities, and a complete exoneration of all Customs tariffs (REPUBLICA DOMINICANA, 2013).

Although the Dominican Republic is still considered a Catholic country, there is a growing Protestant population. According to a recent newspaper article in the *Diario Libre* there was a poll made by Latinobarometro stating that Catholicism is no longer represented by 64% of the population but this number has decreased to 48%. The poll contends there has been a reduction of 16% of Catholics in the Dominican Republic and there is a 28% of people who are atheist or do not affiliate with any religion. One of the major reasons for this decrease in the Dominican Catholic population is an incident when in 2013 the representative of the Vatican, the Polish Archbishop Jozef Wesolowski was found guilty of sexual child abuse and being an accomplice of child pornography (Diaz, 2018). In the article, another reason as stated by a Catholic priest, Father Jesus, the reduction in Catholicism is related to the fact that the church is not attending the needs of the people and has the institutional incapability to adapt to these times (Diaz, 2018). Catholicism in Dominican Republic seems to be under what scholars like Stark would call a monopoly of religion and that is the reason why I understand that for the purpose of this research the concept of the religious figure of Altagracia can become the starting point of a conversation about religion considering Pentecostalism, Protestantism, and other religions as important as Catholicism.

In any case there is a high demand of religion and some attribute that need for organized religion to prevalent social conditions like poverty and ignorance (Finke, 2005). If what Father Jesus from Dominican Republic is right about Catholicism, there are needs in the Dominican society that the Catholic church is not taking into consideration. When I use the figure of Altagracia to start the conversation about religion if the figure is not relevant or meaningful then the question is what is that religious need that is being unmet? Stark argues that there is a marketing approach to religion in the sense that there is the wrong assumption that people have with religion, the same relationship they have with marketing. There is a demand and a supplier, in this case a religious need and a religious supplier fighting for the market (Finke, 1998) In this sense I understand there has to be an open conversation about religiosity and answering the

question why the figure of the virgin is not appealing anymore is a very important and valid question to ask. Another way to ask that question is what about Protestantism or any other religious community is appealing and meaningful for your life? There are a diversity of levels of commitment or orthodoxy to religion. The question of religious positionality is important. For example, I consider myself a Catholic religious person. Being Catholic can become a stigma that I personally do not like to be associated with. The fact that the Catholic church is responsible for a considerable number of cases of pedophilia among clergy can make a person question their religious attachment to Catholicism. As well, many Catholics have condemning and judgmental attitudes against gay people and the right to abortion (Finke 2001) In the case of the Spanish Caribbean tradition there is the memory of the slavery experience in which slaves were forbidden to practice their own rites and religious traditions and were imposed the Catholic religion (Duany,2005) is another powerful reason why people refuse to be associated with the Catholic tradition. In this sense dissatisfaction with religious needs is something that needs to be considered when researching about religion (Stark 2014) Stark would say that religious dissatisfaction is important data to be gathered by religious institutions because there is a mission to be completed by religions and that having competition means there is a social stimulus for religion to become better at meeting people's spiritual needs. For this research the objective is not to gain religious data on how to improve the Catholic church's capacity for adaptation to the needs of Dominican migrant women but to discuss the meaning of faith and religion in the context of gendered migration.

There is an economic aspect of religion that is very well exemplified with the case of the virgin of Altagracia. The real economic impact of religion in the lives of people, especially in the Caribbean is very much related to the colonial history of the Caribbean. Catholicism was imposed by the Spanish colonization process and the economic system of slavery brought the African religiosity that resulted in the religious syncretism. It should not have come to me as a surprise that many of these ceremonies and rituals done to gain favor of the Virgin of Altagracia, still exist. The called promesas done for the intercession of the Virgin in English the word would be petition. In this type of ritual, there is a petition and if that petition is granted there is a reward for the virgin, this reward can be food, clothes or sacrifices like walking barefoot or on the knees to

the Basilica. The promise is completed when arriving at the actual temple of Altagracia in Higüey. There is a believe that the Image of Altagracia is not an image but the Virgin herself. This type of ritual is very similar to the ones described by Stark on Samarian religions where the statues were fed and clothed and taken care of as a living person (Stark 2000) The economic retributions of the promises for the Catholic church are significant. An example of this can be the multimillionaire investment on the construction of the Basilica of Altagracia, the Catholic television channel produced in Dominican Republic, it can be watched in Puerto Rico. The ritual of the cows, where there is a massive donation of cows as retributions for Altagracia that are then blessed by the bishop and auctioned, the money goes to the Catholic deeds. This economic aspect of religion where Altagracia is an example that can be substituted by the figure of Guadalupe in Mexico, Saint Francis on Italy, Santiago in Spain, or any other religious figure regarded as miraculous to places where believers make pilgrimages. Similarly, in the case of some evangelical churches, religion is the means of economic solvency for the family of the pastor. In the case of Dominican cultural religiosity in general Catholicism is important mainly because there is not a clear state church division. This research is not interested in answering the question of how much is Catholic is religious dogma relevant or not for Dominican migrant women. This research is interested in the cultural religiosity of Dominican migrant women in general and there is a significant number of women to whom these types of rituals are significant. If the case is that the Virgin of Altagracia is not reflected upon as an example of womanhood, it is relevant in terms of the economic aspect of religion and it can be used a way of having a conversation about the religious market as understood by Stark. In religious culture in general the economic dynamic is that religious priests or pastors depend on parish assistance (Stark, 2000) The type of people that contribute to the economy of the church is also important. It should not come as a surprise that the political and economic elite of Dominican Republic is predominantly Catholic. The economic dynamic of religion is similar in most religions, then the symbols and corporality of religious figures is important. The question would be what religious figures are attending the needs and wants of the Dominican migrant women and what are the meanings they attribute to their devotional figure, in the case of Catholics the Virgin of Altagracia in the case of Protestants the figure of Jesus or God himself. What is the religion of their

choice and how do they address the religious competitiveness between Catholics and Protestants as proposed by Stark and Finke?

### **3.5 Situated knowledge and narrative styles**

With this research, and by adopting a feminist methodological approach my role is not to decide whether women's reflections are true or logical. The perspective and context of the Dominican migrant is unique, and my intention is only to capture that insight with my interviews. The female body of the Dominican migrant is one that I can be an observer to, but never a part of. The situated knower has the privilege to witness first-hand the emotions and reflections that I have only access to as an observer (Walby, 2011, Nazarea 1999). Before conducting this research, I have been in contact with many Dominican migrant women because I formerly worked for an NGO that gave services to this population. My ideas about the Dominican migrant women were mainly incomplete, but I could see from my outsider perspective that there was a lot of expertise in the arts of resilience. One of the things I could notice was their interest and relation to religion. I quickly understood that they were a community of religious believers. Their religious background most of the time was related to their mothers' religious belief system. Feminist epistemologies privilege narrative styles over argumentative styles of cognition (Walby, 2011, Nazarea, 1999).

As feminist epistemologists suggest the persuasive effect of the storytelling is harder to achieve when using a quantitative or an argumentative method of cognition. Religious background is one of the most important questions that I want to address as part of the methodology, and I will ask this question to be answered in the form of storytelling. This is because of the importance of background knowledge for feminist epistemologies. Not only is their religious background important but also their political views and personal relations to others. The situated knower is also in the position of sharing or not information depending on their intuition or background belief about the research process and their relation to me. The situated knower in this case, Dominican migrant women are in the position of sharing their experiences with sincerity or maybe even respond to questions in some way trying to comply with a political discourse that they interpret as appropriate (Walby, 2011, Nazarea, 1999). Feminist epistemology considers that women in most cases are the ones in

charge of the education and care of babies and children, and that this impacts greatly the way we construct our gendered identity (Kristeva 2016) The methodological approach of the narrative style about the Virgin of Altagracia and how religion has shaped these women virtues and qualities will be related to the influence of mothers on their religious or spiritual background. Some might argue that that feminist epistemologies do not consider an important piece of information that is the perspective of the male informant, the father figure might be important as well. As the theory of the situated knower informed me, the situated knower can only be considered as such if they have the embodied lived experience of belonging to the group. Nevertheless, it is not only the experience of being born a woman that brings epistemic richness to the research but the way that the woman reflects on her life and social situation that brings epistemic abundance of analysis and new meanings.

### **3.6 Standpoint theory**

Feminist epistemologist Dorothy Smith explains that the position of the situated knower in this case Dominican migrant women and its political and institutional position in society makes them better at explaining society (Smith 2005). This theory called Standpoint theory emphasizes on the idea that women have some knowledge about life that has been neglected because of the disregard for household and feminized labor. For this thesis the position of Dominican Puerto Rican migrant women is disadvantaged in a crossroad of gendered, classed, and racialized ways. This feminist epistemological position is relevant because there is an account for the gender endeavor where women have been in a disadvantaged position. A social disadvantage that at the same time has epistemic privilege as third world epistemologies contend, the more socially disadvantaged the more epistemic privilege (Smith, 2005). Quoting Dorothy Smith.

In taking up those intellectual discoveries of the women's movement identified with the concept of women's standpoint, I describe my own experience of two forms of subjectivity: one in the local particularities of my everyday world as mother and housewife, the other in the academic world based in texts and transcending the locally embedded body (Smith, 2005 p. 440).

With this research my intention is to reflect on the social institution of religion and how women relate to and translate the power discourse they promote through the Virgin of Altagracia. The feminist theoretical standpoint has been through a long history of ideas, one of the important ones as Hartstock points out is gender as a social construct not as a natural given (Caputi 2000, Hartsock, 1998). Nancy Hartsock is regarded as an important materialist feminist scholar and is concerned with the political scope of feminism and how the personal is political. Gender as a social and cultural construct is especially relevant when asking about the quality of docility of the Virgin of Altagracia but also through the migration experience. Especially now when the administration of President Trump is on lookout for strategies to deport migrants from US territories. It can be very threatening for migrant woman to not comply with abusive or disrespectful figures of power at the workplace. Therefore, the work of Nonprofit organizations like the Centre for the Dominican woman or Centro para la Mujer Dominicana in San Juan is an important place to recruit participants. First because it is a safe environment for migrant women where they are been educated about their human rights. Also, because they share strategies about how to deal with this kind of exploitation.

Lived religion as interpreted by Dominican Puerto Rican women is one that can contribute with a narrative richness and insight that religious discourses cannot. Evelyn Steven's work "Marianism the other face of Machismo" is a groundbreaking essay that describes the Catholic tradition of Marianism as spiritual superiority and a social dynamic as powerful as machismo (Stevens 1994). Marianism has its roots in the Catholic cult to the Virgin Mary and Stevens argues that the Virgin as a model of womanhood has permeated into Latin American culture so deeply, Marianism is almost as an unconscious way of taking on gender roles. From the perspective of standpoint theory, this is a projection of the dominant male discourse to subject women to the needs and wants of the male. (Harding 2004) Sandra Harding's work is based on the feminist standpoint ground idea that gender is not natural but a cultural construct. The use of the word natural is important for Standpoint Feminist epistemology because it emphasizes that the social privilege of the male is something natural. That motherhood and caretaking and the roles assigned to the woman are a natural given. Stevens describes Marianism as a way of promoting motherhood, sadness, self-sacrifice, and moral sexuality. For Stevens, the virtues of the Virgin are considered as the

real womanhood as opposed to the evil liberated un-feminine woman. The argument put forth is that this Marianism seems, as a way of empowerment.

Stevens argues that this is a cultural force where women have little choice. In her argument, although Marianism may seem as empowering for women, they are victims of history and cultural circumstance and not as subjects capable of making choices.

Feminist epistemologies can only be adopted if there is a comprehension that there is a world filled with inequality and that political power is something that women have been marginal to. This is something I come to an agreement with especially after listening to some very incredible stories of migration and violence and emphasizing with some of that myself as a Puerto Rican migrant in the US and most recently in the UK. Marxism is an important epistemological consideration because it considers the disadvantaged social reality that I want to highlight, however it may be limited in some way. Haraway expresses it as an important way of doing science but because measuring every social reality with economic theory is not always adequate (Haraway, 1988). The position of the migrant woman in any part of the world makes them especially vulnerable to social problems like violence, racism, and poverty. The context of the Dominican woman has been historically and culturally marked by migration and gender violence. That feeling of loss when one has to leave family and one's own children behind to find economic ways of survival can be an endurance test. At the same time there could be a feeling of accomplishment, a sense of being capable of adaptation and expansion of solidarity in newly found spaces. To have a home away from home can be in some ways liberating and at the same time create a feeling of instability. With this research my intention is to listen and understand what is going on in the minds and hearts of migrant women when facing this predicament. This task of becoming vulnerable and opening up to discussing situations of suffering, uncertainty or discomfort is something that has been challenging at least. I, as a researcher, do not feel entitled to enter the intimacy of a woman's wounds and judge if religion has been helpful or not or if her decisions have been rightful or not. I am only interested in listening and caring for a subject that has not been completely analyzed in a theoretical way and that I understand is relevant and important.



Social institutions are not designed to fulfil the interest of vulnerable groups (Harding, 2005) and the Catholic church is a social institution. According to literature on Marianism the catholic church uses examples of the lives of saints and virgins as a way of promoting the qualities that in many ways promote gender violence. Adopting a feminist epistemology is to understand that social research is never impartial (Harding, 2005) and that is why I start by standing my point before proceeding to explain the feminist methodology I will be using for this research. Feminist epistemologies and methodological approaches propose to study up powerful institutions (Harding, 2005) in this case I propose to study up the catholic church and the virgin of Altagracia. By studying the use of the docile to describe the virgin there is a direct relation to the everyday lives and experiences of women. This question about the docility of the Virgin and the meaning of this to women's daily lives is a question that should not only be relevant for me but for Dominican migrant women, this needs to be a relevant question for them as for me. According to Harding and Norberg there it is methodologically impossible to not fall into a power dynamic when conducting fieldwork (Harding, 2005). This is something that I must bear in mind when doing my interviews there are some social stigmas about class and race that I cannot get rid of even if I tried. This means that even though I will try my best to do my interview as a conversation between equals, I will not be able to hide the fact that I am white and middle class in Caribbean social terms.

From the Standpoint feminist point of view there is a social privilege to be a woman who is the caretaker and the child bearer (Smith 2003). After all, the patriarchal view and dynamics with individuals has failed to recognize human needs and virtues. For this research, standpoint theory can recognize that being capable of attending to the needs and wants of the others is in a way a social privilege that needs academic attention and research. The gendered position of knowledge

Feminist epistemologist Julia Kristeva presents the idea that maternity and caretaking can only be studied from the position of experience (Kristeva, 2014, 2016). In this case I argue that religion is a way of introducing an idealized form of maternity. By using the Virgin of Altagracia as a role model, women should be modest and humble, docile and some might argue submissive mothers and caretakers. The caretaking role and to do so with disposition and as a priority in

life is one of the themes that emerged as an important one. The virgin of Altagracia is the example of the most perfect and spiritual motherly love, this womanly virtue of love for her children is something that can be conflicting when given the scenario of Dominican migrants. These separations can imply sometimes that the woman must leave their children behind. Leaving family and children behind is something that in my opinion is not seen as inappropriate and shameful for men who migrate. Maybe because in Caribbean social terms men are imposed with the responsibility of providing economically for their family (Kristeva, 2014, 2016). When a woman expresses that she had to leave her children behind in order to migrate we might interpret this as a negative psychological situation filled with shame and emotional pain because of this rupture. My intuitive question would be How does this affect women's self-esteem or psychological health? This is one of the methodological challenges for this research. Feminist epistemologist Julia Kristeva makes the argument that only the mother or caretaker who is going through the experience can verbalize their emotions. This for me implies that there needs to be an opening up for their expressions before my analysis interferes. Only experience can explain the difficulties, emotions a meaning this type of situation may unravel in a woman. The way a woman reflects on this experience is the epistemological authority.

By reliance I mean experience in the double sense it has in German. Experience (in the sense of *Erlebnis*) is the eruption of a new pre-object: an emergence, a flash, or an immediate perception. Progressively, in its second phase, experience becomes familiarity [cognizance], a patient knowledge [*savoir*] that understands (*Erfahrung*) (Kristeva 2016 p.461).

Women's reflections on her own circumstances are important. The researchers' bias according to their experience needs to be acknowledged and identified before analyzing the data. It may be something of a surprise for me that women can leave their children behind and not feel shame or guilt for doing so, but I am mindful that the element of choice was probably removed from their decision and that 'choice' in a liberal sense is a luxury that many women do not have. I was forced to reflect that I have not been in this situation, and this reminded me to examine my reactions and to keep an open mind and not assume conflict.

When asked about gender norms and roles women in the Caribbean refer almost directly to the cleaning and cooking chores. For example, a man can be less of a machista if he cooks and cleans. Machismo is defined by Evelyn Stevens as "the cult to virility. The chief characteristics of this cult are exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male to female relationships" (Stevens 1965, 1973, p.18). Gender is always linked to race and class, and it is not possible to separate these forms of analysis when considering a gendered study (Mohanty 2003, 1991, 1988). The global economic forces that influence women in a transnational perspective and how the gendered body of the migrant is allowed to cross borders according to specific nation state necessities is a Global trend. In that way for example the female body of Dominican migrant has been used as domestic and sexual labor as male dominated political influences make that migration possible. The role of the women to engage in keeping and maintaining a clean house is seen as a something feminine and a migrant job. Again, the privileged position of the situated knower is the one that is of interest for this research. It may be the case that cleaning and caretaking skills that are traditionally regarded as skills that belong to the feminine migrant. Feminist epistemologies warns us that this may not always be the case and that cleaning and caretaking maybe of no interest and value to the woman. The

manifestations of the situated knower in this case, Dominican migrant women will be the manifestation of a conversation between women. Something that can as well alter the way they verbalize their ideas and interest and their roles and virtues as opposed to men. This is something feminist epistemologies bring to mind. Our position and expression are always a gendered perspective. Me having a conversation from a heterosexual middle-class white Puerto Rican female will always be different than if I were a man, or a lesbian, or European or black. The access that I will be granted or denied in the fieldwork process depends on all of the social conditions that the women I interview see in me and themselves, our positionality in front of each other.

### **3.7 Postmodern feminist epistemologies**

Postmodern feminist epistemologist Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray and Meaghan Morris brought to my mind concepts like performativity and the linguistic

expression as epistemological considerations. Chandra Mohanty and Uma Narayan the importance of race and class when adopting a feminist methodology. In this part I will explain these concepts and how they inform my methodology.

Postmodern feminism differentiates from standpoint theory and the social construct of gender with the concept of performativity. Standpoint makes the case that gender is not biologically or a natural given. Postmodern feminist epistemologist Judith Butler that there is not an essence to be a woman but that it is also socially constructed by performance (Hurley, 2015). For example, the notion that women are neat and clean. Cleanliness and neatness in women are an essential characteristic and an imposed role that is not essential to women. Postmodern feminist epistemologist also introduces the concept of heteronormativity, the notion that everyone is by nature heterosexual. I need to be aware that my methodological approach should be inclusive to homosexuality, and this topic may become important during my interviews. Homosexuality is a sensitive subject for Dominican society as regarded by Enrique Chaux, Dominican society is highly homophobic in comparison with other Latin American countries.

Higher levels of homophobia were found in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Paraguay than in Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. Homophobic attitudes were positively associated with being male, having lower levels of empathy, spending less time with friends and the media, having aggressive attitudes, and being more religious, in particular non-Catholic Christian (Chaux 2016 p.207).

Catholic tradition is regarded by Chaux as less homophobic this means that their environment maybe more flexible or welcoming to homosexual men and women in the context of Latin America (Chaux 2016) However, on another worldwide research made Sebastian Jackel the reproductive objective of sex between a man and a woman as the plan of God is the argument for priests and pastors to reject social policies that benefit homosexual men and women (Jackel 2014). This makes Catholicism the second most homonegative religion in the world only preceded by Islam. It is important to say that unlike Dominican Republic, in Puerto Rico same sex marriage has been legal since 2015 when under the presidency of Barack Obama and the approval of US congress same sex marriage became a legal right. Because Puerto Rico is a colony governed under US law this was something that some interpreted as an imposition, and not as a legal leap

jump to human rights. It would be an interesting case to find a situated knower, in this case a Dominican lesbian woman that migrated and that sexual freedom was meaningful for her when migrating.

Postmodern feminist epistemologist Luce Irigaray gives light to the contingencies and contradictions of the linguistic expressions and reflections that have epistemological privilege in academic world and in our social world (Irigaray, 2002). The privilege of linguistic expression over other types of significance is also a methodological challenge. The meaning of signs cannot always be worded but can be expressed in other types of data like body language and visual data. In the use of speech, the stress on the appellation of inanimate beings to ensure their permanence, memory and insertion into a discourse, a logos, aiming at constituting the real into a totality, has caused the forgetting of its role as a call directed to the other (Irigaray, 2002).

To privilege the verbal type of expression over other types of expression is for postmodern feminist epistemologist is a type of epistemological violence (Knigge and Cope 2006). In order to adapt other types of analysis of the data as opposed to the epistemological violence of the spoken privileged position of the researcher in front of the analyzed participant. Kope and Knigge propose to use images in their geographical research and situated knowledge in the analysis process. Because this research has a sociological approach, and my intention is to capture meaning not necessarily in a verbal expression, images might be relevant. By images I mean the visual and verbal types of data presented to me during interviews that express an image woman have on their mind. By integrating multiple perspectives is something very appealing to me. In the interview process I might ask the woman to describe to me an image like, the boat where she travelled or the image of her grandmother or even what comes to mind when I ask her about her homeland. This type of images may contribute greatly to the data I will be gathering. The linguistic descriptions are mediated not by direct reference to the sign that is directly related to the meaning but by all other references we have about it. The meaning of the signs is always different and changing and the verbal expressions I get about the Virgin are as postmodern feminist epistemologist contend, a social construct of meaning. That is the reflections women have on the Virgin of Altagracia may lead me to a contradictory and not always linear and direct meaning to it but to the social

context they have about it. The ultimate truth will not be revealed about what the Virgin of Altagracia. Postmodern feminist epistemologists reject the meta narratives that might arise when trying to analyze data in an objective and truth-seeking way. There is no essential truth to what the Virgin of Altagracia means and there is no essence to it that needs to be uncovered. Even the most exhaustive methodological approach will never achieve a complete and rational meaning of the Virgin of Altagracia for Dominican migrant women. And even if I attempted to do this the final result will not lead me to the ultimate truth about it.

Postmodern feminist epistemologies bring to light the oppression that can happen against women by other women. Feminist like Uma Narayan and Chandra Mohanty and other black feminist bring to the discussion of class and race as something that cannot be separated from gender. (Mohanty 2010, Narayan, 1997) In the case of Dominican migrant women there is the case of the sexual and domestic worker that becomes a victim of labor abuse by other white or higher-class women. This postmodern epistemological feminist argument comes from the fact that early feminist did not consider race and class when discussing oppression that almost exclusively referred to oppression of men over women.

As I discussed earlier there is a methodological barrier especially when one is associated with middle class and white skin. The fact that I am a PhD student that is doing her fieldwork but has the privilege and the access to higher education immediately points to inequalities between me and my research participants. I have responded to this by recognizing the Dominican Puerto Rican as the situated epistemic authority on migrant experiences. By reflecting and changing my way of doing interviews and opening up to the production of new meanings I would like to think that I can improve as research. By acknowledging my own biases maybe this methodological reflection can be improved. For this reason, I decided to include in the proceeding part my own story.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This reflection on feminist epistemologies has led me to understand the importance of remaining open minded during the fieldwork process. I came to this conclusion because I understood how my own biases affected the methodological process and acknowledging this was an important step in this

process. The social context of my life has led me to believe that the figure of Mary had some feminine qualities like docility that feel like an imposition on the social ways a woman can perform. My reflection came from a catholic middleclass upbringing that is not necessarily why women give importance to the figure of the Virgin, if any. I have, like most women I interview a religious background in common. By having a religious upbringing in common, I thought meanings of the religious figure of Altagracia might be similar. This methodological reflection and the fieldwork experience have proven me wrong. There is a religious background to most of the women I interview but my interpretation and the meanings I attribute to the figure of the Virgin of Altagracia are most of the time analyzed from a completely different perspective. The social context and the significance of religion and migration are key to understanding this social context and why the Virgin is meaningful or not. The interpretations of the religious figure of Altagracia can be something like the negotiator with the invisible, uncontrollable. Nehring explains that some people use religion to explain events that are otherwise unexplainable part of life that does not respond to cause effect events, that is not a logical and controlled life is always mysterious. The numinous world where terrible and good things happen, the Virgin maybe someone that claims justice and save people from sickness, death, loss of love or give meaning to any unfortunate event. The types of life testimonies that do not obey the laws of science and logic. Altagracia as someone who acts in very concrete ways is something that may seem irrational and definitely unscientific. Then the reflection on feminist epistemologies reminds us that meaning, and perception really does matter, even if it seems irrational. If a woman believes that the Virgin of Altagracia saved her from dying in a boat coming from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico and that she needs to repay that favor by walking barefoot from Santo Domingo to Higüey. Before passing judgment on situations like this, the question of meaning is central and relevant. The difference from objective scientific epistemology and feminist epistemologies is the possibility of granting women the epistemic authority that legitimates the type of research I am conducting. By understanding that gender identities and gender norms can be interpreted in new ways has given my methodological process a new meaning.

The process of migration is one that often leads women to making decisions of leaving their children behind. This may seem to me as an unfortunate and

difficult situation. If I take that for granted maybe the interview process may lead to the feeling of loss and the sadness of migration. This may be true for some women, but at the same time it is possible to find new meaningful situations in the new migrated context. To consider this epistemological exercise as successful for me there needs to be an engagement of others and an interest in the subject of my research. In this case the social influence of religion in the way women reflect on that and how this influence affects their relationship with others, with men other women and with themselves. I argue that the subject of this research is relevant and important, but my interest in listening and caring for this subject that for me has not had sufficient academic interest, is not sufficient as feminist standpoint epistemologist suggest. This reflection needs to be useful for the women I interview. The reflection on postmodern feminism is another way of contributing epistemologically with this research. Postmodern feminist sustains that by creating new ways of expressing significance there is an opportunity of creating new forms of meaning (Baxter 2014). By adopting a postmodern feminist approach and by including women as epistemological authority in this research, there is a form of replacing the patriarchal way of doing Sociology with new gender sensitive theorization. With this research, my objective is to propose a decolonized epistemological approach in order to promote a non-violent research environment. By adopting a feminist epistemological approach, I understand I have already improved my methodology. By reflecting on my own biases on the light of race, class, and education and by remaining open to new ways of understanding the meanings of religion and the Virgin of Altagracia.

## **Chapter 4: Journeys from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico; Understanding migration and transnational dynamics of women in between the islands**



## 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to share and analyze the stories of Dominican women who came to Puerto Rico and who managed themselves between two identities. Phases of migration that came from Dominican Republic first arrived during the 1960s after the death of dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (Hernandez 1995, Graziano 2006, San Miguel 2001). A second phase of migration occurred during the 1980s and 1990s following an economic crisis, which redefined and reshaped Puerto Rican history and culture (San Miguel 2001, Graziano 2006, Hernandez and Rey 1998). Literature on the reasons for the second phase of migration of the 1980s point to the dollarization of the economy and an unsustainable inflation for the Dominican people (Khan 2010). However, reducing migration to economic changes neglects other important aspects to consider (Vásquez 2016) Religion is present in every step of the migration process, from the decision to migrate, to the most frightening part of the journeys and finding a sense of meaning to the new territory. Women want to maintain a sense of belonging and sometimes they need to make peace with their decision of leaving children behind. In this chapter I will be answering the following questions: What are the socio-economic circumstances of Dominican Puerto Rican before and after they arrive in Puerto Rico? What is the role of religion and the specific needs it satisfies before, after and during migration?

Although political and economic circumstances are important the purpose of discussing these events is to grasp the connection between these economic and political events and the life stories of the women who contributed to this research. The religious resources women acquire when migrating reflect the strategies women use to retain their sense of worthiness and justice in the middle of the uncertainty and isolation that comes with the migration process.

In the first part of this chapter, I describe the basic documented information on migration from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico in recent studies. Because of the geographical proximity and the importance paying attention to this neglected part of undocumented migration. I explain the popularity of maritime travels by giving special emphasis to the stories shared by the women who came in *yola* (wooden boat) and explain the importance of having religion as a resource during these journeys. The second part of this chapter is about the

reasons why women in particular decide to migrate. This is important because some aspects of gender violence, body shaming and objectivation women go through in Dominican culture and how religion serves as an important resource against feminine violence. In this section I also discuss the negative perception of the dynamic of leaving children behind and how religion helps women make peace with a shame inflicting society. In the third section of this chapter, I analyze the cultural negotiations and experiences of the women after migrating. The ways in which they maintain their sense of being Dominican in the new territory. I also analyzed the aspects of culture like language and sports that facilitate these exchanges in everyday life. In the fourth and last section, I analyze dynamics of remittances in the private sector, in particular the sense of responsibility and solidarity with family.

## **4.2 Maritime travels and decades of continuum migration**

The first major migration flow of Dominicans to Puerto Rico started in 1961, after the death of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (Martinez San Miguel 2001). During his dictatorship, Trujillo did not allow people to leave the country as a political measure to prevent the organization of an opposition from the outside. Very few of the women I interviewed came to Puerto Rico during this first phase of migration that can be considered political because of the more flexible terms of US policy with Dominican migration (Cabeza and Campos 2016). Most came during the 1980s and 1990s. After reviewing the literature, this is the most important migration flow studied by scholars from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico. Among the sociological and anthropological studies that stand out: Duany (1990), L. Hernández (1990), Grasmuck and Pessar (1991), Candelario and López (1995), Duany, L. Hernández and Rey (1995). These studies focused mainly on aspects like economy, gender, family, and sexuality. In more recent studies there is an important account where Frank Graziano (2006) makes an important empirical of undocumented migration interviewing people in the maritime smuggling business. About the aspects of racism and discrimination Nina Estrella (2016) analyses acts of intolerance and discrimination as perceived by Dominican migrants in Puerto Rico. It is important to mention that although the aspect of religion may be mentioned it is not central to any of these studies.

Recent events in Puerto Rican history like Hurricane Maria (which occurred on the 19th of September 2017) and the Puerto Rican economic crisis due to a 72 billion debt (refs?) need to be considered when understanding migration phases. Although this recent event is still in need of scholar consideration, when reviewing the literature, the US Census bureau statistics is the most straightforward information about the documented Dominican migrants who live in Puerto Rico. In 2017 there were 82,407 Dominican migrants living in Puerto Rico (US Census Bureau 2017) This population is 52% women, their median age is 40 years and 68% described themselves as white raced (US Census Bureau 2017). Although the information on documented migration is important, I estimate that approximately 10 out of the 30 women I interviewed came to Puerto Rico as undocumented migrants in yola. There are many reasons why a woman would not share this type of information with me. For example, social stigma or fear of legal consequences to telling and recording their stories. In fact, I know most of them did not share this type of information with me. There were some women who decided to share their stories, for which I am very grateful because there are many ways in which women are harmed and vulnerable during these maritime travels. During all of the testimonies there is a fear of death and danger where according to them God was the one that gave comfort and solace. Religion plays an important role on making the decision to migrate but also it is the ultimate resource when facing the fear of death during the journey as the women I interviewed related.

After decades of sustained migration from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico and vice versa, (Duany 2014, Cabezas and Campos 2016) the majority of the women I interviewed had dual citizenship. Because of this historic and permanent migration movement more than half of the women who participated in this research migrated because either them or one of their parents married a Puerto Rican partner. Marriage between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans is very common and in most circumstances the relationships are legitimate. Marriage is also a business, during my interviews I came up with three women who married Puerto Rican men to become legal residents in Puerto Rico. Although this is a very common situation, there is unfortunately limited research on this dynamic.

Scholars like Graziano and activist Romelinda Grullon remind us of that

Dominican population in Puerto Rico are mostly undocumented and there is no official way to know how many people enter the island (refs). Anthropologist Jason de Leon in his article "Undocumented migration, use wear, and the materiality of habitual suffering in the Sonoran Desert" (De Leon 2012) there is a political reason why undocumented migration is ignored by the US government and the reason is that natural barriers like the Sonoran Desert and in this case the Mona Channel serve as ways of letting undocumented migrants die. During this research I understood how this problem is systematically ignored and how the position of the women is the most vulnerable. The article titled Trafficking discourses of Dominican Puerto Rican in Puerto Rico by Cabezas, and Campos (2016) describes how violent is the situation and why politicians overlook the situation. Religion can be a resource for women in this frightening situation and I cannot help but become an advocate for making this situation visible. As the literature available on undocumented Dominican migration to Puerto Rico, my opinion is that the best are the estimates by Frank Graziano (2006). His research shows that since the 1990s, more than 500,000 people have built handmade boats and tried to cross the Caribbean Sea from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico. The journal article entitled, "Why Dominicans Migrate: The Complex of Factors Conducive to Undocumented Maritime Migration" is one of the most detailed descriptions of the Dominican Puerto Rican smuggling business. Castles reminds us, it is important to understand the difference between the term smuggling and trafficking (2014) because of the difference in the consenting aspect of the journey. Although, the correct term to use is smuggling because the women I interviewed embarked on these journeys voluntarily, there were aspects of the journey that were controlled by the people involved in this business. The distance between the islands is only 60 miles (Graziano 2006). There are different types of boat trips, and the commodities and chances of success are relative to the economic position of the migrant and the amount paid for the trip. On a well-paid fast boat that translates as the person is paying for a shorter journey and a reduced chance of getting caught by the police. This type of boat trips is organized by professional smugglers who work in accordance with the Dominican navy and Puerto Rican collaborators (Graziano 2006). During my fieldwork I met Irene who migrated to escape a violent family situation which I will discuss later in this chapter. During our interview she talked about travelling in yola like this:

It is something so sad and so painful, but that you cannot back off from. Because you cannot say "I'm leaving" anymore, you cannot say "I'm staying", because you're already in the middle of the sea. And when you find yourself in the middle of that village of people in that way. I said, My God I am in your hands and I'm worth what I am to you. And there comes the Virgin of Altagracia, I said, Virgin of Altagracia, I am your daughter, you know what you are going to do with me! I grab on to you, my Lord. The people started fighting, there were wounded people, people with handcuffs or prisoners who were taken prisoner from the country. I never thought I would go through that. I would have never gotten into that. I thought. I will never see my daughter again. I felt like I was exhausted, but I said no. So, there was something beyond. Yes, I said my God! leaving with so many wounded people that's why you say, I will no longer see my family. But I swear to you, and I am living it because that is never forgotten. I took a force that I disguised myself. I was not myself anymore. I protested. I spoke hard, and I pushed. A guy who wanted to sit on one of my legs and I pushed him over. There was one that got on my foot, and I pushed him. Because you feel either I lose or win. I took courage and then I said. We will arrive. And I remember the words that a woman told me. That captain is the best captain. He was like a little boy. And she said, that's the son of the best captains. He was born in the sea and was raised in the sea. And I said, this is from God because that is how a good captain is. He said if you keep fighting, I will take you back. And I said God and I began to pray now I said, I did not know this, Help me God! I did not know this! if I knew this, I would have stayed with my family. You understand me.

(Irene, Interview, Domestic worker, 65 years old, San Juan, 2018)

Irene opens her story talking about how she had been tricked by the smugglers when she paid for a luxury boat "a decent boat" but was latter transported in a wooden boat or yola. This was terrifying for her because she was aware that she was doing something illegal and felt like she was trapped in the situation without the opportunity to back off from. Irene was not aware that she would be in the same boat with people that seemed to her as prisoners and wounded people.

When she says, 'If I would have known I would not have done it' she means that although she is aware that the trip was illegal, she is not a person that condones crime. She was scared to be on the same boat with what she perceived as criminals, and she immediately prayed to God saying I did not know. Irene was already scared of being in a wooden yola in the middle of the Mona Channel, but she was also scared of the people who were inside the boat. She was scared for two different reasons and entrusted her life to God and Altagracia who were able to value her life. Irene will never forget the fear. At the moment when she realizes that her life might be about to end, she decides to turn her life into the hands of Altagracia as her daughter. This is significant as herself being identified with the love a mother can have towards a daughter. The journey itself was a risk she took in favor of providing a better life for her daughter. For Irene only the love of a mother can understand how she got into that fearful situation. She attributes the success of her journey to the blessing of Altagracia on her effort to provide for her daughter.

In the middle in her story Irene talks about becoming someone else. Not being herself anymore. According to Hector Lopez Sierra (2011) religiosity in the Dominican Republic is largely influenced by Haitian religious beliefs. In many of my participants' descriptions of the festivities of Altagracia they talk about the fiestas de "Palos" or "se Monto". "Palos" is another word for drum and "Se montó" refers to the act of a spirit taking power over you. Irene talks about this unexplained possession of her body. She said a rude and courageous spirit helped her survive the journey. Irene believes she could make it, there was a premonition that made her feel secure after overwhelming feeling of fear and hopelessness. In my interpretation the religious figure of Altagracia became a force outside of herself to be able to overcome this traumatizing experience.

There was to Irene a sign of God in the middle of the situation. As she described earlier, she was scared of the people that were inside the boat. But the captain seemed to her trustworthy. There was the intervention of another woman that talked favorably about the captain. "He was born and raised in the sea" this was comforting for Irene who was afraid of the sea and felt like she was on good hands. As well, she talks about the captain trying to enforce order inside the boat. This is something she understands as a sign of God. In the middle of a boat

full of people who to her were criminals, she in the captain a person with values similar to hers.

Another type of boat trip are the ones organized by local fishermen in Dominican Republic and are less expensive than professional smuggler trips (Graziano 2006). For example, Angélica is a woman I met at the festivities of the day of Altagracia in a Catholic church called San Antonio de Padua. Her story was the first time during this research that a woman talks about the experience of getting to Puerto Rico in yola. She described arriving at Puerto Rico as a process which was quite difficult because she was twice intercepted by the police and taken back to Dominican Republic. She described the experience as horrible, at age 19 she felt she was not aware of what she was doing.

E: Horrible, mamita. (Laughter) No. That's something I do not recommend to anyone. If I had the consciousness, I say, my God! That I have right now. Because you're risking it. That's a very dangerous sea. I do not know if you know, the Mona Channel. That is, that you, the boat, is going forward and forward and the sea takes you back and back. So, if you went ahead 10 km, the sea took you back. And a terrible weather. Because sometimes the bad weather seizes you, you leave Santo Domingo, the sea is fine, but here in Puerto Rico, the sea, it becomes difficult. You understand. The journey is two nights and a day, you cannot eat because, that is another thing. That boat, no matter how big the boat is, the sea manages it at will, you understand. That is, apart from that the water that falls inside the boat you have to remove it, so that the boat does not sink.

(Angélica, Interview, Secretary, 33 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Angélica begins the description of the journey saying, "If I had then the consciousness ...that I have right now." Later she explains this change of consciousness that came to her because of her involvement in religion. Before she became involved in church, she said she thought of herself as invincible, as "The last Coca Cola in the desert". That means she had no real fear of danger and remember the boat journey as a terrifying experience. She remembers the feeling of insignificance in comparison with the unmerciful sea. When Angélica

describes the Mona channel she turns to me and asks, do you know that sea? With this question she is implying, only a person having the experience of "knowing the sea" is capable of understanding the danger implied in making that journey. In this case Angélica encountered bad weather and there is a sense of being at the "mercy of" something that cannot be controlled, no matter the size and conditions of the yola.

Most of the information available on the maritime trips from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico are the testimonies given to newspaper reporters (refs). For example, in 2004 the New York Times published a notorious case where a in boat journey gone adrift two lactating women saved people from starvation and death. The article 'Dominicans Saved from Sea Tell of Attacks and Deaths of Thirst' provoked a series of reflections on the stories of migrants that gave testimonies of cannibalism and sexual abuses committed on these types of journeys. Graziano explains some of these boat rides, the ones organized in the communities of fishermen do not have the means to buy or guarantee arriving safe to Puerto Rican shore. According to Graziano as well, there is the danger as well of travelling with a corrupt captain. The reason why this is an important question is because in Dominican Republic there are rumors of corrupt captains after stories were told where journeys were lost at sea and the captains were later found alive. During my fieldwork I met Xiomara who I had the experience of arriving in this type of boat journey. As Xiomara related.

M: Did you have a good captain?

A: That I can't say. Because they were waiting for us here. We arrived 103 and only 13 remained. That same night they took them all. The police were waiting for us.

M: And how did that happen?

A: Because if they are monitoring you and denounce you, the police here already knows where you are going to enter. Or where you are already entering. And there they were. And once they get to the beach. In those times.



M: And how did you get out of that?

J: I would say the coincidence that God was with me. Because I also stayed in the street. I did not hide or run. We reach the sea and I got out. I walk and I hit the road. I took off my clothes in a little thing, I change my clothes. I got out. There was another street here, another one here. And there was a patrol here. There was this avenue. And there I just stayed.

(Xiomara, Interview, Office maintenance, 65 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Xiomara is unsure if the captain was corrupt or not because the police was waiting for them when they arrived. Many people fear the journey at sea but there is the also the danger of facing the consequences of the illegal action of taking part on that trip. Xiomara makes a comment about people notifying the authorities or the coast guard of the trips. This is the reason why I understand that that specify trip was not the type that is organized in accordance with the Dominican Navy. I interpret that there must be a group in Dominican Republic that takes some kind of benefit from notifying authorities of this type of trips.

About other types of undocumented migration there is also, an overnight commercial boat, of the companies Ferries del Caribe. People refer to this mode of transportation "El Ferry". This boat travels an average of three times per week in a service from San Juan to Santo Domingo or from Mayaguez (Puerto Rico) to Santo Domingo. According to Cabezas and Campos (2016) this too is a smuggling opportunity. During my interviews I came across a case of a woman who entered Puerto Rico inside a bin that was carried in a van that was transported in one of those ferries.

At the end of the story of her journey, Xiomara reflects on the absurd event of getting caught and saved latter. She attributes this irrational or illogical event to a coincidence that God was with her. According to psychologist Daniel Kahneman (year?) many of the interpretations with give to events have little to with rational arguments. In the journey Xiomara was had the unfortunate luck that her boat group got caught by the police. She cannot give a rational explanation as to why this happened. Graziano might say that probably she embarked in a

community organized journey where the captain has no government contacts or bribing capacity. If 103 people arrived and only 13 remained, she was one of those who were saved. It is interesting that she uses the word coincidence not attributing that God was with her because she prayed or because of her ability to hide. God was with her in that specific time of trouble. At the moment when she had to take action to save herself, she did not. As she explains, she just stood there in the middle of a crossroad. What is interesting about using the word coincidence is that very intelligently she does not take the presence of God for granted. Nor she explains in greater detail how God choose her and not so the other 90 people who did not make it. In my interpretation she does not take seriously the fact that she was saved. There are no rational explanations, and she does not feel particularly deserving. She just was saved.

### **4.3 Gender violence and other considerations that lead to migration**

According to the socio demographic information available on Dominican migration women who leave their homeland apart from searching for better employment opportunities, sometimes depart to escape personal and relationship situations in search for a safer and more stable environment (Nina Estrella 2016). This was the case in at least one third of the interviews I made. One of these cases was particularly important because of the multiple ways this gendered violence can manifest itself. Anita is a woman approximately 40 years old who lives in a semi-public housing complex in San Juan. She is a cancer patient. Anita spoke openly about the issues that motivated her to migrate. One of this, street safety. It is very common to hear among Dominicans in general that criminality is something that makes people walk with fear on the street. She mentioned female killings and the politics of Dominican Republic. However, the main reason why she had to leave the Dominican Republic was because she could not get a job, basically because she was overweight. She talked about the problems faced by a fat woman in Santo Domingo, for example, public car drivers wanting to charge double fees, the difficulties of buying clothes or not being able to enjoy entertainment activities such as going to the beach. She said that many women choose to have bariatric surgery to avoid weight gain. When in a job descriptions woman are asked for a good presentation that meant being

slender, young, and beautiful. She talked about health services provided for women with cervical cancer, comparing both countries. She described a therapy called branquiterapia that according to Anita is a procedure that burns the internal organs of women who suffer from cervical cancer. We talked about faith during her illness and how she has overcome her health difficulties that will be mentioned in the next chapter. Anita described her body shaming like this.

No. I had no job opportunities back in Santo Domingo. Here they do not discriminate when they give you a job. It does not matter your body, your color, no matter how educated you are. Nor the disability that you may have. Here you earn a job because you deserve it, but not there. There are no opportunities there. A woman after 35 years of age, getting a job. There is a lot of discrimination with women that are fat. When I had to buy clothes there in Santo Domingo, I cried. My mom had to send them to me. Why is that possible? I'm too fat to get clothes there. It is not easy. They do not sell clothes in my size in every store as they sell here. Then, also, when you are going to ride in a public car, there we call them concho. If you are fat, they want you to pay double fare. Once, a driver did that to me. Double fair. And I said to him, why? I only occupy one seat; I cannot occupy the other. He said to me, no. I had to pay double fare or, if I did not, I had to get off the car. More terrible still. Being fat, is like a synonym of cow.

Look how she looks. They call you fat Whale. Once I went to a beach and I put on a bathing suit and people said look at that fat girl. In that beach in Samaná, and I was the only fat person. I did not bathe. I did not bathe. Women do a hundred thousand things struggling to lose weight. Why? I tell you it's hard to get clothes and youthful clothes when you are young. Let's say for an old lady, maybe. For a young woman, you do not find it. you do not find. There is still the taboo of fatness. Terrible. Terrible.

(Anita, Interview, Caretaker, 41 years old, San Juan, 2018).

It is important to mention that Anita is an Evangelical Christian but defines herself as a progressive Christian. She believes there needs to be social change

in Dominican Republic and migrated because she needed to focus on self-care. She is battling cancer, and according to her she was supposed to be dead a few years ago and attributes her being still alive to God. Because she needs to focus on herself there are aspects of Dominican society that she felt were harmful to her health. Her religious practice is something that has helped her through her process because she understands the healing process is related to taking care of her body by eating healthier and living a life without that much stress. She explained that criminality in Santo Domingo is something that creates much stress in her life, and she is not willing to negotiate her peace. She talked about God as the healer and is very much in tune that she is loved and accepted by God and not the society she born in. Although, she is an Evangelical Christian she attributes social activism to the Catholic church that educates and preaches an anti-machismo movement using television and congregating marches against feminicides. She explains this:

And no, and that is known, they talk about it as much on television as they do so much for the local newspaper radio media by all means because remember that the Catholic is against machismo. They are talking so much that they raised, and they do marches for the women, for you know that they do not mistreat them so much, that the

woman needs equality. Lifting a hope for the woman. Because if the woman everywhere, always carries. Always everywhere women are always subjugated. There is not a country that has not had that a little bit. Unfortunately, we still lack. But we will have to make the change. If my generation made a step forward, yours has to go further to the front. And the other one that comes after yours, further to the front. Until one day we will all be equal.

(Anita, Interview, Caretaker, 41 years old, San Juan, 2018).

When Anita said these words, she was implying, this machismo problem is not a Dominican problem. No matter where you live in the world, if you are a woman in some way, you belong to the battle. I could feel that she was talking about us, in a way she was making me part of her battle and said you need to carry on. Anita mentions the protagonist role of the Catholic church in marches and in

education through their television channel that is one of the transnational practices of religion I encountered during my interviews. At least three participants mentioned that, if they could not go to mass, they would see it through the television. This television channel is like Anita mentioned a way to educate because they offer panels of conversation, interviews with psychologists and other specialist that discuss for example aspects of life in relationships like how to manage conflicts, adultery, and violence. They offer a daily mass and answer to specific problems that people write about using social media and email. In many ways this compares to the findings of Manuel Vásquez, who argues that technology is helping religion to spread their globalized messages of empowerment to migrant societies. In this case to turn on the television and watch and hear from the Dominican Republic catholic channel is a way of staying connected to the social issue's women encounter and a message of hope and peace for women.

Earlier in this chapter I introduced Irene when discussing the maritime travels between Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Irene was one of the women who took the maritime route and one of the mayor reasons why she migrated was because of the violent circumstances of her marriage. Irene was married to a man who was violent and used to beat her. This was not the only problem, but he also had several affairs with women who had children and she had to take care of them. She was the legal wife, but he brought his children to Irene to meet them and take care of them. There was an event that changed her life, after giving birth to her only daughter, her mother-in-law asked the doctor to sterilize her without her consent. Irene woke up to the news that she had been sterilized after the c section and was devastated with the news. Although it was very difficult to make the decision to be separated from her daughter she decided to leave. As Irene expresses:

I chose to leave because otherwise I was going to kill myself. He spent all his life waiting for me. When he got sick, I had to spend all I had to support him. He was a man with a lot of money my daughter's dad, was a man of money. He had warehouses, he had a groceries store, he had many houses in the capital city and everything. Then when he got sick, I had to buy his bed, his stockings, the medicines, I helped him in everything, until he died. When I saw my mother-in law, I said to her

"you know you never supported me" and she told me "My daughter you're right", but I will never forgive her. What she did to me. When I asked her why she did that to me, she said "He already had too many children, so he would not have more"

(Irene, Interview, Domestic worker, 65 years old, San Juan, 2018).

One of the most important aspects that defines the identity of Irene is that she is a mother. As she expresses, the reasons why the Virgin of Altagracia is so meaningful for her is this attribute of motherhood. When her mother-in-law took that away from her the possibility of having more children, she mentions this as the event that made the decision of migrating clear. Irene was devastated and resented for life with her mother-in-law. She saw having her daughter as the most important project in her life. According to Ida Salusky the author of "The Meaning of Motherhood: Adolescent Childbearing and its Significance for Poor Dominican Females of Haitian Descent", there is an underestimated value to motherhood in research. Especially, when the women who want to become mothers are poor and uneducated (Salusky 2013). For Irene being a mother is the reason why she worked and tried to earn money. The reason why she endured another violent relationship after arriving, because she wanted to bring her daughter legally to Puerto Rico. When a woman becomes a mother in this social context there are many ways in which she is regarded as a woman. It basically means the transition from child to woman. There are many times an effort to become independent from parents, to buy a house for the new family. There is a sense of belonging to someone who is dependent on you. Becoming a mother is also a way of solidifying a relationship where there is a responsibility in common. In a way, becoming a mother in the context of Dominican Puerto Rican is the culmination of the qualities a woman should have. The place of the mother is a respectful space that figures like Altagracia occupy as an example but in this case as a resource when making the decision of escaping a violent relationship.

#### **4.4 Destination Puerto Rico (Transnational cultural negotiations)**

Sociocultural transnationalism as used by scholars (Faist, 2000; Glick Schiller, 2000; Itzigsohn, 2000; Portes, Guarnizo 2017 and Landolt, 1999; Tambiah, 2000)

refers to the cultural practices used to incorporate the sense of identity when feeling in between the country of origin and the host country. As Itzigsohn and Saucedo remind us of such activities can be private like maintaining a close relationship with family and friends from Dominican Republic. There can be more political activities like maintaining associations with political parties or hometown associations. According to the literature, the use of the term transnationalism is a challenge to the previous research trend which was focused on assimilation and integration or exclusion because of ethnical and racial purities. There is a need to maintain a sense of identity and there is a negotiated sense of belonging to the host country (Saucedo and Itzigsohn 2002) Literature on Dominican migration evidence that the first desired country of destination for Dominicans is the United States, the second option during the 1980s and 1990s was Puerto Rico and recent studies favor Spain as the that second preferred option. It is important to discuss the transnational aspects that facilitate the cultural transnational identities that form in the community.

One of the forms of transnational practices is the participation in groups and activities that reinforces the sense of shared identity (Saucedo and Itzigsohn 2002). For example, Yandra is a volunteer in a group of people from Azua, a province of Dominican Republic called the Azuano Group. She lives with her parents and is the caretaker of her mother who is a cancer patient. She was married for 20 years and then divorced. She never had children but has four nephews. She reflected on the experience that when she entered this new society, she describes her personal adaptation process as easy in part because of that shared sense of community. The experience of migrating exposed her to new places, but she felt at home because of the climate and language similarity. Yandra mentions the presence and adventurous attitude of her mother to take the bus (local public transportation) to get to know San Juan. She attributes her successful adaptation and feeling of belonging to the fact that she is always surrounded by other Dominicans. She understands there is no difference between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans. Yandra describes the migration process like this:

I feel at home in Puerto Rico because it is so similar to the Dominican Republic, the climate, the culture, everything. The change was, well,

easy. And we integrated easier because of that. If it had been a place where the climate is different, the language is different, the culture is different, it would have been more difficult (...). And that is something that also influences. You will always see that, although we always share with the Puerto Ricans, for some reason or another.

We are always surrounded by Dominicans.

(Yandra, Interview, Administrative worker, 40 years old, San Juan, 2018).

During our interview she referred to her nephews as *Domiriqueños* which is a neologism that integrates the part of the word Dominican, *Domi*, with *Riqueño* which refers to *Puertorriqueño* (Puerto Rican). In my opinion the use of new terms to describe this hybrid identity is a perfect example of the transnational cultural dynamics of social integration between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans. Not only was this the word used in this interview this was the word many women used to describe themselves or their children. This term *Domiriqueños* was used in a film produced by a Puerto Rican radio and social media influencer called Jorge Pabon. In the film, *Domiriqueños*, a community basketball court is saved because Dominican and Puerto Rican players in the community decide to unite forces against corporative interests. This film is a series of collaborative movies between Dominican movie producers and Jorge Pabon. Yandra considers sports to be an important resource for integration and describes it like this:

I: Yes. In baseball and in basketball too. But more in baseball than in basketball. And this passion for sports, I tell you, is more because of the proximity, because when your rival is closer, the country or whatever, is closer, and we are more similar, the rivalry is greater. And it makes it more interesting. And as the two countries are so passionate, well then, there it is demonstrated. And the confrontations, we enjoy it, more than anything. At least here, my dad is a baseball fan. And Daddy always took me to the baseball park since I was little.

(Yandra, Interview, Administrative worker, 40 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Yandra talks about sports as an integrating activity between the Dominican and Puerto Rican culture. As scholar of religion and sports Joseph Price argues,



baseball can be defined as a civil religion (Price 2003) What Yandra is trying to get across with the example of sports as a transnational practice is the embodied experience of the baseball matches between Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic. She emphasizes on the similarities between our identities that become apparent in the experience of watching the matches live at the baseball field. The listening to the music, the chanting, the manifestations of national symbols and most importantly the overall experience of having fun. Traditionally in baseball matches between Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico are referred to as the battle of mangú against mofongo. The Dominican national symbol, the mangú and the Puerto Rican mofongo are both signature dishes to the local gastronomies. When I referred to the battle Yandra replied "in essence they are both made of plantain". This example of sports as a transnational practice is important when understanding the role of religion because of need of embodied integrating experiences. The spiritual need for joy and the feeling of belonging are well exemplified in baseball matches.

Some literature on migration focusses on the aspects of adaptation and integration, for example Nina Estrella (2016) argues that the attitude of the people in the receiving country is important in the adaptation process. In her article, Nina Estrella argues Puerto Ricans have bad attitudes toward Dominicans because of racial discrimination. In general Puerto Ricans tend to devalue Dominicans as "ignorant, poor, delinquent, and illiterate and appearing as people with great deficiencies and diverse problems" (Nina Estrella 2016). Nina Estrella concludes that this negative image, on the part of the host society, shows that there is a lack of knowledge about this cultural group, which motivates the occurrence of acts of intolerance. Though, discrimination and intolerance are things that occur in Puerto Rican society, most of the women I interviewed seemed to grant more importance to the overall sense of being welcomed in Puerto Rico. For example, Canita met her Puerto Rican husband in Santo Domingo. He was 16 years older than her and had gone expressly to Dominican Republic to find a wife. Even after getting married, her husband continued to travel to Dominican Republic alone in search for women for sexual escapades. At the moment of the interview her husband had passed away two months before. Canita attributes her husband's death to a depression he suffered after the experience of Hurricane Maria. During the hurricane, the zinc roof was blown away and she and the couple took refuge in the bathroom. After the hurricane

her husband had health complications and later died. Canita was very young when migrated and felt unprepared for the migration process. This is added to the fact that she came to live with a husband with whom she had very little acquaintance. Amid that feeling of uncertainty and fear of the unknown she found out Puerto Ricans to be welcoming people. She describes the process as follows.

I was 20, 21 years old when I came. I said, My God! I do not know what I'm going to do in this country where I do not know anyone. But really, when I arrived people here, they treated me, and they still treat me, I tell you. I cannot complain. This is my second home. Because you know that the country where one was born, my Santo Domingo, is beautiful, and beautiful, and beautiful. My firstborn, I like to say, my country. I love it and I love it here too. I love Puerto Rico. I love the people here. I love it here a lot because I've spent more than half of my life here.

(Canita, Interview, 52 years old, cook, San Juan, 2018).

She described the decision as a leap of faith and was full of doubts about her future in Puerto Rico. Canita can express her feelings of love to a community that welcomed her as one their own. This seems very likely because she is a beloved person in her community. For many years she organized summer camps for the children in the community of Sabana Seca. She has a paying job at the local catholic church as a cook for the community of Franciscan friars that live in her neighborhood catholic parish.

#### **4.5 Labor market for Dominican migrant women and private solidarity networks**

According to Ramos and Funkhouser language and education mattered in the migration flow of the 1980s and 1990s from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico (Ramos and Funkhouser 1993). In their research conducted in 1993 they found out that there was potential to transfer education attainment in Puerto Rico because of language in common. That made possible economic growth for

Dominicans and Cubans who only speak Spanish who rather migrate to a culturally similar place like Puerto Rico. Those who want to make profit of their education attainment in the professional job market of Puerto Rico in the 60s and 70s took advantage of this. This is why apart from Puerto Rico, the US cities preferred by Dominicans are New York and Miami for Cubans (Ramos and Funkhouser, 1993). In conclusion, Ramos and Funkhouser argue that most educated Dominican and Cuban migrants came to Puerto Rico, and they describe them as an economic under researched part of the intra Caribbean migratory phases.

On the other hand, the migration of the 1980s and 1990s as most literature agrees is a composed by working class people (Duany, Cabezas and Campos 2016). Based on my experience in this research, most women worked in the service sector, mainly as care givers for elderly, as household cleaners, waitresses and beauticians. Appendix 1 provides a detailed description of the women I interviewed and their jobs. Most of the women I interviewed contributed economically to their country of origin, most commonly by investing in housing but also by sending money to their relatives. The importance of the use of remittances in migration is a topic of debate between migration scholars. For example, In the case of Dominican Republic, the capitalization of remittances in the public sector makes this context to be considered exceptional (Guarnizo 2017). Since 12% of the Dominican population lives abroad, policy makers in Dominican Republic have imposed approximately 20% larger taxes on remittances compared to the average developing country. Guarnizo argues that, as recorded by the IMF's Balance of Payments Statistical Yearbook, remittances destined for Dominican Republic were officially \$100 billion in 1999 from \$70 billion in 1995 and \$45.3 billion in 1980 (Guarnizo 2017, Purl, and Ritzema, 1999; Gammeltoft, 2002).

For this research, I was interested in the private dynamics of remittances. Most scholars theorize on the migration phases and the reliance on remittances to support families not on as much on the state's economy. Duany and Howard argue this is the case for many families in Dominican Republic. According to this theory, the use of remittances balances out the economies between developing countries like Dominican Republic and the United States, for example. The economic crises that affected Dominican Republic during the 1980s and the

1990s, triggered a major migratory flow to Puerto Rico and poverty is the main reason why people migrate (Baerga and Thompson 2018 Duany 2019, Mitchell 2010, Moya Pons 2014, Sagás and Molina 2008). To understand why Guarnizo argues that the public sector is capitalizing on remittances, it is important to understand that migration in Dominican Republic in 2017 constitutes 12% of the population. This despite the fact that according to the World Bank, Dominican Republic is one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America. In 2017 the OECD/Centro de Investigaciones Económicas, Administrativas y Sociales (2017) published the paper, “What impacts does migration have on development in the Dominican Republic?”, in *Interrelations between Public Policies, Migration and Development in the Dominican Republic* This publication is an important quantitative assessment of the use of remittances in the Dominican Republic. The research was a joint effort between the Dominican and European Union governments. According to the study households that benefit from remittances have an increased capacity to invest in education. Returning migrants also exhibit an increase in skills acquired during their migratory experience. However, theorist like Massey argue that focusing on remittances is not doing justice to the actual transnational dynamics. The same publication of the OECD concludes that remittances seem to promote a dependency situation with the migrants, especially women. During my research I did come across this dynamic of dependency. For example, Dominga whom I introduced earlier in this chapter in the section of the caring communities expresses herself:

Now it is a little better, but before it was more difficult ... Things were very difficult before ... Imagine I worked in a clinic doing cleaning and I earned 75 pesos. I think... they are like 5 dollars from here ... We are nine. But the only one out here is me. The only one that came from us was me. I always helped them all. If they had problems, I was solving the problems for them. When they were sick, I had to buy their medicines. If they had a problem, I had to find the money and send it to them, because they did not have it. Now, my brother, he has been helping me a little bit more with my mom.

(Dominga, Interview, 43 years old, Domestic worker, San Juan, 2018).

When Dominga migrated, she agreed with her mother to become the economic provider for her and her daughters. Dominga sends remittances regularly to her family because of her sense of responsibility and solidarity. She mostly sends money to her mother, who at the time of the interview, was in her 90s and her father, who is 100 years old. She is aware of the economic changes in Dominican Republic, and she can feel that when she says there has been a change in her family situation. Before migrating, she had a job cleaning at a medical practice. This is where she met her husband, at a midday break when she was hungry, and he invited her to lunch. She earned 80 pesos in a month that according to her was sufficient to buy food for her daughters but not enough for anything else. She lived in a house with her parents and her brothers and sisters in a poor neighborhood of Santo Domingo. Because she was the only one of her family to have migrated, she felt responsible, not only for her parents but she had to solve her siblings' "Problems" as well.

#### **4.6 Transnational caring communities and (lived?) religion as the moral compass**

Religion plays an important role before, during and after the migration process (Vásquez 2016). For example, the transnational care of children is something that influences the way women feel about themselves in the light of the conservative values that clash with their economic needs. Transnational caring communities offers the opportunity of maintaining a sense of Dominicaness and pass moral values from one generation to the other. According to Uriarte Dominican Puerto Rican migrants are many times single mothers in charge of providing economically for their families (Uriarte 2013) Before leaving, women plan for taking care of the children, in most cases women do not rely on the biological fathers for this. Many of them rely on their mothers or another female member of the family. According to a psychological study carried out in Dominican Republic, Juan Uriarte argues that there is a negative perception of this situation which in many cases is considered as abandonment. In a study carried out in the Dominican Republic with the children of migrant women there was a challenge to the association of these children with poor school performance, aggressiveness, depression, and isolation (Uriarte 2013). For example, Xiomara came to Puerto Rico in yola as describe earlier. Two years

after arriving, she brought back the two children she left behind. As she expresses the children were with their papers in Puerto Rico. Curiously, she had one last child that according to her was born in Dominican Republic by accident. According to her, she was 7 months pregnant when she decided to go on a holiday trip to Dominican Republic. It turns out that when being there, birth occurred. She left her son there. He came to live with her when he was 14 years old. Xiomara explains.

I left with my belly. I was seven months pregnant. And I lied, I said, when I was going to travel, that I was five months pregnant. And they let me through because I had a small belly. And then when I got there, my belly swelled and from there I was left in Santo Domingo.

(Xiomara, Interview, Office maintenance, 65 years old, San Juan, 2018).

When a Dominican man decides to migrate and is doing well there is a sense of satisfaction and achievement for the entire family (Carrillo 2005). This should not be different when a woman migrates except there is the perception of abandonment that some women need to cope with. When a woman leaves behind a child there is many ways to explain the decision, that can be based on economic reasons, or it can be a transnational practice, a need to maintain contact with the roots (Friedman 2014). In the case of Xiomara, it was apparently by accident. Religion is for her a way of living a judgement free life that has nothing to do with the way people preach, Xiomara is a practicing Catholic but says she is open to go to any church because she believes God is present in every religion. As Xiomara herself said:

People go to church. And I don't want to criticize. You hear them preaching and they preach nicely. And I like their preaching's and I like their songs, but some have a black heart. You talk to them about religion, and they tell you. A true Christian has to do this. To be a true Christian you have to do that. To say, I believe in God. Because to say, I believe in God. It's not me preaching. No. It is if I see a person, if I see a sick person and I can shake his hand, it is to shake his hand. It is if I see a person who needs help, to help him or to bathe him, do it. Do it. Why do you have to come to preach and give sermons to the

crowds? For me that is not believing in God. For me to believe in God, action is what counts. When you go out there, right.

(Xiomara, Interview, Office maintenance, 65 years old, San Juan, 2018).

The most important aspect of religion is not dogma but the everyday acts of kindness. It is not the way people talk but how people act. The way Xiomara can go to any church is comparable with Marie Freidman explanation about Latino populations in the US. Friedman (2014) argues that people can go from one church to the other with relative ease in comparison with the European experience of social conflict between protestants and Catholics. Friedman would argue it is very common to find women like Xiomara who defines herself as catholic but can go to any church searching for God. This religious malleability is precisely because of the lack of importance to dogma. Xiomara is a good example of the way of living an embodied religion. Not one that can be defined by words but the one defined by actions. For Xiomara judgement is what makes people evil, she tries not to do it with others and seems to me like she does not judge herself for leaving her son behind, she believes in a merciful and forgiving God. Xiomara cannot give a rational explanation to why she left her son behind she is the example of a woman that finds in religion the capacity to live a judgment free loving life.

In Dominican culture it is considered "normal" to leave children in the care of their grandparents when women need to migrate. As Saucedo and Itzongston argue, maintaining ties with family is the most common transnational practice (2016) Many women decide to send their children to Dominican Republic during the summer vacation. This is, only if there are economic means for the travel and the parent's migratory status allows them to exit the country. Working class women need to keep attending their jobs during the summer months and daycare is expensive. For example, Milly is a waitress in a Dominican restaurant in San Juan. She works from 6 am to prepare the signature Dominican breakfast till late afternoon. Milly is from Higüey, what she defines as Altagracia territory. This is because the Basilica of the Virgin of Altagracia was erected there. In the next chapter I will come back to the significance of the Virgin of Altagracia for her. She has three children and she recognize her daughters feel their Dominicaness because of their summers spent at their grandparents. She talks

about having a real struggle taking care of her children, especially her first daughter, but feels like it is worth it because she disagrees with the culture of leaving children to be raised by their grandparents. Milly argues on her reasons why she thinks this way:

I have never sent my children, as you know, many of us have children and we send them there to be raised with grandparents. I have never separated myself from my children for more than a month or a month and a half. It's just that, I know what that means. The one that has his package should throw it to their shoulder. I have never been in favor of that. No. I have never been in favor of that. And I've seen myself in situations where I could have left them. When I had Lydiana, I was 20, 21 years old. And she is the first granddaughter of my parents and they told me. Give her to us. Send her to us. I said No. That was my responsibility. Everyone makes their own decisions. Life is made up of emotions and decisions. I spent a lot of work. I suffered many, many needs when I was with her. There was a time when I had to get up super early. At that time, I did not have a car. I did not drive. My husband could leave her in the care and leave me at work, but in the afternoon, he had no break time. I had to take public transport, go pick her up, it was far away. I went through a lot. Believe me that the thought crossed my mind. But then I said it's a lot, and Mami already brought us up. And in the end, I said no. That I was going to raise my children, me. As I could. Giving them what I could give them. I have never been in favor of that. Because I believe that you have to instill in your children your values. Then women send them to their grandparents. Then they go get them when they are 10 years old, and they want the child to get used to their rules. You cannot impose on your own on a child who is 10 years old, who knows that you are their mother, but that you only went to visit. That you go and visit. You will not get the child to do what you want just because you are his mother. No. Not Maria. I completely disagree. Right now, my daughter has her baby there, and she is, well, sacrificing because she has to work. Leave her the baby in the day-care to leave for work, to work.

That was her decision.



(Milly, Interview, Waitress, 43 years old, San Juan, 2018).

During my interviews I came across many women who left their children behind and some women who argued this was something wrong. Conservative religious communities can use moral shaming for the women who leave children behind, especially because they are breaking the familiar traditional structure. On the other hand, the way women like Xiomara chose to see it is to see in God a forgiving understanding figure that restores the sense of dignity of the oppressed. Milly thinks this dynamic is abusive for grandparents but more importantly believes that there are moral values to be instilled by mothers themselves. Because Milly is from Higüey, she talks about her daughters loving, Las Patronales, or the festivities to Altagracia. She describes the pilgrims dressed in white and the cultural importance of Altagracia as the patron. On the other hand, she believes in adapting and educating children on the struggles of migration. I learned that many times, clashing opinions on this issue can become violent between women. In my opinion, many times women who leave their children behind are already struggling themselves with the feeling of being a worthless person or a bad mother. Other women can make them feel like that with their opinion. Some women are already suffering the reality of leaving their country, leaving their family and feel isolated. In some cases, small children left behind no longer recognize their mothers after 12 or 14 years of separation.

Some women do not have the possibility of engaging in transnational family practices basically because of the lack of economic resources. As Saucedo and Itzigsohn explain, maintaining a transnational dynamic of travelling requires economic means that are not always accessible (2002) This makes Dominican Puerto Rican feel especially isolated because they are, they are solely responsible for the care of the children. In Dominican social context the male is oriented to be the economic provider for the family. The woman, in contrast, is left alone to take care of the children, religious communities can become supportive for those times. Sometimes the dynamics of the transnational caring communities are available for the women who have the economic capacity for sending their children for the summer. Other times, travelling themselves is impossible because of the legal status would not permit them to. Transnational caring communities is something practiced by approximately 20 out of the 30 women I interviewed. Although many women engaged with this dynamic, they

criticized it in other women. This discussion is important because on one hand conservative moral values position the single mother who needs to provide in the receiving end of this moral shaming. On the other hand, religion can serve as an indicative power and religious communities as a support network for this specific need.

## 4.7 Conclusion

This chapter covers the main aspects of Dominican migration to Puerto Rico, the first migration phase that took place in the 1960s, then the second phase during the 1980s and 1990s. There are also recent documented government statistics where we know that in 2017 there were 82,646 Dominicans living in Puerto Rico. The main discussion evolves around the mostly undocumented context of the maritime route to Puerto Rico and the stories of the women who endured this hard trip. Also, in this chapter, I discussed some of the gendered problems that women encounter in Dominican Republic, an excessive pressure on women to become desirable is something that affects not only in a psychological way, but there are also economic consequences to this generalized objectivation. The job market is restricted by these social values. Other aspects of gender violence like non consented medical procedures, physical and psychological violence are some of the factors why women migrate in the search for a safer place to live. In this chapter I discussed different aspects that surround the decision of leaving children behind when migrating. This is mainly seen as something negative, as abandonment, and many women suffer this type of situation. Apart from leaving children behind for years there are part time ways of transnational caring that are the most common way of children to sustain ties with their families and sustain a sense of their Dominican Identity. There is also the economical incapability of sustaining transnational caring ties and in this case, there is a special sense of isolation. In this chapter as well, there is account taken on the way's women sustain cultural ties with Dominican Republic for example when becoming involved in Hometown associations and in sports activities that reinforce their sense of belonging in the community. Lastly, in this chapter, there are the job market considerations when arriving in Puerto Rico. There is a privileged space for educated Dominicans in Puerto Rico because of the advantage of transferrable education titles acquired. However, the findings of

this research were that most women worked in caring and domestic service, there were beauticians, nuns, and food truck owners but mainly there was an analysis of the experience of women that worked in the service sector. In this chapter, the basics context of Dominican migration to Puerto Rico was discussed. Understanding the economic and political circumstances that underlay the migration phases is important because of the impact these events have on working class women's everyday lives. Religion is not isolated from the migratory process; it can be a resource during the journey and a calling to selfcare. Religion can be seen as a moral compass but also as a reinvigorative force in a conservative society. Religious communities help women maintain a sense of belonging and identity.

# Chapter 5: The role of Catholicism in the transnational context of the Dominican migrant women in Puerto Rico

## 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to understand Dominican religious identity and how Dominican Puerto Rican living in Puerto Rico relate to their religious communities. As Ryan and Vachelli explain, recognizing that there is an individualization of religion does not translate into the lack of importance of religious institutions, rather there is an exchange done between agency and structured religion (Ryan, Vachelli 2013). This Chapter is a second of the empirical chapters based on the transnational religious experiences of Dominican Puerto Rican located in the context of Puerto Rico. Last, the purpose of this chapter is to share the empirical contribution of Dominican Puerto Rican with this research and include them in the existing Sociologic conversation on religion and migration. I will be answering the following questions: What are the meanings and importance of religious beliefs and traditions for Dominican Puerto Rican living in Puerto Rico? Does the migration experience lead to new religious trends and communities? What are the social conditions that affect their religiosity? When reviewing the literature there are many scholars that help deepen the analysis of gendered migration in a transnational context (Berger 2004, Vásquez 2014, Pasura 2012, Van De Kamp 2018, Sánchez Walsh 2008, Friedman 2014, Tweed 2008, Davis 2012, Flores Tondo 2014, Orsi 1985, and Polanco 2006). Some scholars focus on the political and globalization messages of -religion (Berger 2004, Tweed 2008, Vásquez 2014, Levitt 2018, Pasura 2012) Others are concerned with the gendered and personal struggles of migration and religion (Friedmann 2014, Orsi 1985, Sanchez Walsh 2008). Although this literature contributed to the analysis of my data there are some specific characteristics of Dominican religiosity that I bring attention to with this research. I will discuss Marian devotion to the virgin of Altagracia on the 21st of January as a display of the Dominican religiosity. Catholicism can have different forms of interpretations and in this chapter; I will discuss the interpretations of women belonging to Catholic revival movements and why they identify with this

conservative religious movements. Simultaneously, with conservative tendencies there is a lost taken for granted status of Catholicism (Berger, 2004). Last, I will be discussing this loss of Catholicism for reasons like sexual abuse scandals and unmet gendered spiritual needs. As I explained in the purpose of this thesis is to contribute empirically with the lack of literature available on religion in the context of Dominican migration in Puerto Rico. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate with empirical examples the meaning and importance of religion in the Dominican migrant scenario. In order to make sense of the migration process most of the women I interviewed took religion as a resource for satisfying their material and emotional needs. In conclusion, in this chapter I discuss key aspects of the migration experience, the principle of reciprocity of the petitions to Altagracia, the tendency towards more traditional interpretations of Catholicism and how these tendencies contrast with how the migration experience makes way for specific spiritual needs that Catholicism is not attending.

## **5.2 Remaining loyal to Catholicism in Puerto Rico**

Most of the Dominican Puerto Rican living in Puerto Rico identify as Catholic, my field experience would suggest that the Pew research center is correct when they argue Puerto Rico is 59% Catholic. While some women decide to discard their religious traditions, according to Vachelli and Ryan, religion supposes a way of sustaining faith while building new relationships in the new setting (Vachelli, Ryan 2013) According to Hofman Ospino, remaining Catholic is for Puerto Ricans an act of resistance from the US colonial experience which has tried to bring Protestantism to the island (Ospino 2018). Some scholars consider embracing Protestantism as assimilating the American way. Silva Gotay explains that since the US invasion in 1898 the imperial strategy has failed to instill in Puerto Rico the English language and the Anglo protestant values of the

American nation (Silva Gotay 2012) As proof of this, the Catholic church in Puerto Rico does not belong to the US but to Latin American associations. Another example is that nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos considered and defended Catholicism as a national symbol of cultural resistance. At the same time, Silva Gotay argues that Puerto Rican elites in Puerto Rico remain Catholic but are interested in their sons and daughters getting educated in the US and

assimilate the Protestant work ethic. This Puerto Rican religious identity that remains Catholic in my opinion is strengthened by the presence of Dominican religiosity and their Associations of the virgin of Altagracia. Dominican religiosity brings to Puerto Rico for example religious music artist concerts like the one of Enrique Feliz that followed the Altagracian festivities on 2018 (refs). However, I don't think remaining Catholic for Dominican Puerto Rican is perceived as an act of resistance against American colonialism. Rather, RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS said that they identified as Catholics but have no big problem with the presence of Protestantism. During fieldwork I met Mileidi who was born in La Romana, Dominican Republic. Mileidi is one of the youngest of 10 siblings and came to Puerto Rico after having divorced the father of her children. Before arriving in Puerto Rico, she lived for some years in New York where she had an accident and spent several months in a hospital. Mileidi is a Catholic who does not believe people should remarry after divorce and is highly critical of the sectarianism that to her is something that happens in Protestant churches. For example, Mileidi, talks about Dominican religiosity like this:

Every Dominican in the back of their mind, they believe in the Catholic Church. But there are things about the Catholic Church that people don't like. So, what do you do? You move to another church. You change your ways ... and bring your family. But it is another belief. Another ... But we are still a family. We are still a family. And they have good principles. Not that they have bad principles. But it has something that you are looking for that the Catholic Church is not providing you with. True? So that's why you have another church that is not the Catholic Church. Then comes the other, and the other and so on.

(Mileidi, Interview, Domestic worker, 55 years old, San Juan, 2018)

According to Mileidi one of the rules women do not like to obey of the Catholic Church is getting remarried or having another relationship after divorce. According to the Pew research center 55% of Dominican women ages 15 to 44 living in the US who gave birth in 2013 were unmarried. This means that at least more than half of Dominican women living in the US are single mothers. According to Mileidi a conflict woman has with Catholic religion is that "Joseph

died when he was young, and Mary didn't get married". Mileidi explains that the advantage is not so much because of religion but because having a stepfather is problematic:

For example, I got married, I got divorced, but then there were my children. Thinking on my children is that I did not think about having another marriage. I thought that because the life of a son with a stepfather is very difficult. So, as it exists within stepparents and children there is a rivalry

(Mileidi, Interview, Domestic worker, 55 years old, San Juan, 2018).

When reviewing the literature, it is important to mention that Santo Domingo was the first colony established by the Spanish and where the first Catholic Church was built by the Spaniards (Paulino 2018). Mileidi defends Catholicism as the true Dominican religion and embraces the traditional Catholic beliefs like, she does not believe in remarrying. At the time of the interview, she had a relationship with a Puerto Rican man with whom she had lived for years. According to her, her son and daughter were already adults when she decided to have a relationship. She added that they don't really have a relationship because she lives in Puerto Rico, and they live with their father in Santo Domingo.

### **5.3 Dominican Popular religion (Catholic and African traditions)**

In order to understand Dominican religiousness, there needs to be an explanation about the influence of African Religions in Dominican Republic. Edward Paulino author of the important book *Dividing Hispaniola* (2018) is one of the scholars that argue that there is a profound cultural connection between Haiti and Dominican Republic. An example of this is the Dominican adaptation of Haitian Voodoo called *Gagá* and also the endemic religion *La veintiuna* division (2018). Paulino argues that the anti-Haitian sentiment in Dominican Republic was instilled by Trujillo and there was a change in the relationship after the 1937 Parsley massacre. Trujillo wanted to erase the African and Haitian influence in Dominicans by promoting a more Europeanized version of Dominicanness by reinforcing Spanish Catholicism (Paulino 2018). But there is

still a profound religious connection between African Religions and Catholic popular religion. As Marta explains:

In Santo Domingo, there are many popular religious celebrations. The 21 of January, the feast of Altagracia is one of the parties that do not change. It is a big party. Where I lived there was a lady, she organized a street party, I don't know if she died, because this was a long time ago. The night before the virgin she would put together an embodiment of the Calvary before two crosses. Everything was decorated with colored ribbons and the crosses were lined with those colored things. That night the lady would bring some paleros, and they spend the night playing palos drums and drinking mamajuana and things like that. And people get possessed by spirits

(Marta, Interview, Nun, 28 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Marta was born in Santo Domingo, the capital city of Dominican Republic but also lived in Cabral, Barahona a province at the border with Haiti. According to Martha Ellen Davis one of the most important features of Dominican folk religiosity is the playing of the palos, which are different to the regular drums because of their elongated body, and they are considered semi sacred instruments (Davis 2012). Most probably Marta was referring to the singing of the non-liturgical salve which is an extended playing of drums that is traditionally played during funerals, processions, pilgrimages, or saints festivals by practitioners of the religion of the 21 division or "La veintiuna division" which is a combination of African and Catholic rituals and traditions (Davis 2012). Marta's description of the Calvary is also one the characteristics of the rituals of the veintiuna division where people place three crosses at the front of their houses along with altars and drum playing. Marta describes this as a distant experience before she came into contact with the Catholic congregation of nuns and later migrated to Puerto Rico. After coming into contact with her Catholic congregation, Marta became an advocate for a less superstitious religious belief where spirits are not a source of fear for people.

Another example of how ethnicity relates to the Catholic religion came up when I met Mercedes. She and her family were persecuted by the Trujillo regime and



Mercedes became involved with the political efforts to overthrow the dictatorship. Mercedes explained that she became radicalized because of her race. Mercedes explains:

I got into politics because I was treated badly... Because I was a granddaughter, my grandmother was black, my mother's mother. My sisters were all blond white with straight hair all those things. then I am black as a Haitian, and she saw that. When my mother came looking for me, I told her that I didn't want to go there because she was abusive with me

(Mercedes, Interview, Caretaker, 78 years old, San Juan, 2018).

It is important to understand Mercedes was born in 1941 just 4 years after the Parsley massacre. According to Paulino in 1937, in the massacre, approximately fifteen thousand Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian were massacred at the border (2018). According to the testimonies gather by Paulino (2018) the Dominican militia used machetes and not the official weapons of the Army. This anti Haitian sentiment permeated into the family life of Mercedes who was rejected and abused by her own mother for being black. Although Mercedes identifies herself as a black Haitian, and identifies against the European racial values of Dominicanness, she remains Catholic and became part of the radicalized Catholic movement against Trujillo. Mercedes has an important collection of images of Altagracia and the Virgin of las Mercedes. According to Mercedes, she prefers the Virgin of las Mercedes because Altagracia was the favorite of Trujillo. After Mercedes migrated, she became a member of another Association of devotees of Altagracia in San Juan. In her association they had activities every 4th Sunday of the month. A mass of Altagracia is celebrated, and she works in the kiosk and among other commitments with her church. The interview was carried out in her home and the conversation then turned into the ethnic representations of Altagracia:

B: Yes, I saw her. I know she is tiny. Hey, but now that I'm looking at her, in this drawing isn't she like blonde? This is like a blonde, she has a... But notice they all have in common that there is always a Saint Joseph behind her.

M: Yes. Saint Joseph is always making her company. I don't know why he is always in the back. In this one he looks like a little boy.

B: Exactly! But it's the first time I've seen Altagracia like this. In that way, because I've always seen her like this, this other way. (Points to a black-haired image of Altagracia) I'm not ... I'm sorry, but I don't like this one. Because I, as a child, I went to the Basilica and this one does not look at all like the one there. And then, I see her now and I see her, as weird. What do I know! I don't know!

M: She is blonde! (Laughing)

B: Yes! (Laughing)

(Mercedes, Interview, Caretaker, 68 years old, San Juan, 2018).

According to (Armstrong 2007) one of the strategies for globalizing Catholicism was to make every local virgin resemble the local women. Mercedes showed me her altars and showed me the different images of Altagracia including one that resembled Altagracia as a child. As Mercedes was showing her collection of Altagracia, she could not make sense of what was for her a European like virgin of Altagracia. Even after migrating, Mercedes cannot forget the way the white, or in her words the European like were treated as superior to the black.

## 5.4 Association of devotees of Altagracia

During my interviews I met a woman called La Colombiana. La Colombiana is the president of one of the three Associations of devotees of the Virgin of Altagracia I encountered. According to Davis one of the characteristics of these types of Associations in the Dominican Diaspora is that they are mostly women led in contrast with other male dominated Catholic Associations (Davis 2012). La Colombiana came to Puerto Rico in 1979 looking for job and lived with a friend. She had 5 children with her husband, also Dominican, whom she met before migrating. She left her children in Santo Domingo until she was able to bring her family to Puerto Rico. La Colombiana is a retired nurse and a cancer survivor.

She found in volunteering at church a way to give back after the death of her husband and her experience with cancer. La Colombiana describes it:

When I retired, I thought, I have not done anything, as San Francis said, I have not done anything ... well, we must do now. Now wherever I know that there is a sick person, a person who needs help with a funeral because someone has died, people I know, and they are from my community, I go there. And the strongest needs I attend to. I always have my gloves in the car...

(La Colombiana, Interview, Nurse, 60 years old, San Juan, 2018).

La Colombiana described herself as a religious woman since she can remember. However, she dedicated herself to working as a nurse and taking care of her five children and husband. She remembers the child raising years as difficult because her husband was an alcoholic and she had had many difficulties with him. One of the reasons why La Colombiana had taken charge of the Association dedicated to the Virgin of Altagracia was that her late husband had been very devoted to Altagracia. As a coincidence her husband passed away on January 21, the day of Altagracia. This, among other things, is the reason why the celebration of Altagracia is so special for her. For La Colombiana her husband went with Altagracia:

We have actually seen many miracles happen. Many miracles, many things that one has seen happen. And we have that much faith and hope in her. We always celebrated the Virgin of Altagracia here, but it was like that from time to time. But since my husband died, that he died on the 21st, because he loved that devotion of the Virgin of Altagracia. Well, we have taken it more seriously. Because ... I don't know how, I made it through the day of the Virgin of Altagracia because he left with her

(La Colombiana, Interview, Nurse, 60 years old, San Juan, 2018).

La Colombiana became the President of the Association of Altagracia that has a weekly meeting, they take care of the sick people of the community and

coordinate the Dominican party of Altagracia. She feels that Altagracia is a transnational figure because she takes care of Dominicans wherever they are. She clarifies that the celebration is not exclusively Dominican, everyone comes, and everyone is invited.

She always protects us wherever we go. And wherever we go she puts good people in our way. We have good neighbors; we have people who welcomed us. Because we celebrate for us, but we invite the community. We do not celebrate alone. We invite the entire community. It's a community party. Because I tell you that she is the same Virgin. La Providence and La Altagracia is the same Virgin!

(La Colombiana, Interview, Nurse, 60 years old, San Juan, 2018).

The work of the Associations of devotees of Altagracia is attending the needs of the local community by taking care of the sick and the economic needs of the people back in the Dominican Republic. The Association is reinforced by the presence of Dominican clergy in her community whom she regards as her friends. The congregation in charge of her parish are the Franciscans of the Caribbean who are an association of Dominican, Cuban and Puerto Rican clergy. La Colombiana contributes economically to the formation of the young friars by sending monthly cheques to the Franciscan monastery located in Villa Duarte Santo Domingo. As Marie Friedman reminds us that a form of religious transnationalism is when people gather resources to attend the needs of the homeland, for example when natural disasters occur (Friedmann 2016). In the case of La Colombiana her contribution is directly to the religious formation of the Dominican friars that alter attend her parish in Puerto Rico. When I asked her about the role of the Puerto Rican priest in charge of her parish she replied. "Gerardo (Laughter) Gerardo is not Puerto Rican, he is Dominican".

## **5.5 The popular festivities to Altagracia and the material principle of reciprocity of petitions**

Because this research had the objective of understanding the significance of the Virgin of Altagracia, I want to begin by explaining the Marian devotion to Altagracia for Dominican Puerto Rican. Manuel Vásquez reminds us that

Catholicism is usually associated with dogma and not with way it is expressed. However, in the case of the Marian devotion the religious experience is all about the joyful festivity (Vásquez 2014) To describe the experience of Marian devotion to Altagracia I want to describe a the 21st of January 2018. This was what I wrote in my fieldwork diary:

I started my day in the Catholic Church San Antonio de Padua in Rio Piedras, San Juan. Upon arrival, Nacho came with me, we stopped at the cafeteria where at least 10 women inside the vending kiosk cooking and preparing for the event. Next to the food, a small kiosk sells figures of Altagracia, stamps, rosaries, candles, and images. The real action was in the kiosk that was selling food. We went straight to buy a fried empanadilla. As we entered the church, there were no more seats available. The church was packed, and the music was live and cheerful resembling Dominican merengue ripiao, which is the oldest style of the typical merengue music, characterized by the rapid drumbeat. The priest was a young man from El Salvador and when he started the homily he cheered loudly. Que viva la Virgen de la Altagracia! Or long live, the Virgin of Altagracia and people replied to shouting Que viva! The priest talked about the difficult political times that migrants around the world are going through especially with the Trump administration and assured the audience that God was on their side. Although times were tough but that our flag is not Dominican or Puerto Rican that our flag was the love of Jesus Christ. Before the Eucharist, there was a display of Dominican symbols offered at the altar. There was the image of the Altagracia, then the Dominican flag, flowers and fruits and musical instruments. It was a strong symbolical and aesthetically Dominican ritual. A parade of Dominican pride from the people leading the procession, the symbols at the altar, the music, and the overall energy of the place. The bread and wine for the Eucharist were taken to the altar by the Dominican Republic's consul Franklin and his wife. After the mass, the president of the Association of devotees of Altagracia brought to the altar the members of the Association to be presented for a standing ovation and gave a small speech afterwards. His speech was from start to finish about the

importance of continuing the tradition and renovating the Association. The mass ended with a small procession of the image of Altagracia to the party that took place in the backyard of the church. The party started with the singing of the Dominican national anthem and there was food and music. We danced

(Reflection of the day of Altagracia, Maria Saavedra, San Juan, 21 of January 2018)

This reflection of the day of Altagracia is about the public display of Dominican symbols as an example of a religious transnational practices in San Juan. Peter Berger argues that religion has been assumed to disappear into the private sphere, yet this is not the case here (Berger 2004) Also as Tweed reminds us, religion and politics are always related (Tweed, 2008). On the day of Altagracia, the Dominican diaspora, a sense of profound love for Dominican Republic their homeland and a strong faith in the Virgin of Altagracia. This religious devotion helps cement the diaspora community and its support system and networking. Tweed proposes a dynamic and relational theory of religion where there are always movement and negotiations with locality and religious orthodoxy (Tweed 2008). Tweed analyses the globalized aspirations of religion, and I want to bring as an example the message of the priest: Our flag is not Dominican or Puerto Rican; our flag is the love of Jesus Christ. This message coming from a very enthusiast Salvadorian priest is a call to the boundaryless reach of Christianity. He named the president of the United States Donald Trump as responsible for the suffering of migrants. Thus, everything else was a display of Dominicanness in the middle of San Juan. The overall feeling was not the one-off attending mass but resembled more a political meeting. The priest talked about the difficulty's migrants are facing in the community and made a powerful call to ending migrant abuse and violence. The people cheered and clapped. The experience on the day of Altagracia in the parish of San Antonio is example of transnational practices and the global discourse of religion.

The day of Altagracia is the day many women chose to fulfil their petitions which are in many cases a demonstration of reciprocity to the economic favor or blessing of Altagracia. Not every woman is willing to share the circumstances that bring her to make a petition to Altagracia because that would reveal

personal or family problems. During my interviews most women would talk about the petitions in broad terms, not revealing the underlying personal struggle. Petitions are important because as Vazquez reminds us, what matters religiously for migrants is not high doctrine, but everyday existential problems (Vásquez 2014). Many of the women I interviewed made petitions to Altagracia and I want to present the following example because there is among the Dominican diaspora and in Latino migrant communities the notion of material reciprocity (Vásquez 2014, Sanchez Walsh 2008). This means that the more one demonstrates devotion and fervor the more Altagracia will grant you her blessing and economic abundance. For example, Ruti, came to Puerto Rico on the 28th of December of 1982. She remembers that date because it was the Day of the massacre of the innocents, a religious festivity. She hid in a bin that was carried on the overnight ferry and paid the man that carried the vehicle from Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) to Mayaguez (Puerto Rico). She later married a Puerto Rican man to attain her resident status and brought her two children to live with her. She has worked since then cleaning houses and has managed to buy a good house and have a happy life. She attributes having a good fortune to her faith. Ruti asks favors not only to Altagracia but also to the divine child and the virgin of Guadalupe. Ruti explains about the petition to Altagracia:

A: I am leaving without shoes until I get to Higüey. Because I was given what I asked for. I asked for that and it was given to me. I needed \$6000 and nothing else. I asked a man could you give me \$ 6000. And he told me, yes, take them. Not everyone will be willing to put \$ 6000 in your hand. Not even your mom, do you understand me? And I said, my God, if I get that money, my God, oh Altagracia! Divine Niño! And nothing else. I went to see him, and he gave me \$6000. I said, Altagracia, if I get this, I am going barefoot from San Juan to Higüey. Only there I will put on my shoes. And I must fulfil that promise, because it was given to me, you understand me. And this is my religion. And the “blonde” knows that always, I get what I ask for. I say I am going to ask for this and I get it. Because I have a lot of faith. Much faith.

(Ruti, Interview, Domestic worker, 47 years old, San Juan, 2018)

Petitions are favors asked in this case to Altagracia to solve some problem that can be economic, family, health, or even romantic situations. Rocio Davis argues that there are similarities between the spiritual practices of voodoo and the Catholic practice of the petition, with the distinction that the petition has healing intentions (Davis 2012). In the case of Ruti; she later explained the seriousness of this petition that she described as a contract. She thinks of herself as blessed by the Virgin of Altagracia but attributes her favorable experience with the fact that she always no matter how she pays her part of the contract. Ruti has made a few petitions and in this case, she is opting to walk barefoot to the basilica. This came up in other cases when women explained that walking barefoot was the preferred way to pay for the petition. Another popular way is dress in white and leave the clothes at the Basilica of Altagracia in Higüey (Dominican Republic). For example, when she was granted her visa, Ruti decided to dress completely in white and when she arrived in Santo Domingo gave all her clothes to someone who was later going to a wedding. This is a way of sponsoring friends or family back home economically or contribute to the celebration of the festivities. The sponsoring of a festivity is regarded in Dominican folk tradition as highly positive in terms of gaining favor with the saints (refs). Davis mentions that some petitions become a family obligation and making a pilgrimage to Higüey in Dominican Republic is an activity carried out year after year (Davis 2012). For example, Marta explains:

The first time I went to Higüey, I was about seven years old. And we went because we were going to take my little sister to fulfil a promise that my mom made because she was supposedly ill when she was born. And my mother promised that if the virgin interceded for her that she would get to Higüey and go to take all the children and that she would take the girl dressed as the virgin. And I had to fulfil that promise

(Marta, Interview, Nun, 28 years old, San Juan, 2018).

The dynamic of the petition can be interpreted as a materialistic interpretation of religion (Vásquez 2014). Marta explains that her mother chose to pay for the favor as a way of being grateful for the support of Altagracia. Davis reminds us that when a petition involves a healing action the participation of women in fulfilling the vow is very important (Davis 2012). Marta is the oldest of the



siblings but in her absence the petitions can be fulfilled in absence by another sister. However, she mentioned later that she disagrees with the 'false' belief that people have that Altagracia is a negotiator or that people should pay for the intercession of Altagracia. From her point of view, Altagracia is not in need of a sacrifice as an exchange for her divine intervention. Davis explains that many people believe that there are negative consequences if the paying of the petition is not taken care of (Davis 2012). This is because according to Davis people not only pay the petition because they respect and have devotion for saints, but they also fear the saints. Saints have the capability of healing and protecting but they also bring illness and death (Davis 2012). Although Marta talked about the petitions as something that does not make much sense for her, she understands that the church as an institution should be more open to popular ways of living religion. The petition may be a transaction with Altagracia and popular beliefs and traditions come in the understanding of the relationship with the sacred.

Mayblin explains that there is something that brings intimacy between Catholic devotees and figures like saints and Virgins (Mayblin 2014) Many times Altagracia is referred as Tatica, which is a popular way of referring to the women named Altagracia, which is a common Dominican name. Tatica is an ally in the complicated lives of the women who need to solve life problems. Most importantly, the traditions and beliefs of the petitions that are transmitted from generation to another are a way of making sure the Dominican traditions persist as a transnational practice. Going to Higüey to pay for a petition is a way of maintaining cultural ties with Dominican Republic and contributing economically with the patron festivities.

Becoming involved in church activities can be a resource of integration for Dominican migrant women. Flores Tondo reminds us that the work of the pastoral center named CAPE has been central for helping migrants empower themselves and claim control over their experience in Malaysia (Flores Tondo, 2014). This was the case in many of the women I interviewed as many of them were involved in church activities. For example, Eusebia came to Puerto Rico during the 1970's because her husband found a job in San Juan, and she felt it was natural to be with him but regrets that she had to give up on her studies to become a housewife. She regrets becoming a housewife but has found in religion

a way to put her skills to good use for the community. Her weekly schedule is filled with church activities, for example, she belongs to the choir and goes to rehearsals on Wednesdays, and she prepares the children for their first communion on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Religion is her time away from home and way of feeling productive and good about herself. As Eusebia explains:

Housework is double the work. I say, that at home you always have something to do. But when you go to work you bathe, you dress, you get ready, you dress up well to do what you must do. You put on makeup; you get pretty. But in the house, all the time. I told sister Josefa yesterday. I'm crazy about starting our routine again. I hate being in the house all the time. And Josefa, died of laughter. Because I must be in the parish at three. And I'm on my feet, walking because I don't drive either. My husband is the one who drives. He has a car, but he is always working. Me with my two little feet. For the mass. So, staying in the house. Oh no, it's exhausting dear

(Eusebia, Interview, cook, 47 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Eusebia likes being at church because she feels productive and contributes in some way with her community. Migration for her implied giving up on her studies which she liked very much and explained that the migration process took that opportunity from her. This is because when she lived in Dominican Republic, her family served as her support system. She explained if I would have stayed maybe I would have finished my studies. My mom would have helped me by taking care of the children while I went to class. Apart from the useful purpose of religion, Eusebia understands the presence of God as a physical embodied experience in the middle of what she described being alone taking care of her hospitalized daughter. She points out during her testimony that although her sister-in-law lived in Puerto Rico and that she had many friends her strongest support was her family. She describes her daughter being sick as a moment of great desperation and it was at this desperate moment when she felt the physical presence of God. She describes her experience like this:

I have had experiences. Once, my daughter was hospitalized. That night my son, José Manuel, was lying down, the baby, had slept, the smallest

one. And I was alone in the house. My husband was working. And I knelt. Because I mean, my despair was great! You know. I know that I opened the Bible and began to pray, to talk to God. I said, my God! Why? I am alone. That is, my family is not here, and my family is in Santo Domingo. Here I only have a sister of my husband. I have many friends. Thank God! But I am alone, and I had an experience. That I say that God loves me. And he loves me, but he loves me! Look, I felt that hand. Look, I am getting Goosebumps. I felt that hand, which made me that. Who says you are alone? You are not alone! I am with you! And I am here! Therefore, there are things that I cannot explain. When I see a person, who tells me. No. God does not exist. I say, God exists! Search for him. Come to him and you will see, you will find him. And thank God, my daughter left the hospital. She recovered. However, it was such a great experience that I said, Wow!

If there is God. And if he is with, he and me has always been there. Why will he leave me alone? I am here! I am here! I am with you!

(Eusebia, Interview, cook, 47 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Embodied experiences with God like hearing or feeling the presence of God are common experiences in the context of Dominican migrant women. Peggy Levitt argues that religion can be a source of comfort and security for people facing economic adversity or violence (Levitt 2018) In the case of Eusebia her faith was her comfort during times of despair when her daughter was hospitalized. What is interesting is that she describes the experience not because of the words of the passage that came up but because of the experience of feeling, the presence of God as if she describes God told her I am here with you. This experience comes at a very vulnerable time in her life because as Bornstein explains the experience of becoming a parent is one where the wellbeing of oneself depends on the wellbeing of the daughter (Silvia Bornstein 2018). When her daughter was hospitalized Eusebia felt desperate, she was worried not only because of the wellbeing of her daughter but because she felt alone in the situation. Migrating and not having the support and company of her family at that moment felt like desperation. She not only needed to take her care of her hospitalized daughter but of the other children as well as her husband and herself. In conclusion,

migration can put women in the difficult situation of feeling as if they need to take care of their children alone. Embodied experiences of making petitions and feeling the presence of God makes women feel accompanied and validated for being far away from family.

## 5.6 Catholic revival tendencies in the Dominican communities

Dominican Republic is a conservative religious society, and during the migration experience there can be a tendency to return to the more conservative values of Dominican religiosity. Rosemary Polanco argues that migration represents a contradictory experience, both traumatic as well as liberating, that produces an enhanced hybridization of the home and host cultures (Polanco, 2006). This experience of migration can be at times confusing. On the one hand, there may be sense of liberty or sometimes a new set of social morality or lack of it that can make a migrant more moralistic. Similarly, Peter Berger reminds us that in the context of globalized, religion there can be a tendency to return to the traditional values or there can be a mixing of new effervescent religions (Berger, 2004). When reviewing the literature Manuel Vásquez argues that in Latin America, in general and because of the history of Roman Catholic dogmatic education, there is a tendency to return to traditionalist values (Vásquez 2014). When I was carrying out the interviews for this research, I did interview exclusively Catholic women. Out of the 30 women I interviewed, four of them identified themselves as Catholics belonging to Catholic revival movements like the charismatic movement and Juan 23. Specifically, they expressed to me that they felt like the traditional values of Catholicism were losing ground. For example, Angelica who I introduced in the previous chapter and when I asked her about the importance of the festivity of the virgin of Altagracia for her, she replied:

People that never come to church show up on that day (The 21 of January, Day of Altagracia)). They come that day to celebrate the feast of the Virgin Mary. However, they are some people who, if they really came because of that, ok. Then they bring music, food. I do not like that, they give food. That is what happens

(Angélica, Interview, Secretary, 33 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Angélica is a young leader in her parish of San Antonio de Padua. This means that Angelica takes part in masses by reading the liturgy, and at the moment of our interview she was involved in the decoration of the altar for the lent festivities. This is important because as Davis reminds us of this gives women like Angelica the power to decide on important aspects of the religious community life (Davis 2012). We met on a Wednesday because she gathers with the rest of the members of her Catholic revival denomination for the praying group. They read passages from the bible and discuss their interpretations and feelings on the scriptures. At the moment of the interview, she is a woman committed to God something that was not like that before in her life. She explains that she was a Catholic and went to church but was not committed; she just wanted to comply with a social obligation. This is important because as Davis explains, there is a difference between understanding religion as an obligation not as enjoyable (Davis 2012). Davis argues that in the context of Dominican migrants in New York there is a sense that the festivities of Altagracia have a more African embodied celebration. This is because the dances and drum playing are something that defines Dominican folk religion not the Europeanized Catholic version. Some of the women I interviewed referred to the festivities of Altagracia as the fiesta de palos meaning the party of the drums. Angelica refers to her change of heart from seeing going to mass as an obligation to having a meaningful experience after her experience at the Catholic revival retreat. At first when she said she did not like the people who attended the festivity of Altagracia for the music and the food I came to understand she was looking for a more committed religious people at church. Peter Berger reminds us that Catholicism is among the religions that are losing ground (Berger, 2004) Stark and Finke explain that of the reasons why Catholicism is losing supporters is because its lack of capacity to adapt to spiritual needs (Stark and Finke 2004). In this case, the day of Altagracia is a great party and Angelica wishes for that amount of people to remain at church not because of the embodied experience of the music and the food but because of deeper reflection and devotion to Mary. As I stated earlier as Davis mentions that, for some people, there is sense of obligation and commitment before the experience of joy (Davis 2012). Most importantly, her words suggest a little resentment with the people who do not

attend mass regularly and are committed like herself. It would be interesting to do further research to understand the attitudes of people of power inside the church with the loss of the taken for granted power position of Catholicism. In conclusion the migration situation provokes an anxiety of losing Dominican traditions and this can lead to a more conservative interpretation of Catholicism. Another example of the sense of losing values and tradition is Fela who migrated to Puerto Rico in 1966 in the first major wave of migration after the death of dictator Rafael Trujillo. Incorrectly, I assumed she had migrated escaping the political repression. Fela quickly corrected that thought by explaining that during the dictatorship values of respect were observed. Fela liked the Catholic values of Trujillo and described the festivities of Altagracia as a dignified festivity where people used their best clothes unlike what she describes as a street party. Fela is a Catholic belonging to a charismatic group, and she explained that she does not attend the festivities of Altagracia because she is not a street woman. She explained women needed to be humble, like the virgin because nothing can be achieved by being brava. Fela explains:

During the times of Trujillo, there was respect. There was respect! You respected. Starting because ... people need to start by respecting themselves. If the person does not respect himself, much less will respect others, but I can respect you. Those are the values. And those same values and I try to transmit it to my daughters. And I have five daughters. And I cannot complain about any. None of them got married young either. They all got married after they were 30 years old...The woman must be submissive because behind your humility you will achieve everything you want. If you go brave, wanting to be what is not to the brave, aggressive, as they say here, you will not achieve anything. But if you go with humility, you will achieve more than with gestures of bravery. As a woman, for me the woman must be submissive. After the years, you always remember the 21 but you no longer celebrate it in the same way.

M. But near here there is a community of Dominicans; do you celebrate the day of Altagracia...?

Q. No. There is a community and there are those who celebrate it, but I do not celebrate it because I am not close to them. I have never been to say, involved in things like those that ... I mean, I am not street woman. I like to be home early

(Fela, Interview, Merchant, 63 years old, San Juan, 2018).

As I mentioned before the constitution of the Dominican Republic has a document named the Concordato entre la Santa Sede y la Republic Dominicana that can be translated as the agreement between the Holy Church and Dominican Republic. Rafael Leonidas Trujillo signed this document on the 16th of June 1954 (Concordato Dominicano, Curia Vatican). Two years before the Dominican government funded the start of the construction of the Basilica of Altagracia in Higüey that was recognized as national monument by the Dominican government in 1972. Edward Paulino reminds us that part of Trujillo's agenda was to remove the African traditions of Haitian Voodoo from Dominican religiosity (Hernandez 2016). During This conversation, Fela expressed reasons why she feels unhappy with the changes in Dominican society. She mentioned as many other women I interviewed petty crime and the loss of what she perceives as Dominican values. Fela understands that during the times of the dictatorship there was respect among the Dominican people. She remains a Catholic woman but isolates herself from the new traditions because she does not agree with the changes in values. She is very aware that there are changes going on in society, but she fears the changes are making society worse. She came to Puerto Rico and met a Puerto Rican man with whom she had three daughters. Fela considers herself as completely immersed in Puerto Rican culture, something she attributes to the loving relationship with her husband who she describes as a wonderful man. It is as if the migration process turned her into a more conservative woman in terms of family and cultural values.

It is important also to understand that Fela is a woman in her 70s and as Mayblin reminds us, there is a tendency to become more virtuous and pious women as women age, since there is not much of a sexual life to feel guilty about. It is important to clarify that socially the term street woman is a euphemism for prostitute, and Fela was very emphatic about not becoming a street woman. As Mayblin explains, "Once again, the older female "devotional

virtuosi” are discernible predominantly by age and by their distance from childbearing” (Mayblin 2014). Maybe for this reason Fela became interested in the charismatic movement, which is considered part of the Catholic revival movement. Charismatics are well known for having a strong sense of community and are advocates of traditional interpretations of the bible. They observe rituals and dances that resemble the original Christian communities that have strong Jewish influences.

## 5.7 Losing the taken for granted status of Catholicism

Although Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic are still predominantly catholic countries according to the Pew research center, there is a sense that Catholicism is losing ground. According to the Pew research center and the Fetzer Institute, in Dominican Republic 66% of the population is catholic and 20% is considered protestant. Very similarly, in Puerto Rico 69% of the population is considered catholic and 25% is considered protestant. This data is gathered on the Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050.

(<http://www.pewforum.org/>, 2019) According to Stark and Finke the reason, why Catholicism is decreasing in numbers is that there is a need to satisfy spiritual needs that the church does not attend (Stark and Finke 2004). During the fieldwork process, it was obvious for me that many of these needs are gender related, like the need to deal with relationships problems and divorce, the need to address and heal issues of sexual abuse among religious congregations and the need for leadership among the clergy. An example of this is Marta who is a Catholic nun who belongs to a Catholic congregation based in Puerto Rico. She describes her congregation as very open that does mainly work in the education of the poor. She considers herself a fighter for the rights of the vulnerable and was drawn to the life of service because of the work done by the sisters and the experience she had in Cabral, frontier between Haiti and Dominican Republic. She argues against this cultural dynamic of the priest being the central figure of authority in the religious communities. As Marta explains, well, uh, there is a truth, I must be honest, and that is that the Catholic Church is a machista. Where the role of man has always been emphasized and valued. In every way, but I say it because of the leadership. In Santo Domingo for example, or in Santiago, I lived in Santiago too, the men, there are only men in the



assembly, a president. There are no women there, so I thought why men must there only be. I once heard a woman say, I do not remember if it was one, one, as it is called, a minister of the Eucharist. She told me that she thought that before the church chose a woman to be a priestess, they were going to allow the men, the priests to marry, to marry. For me that was shocking. Then, where I lived in the same church where I grew up there were no women celebrators of the word. Even I lived the discrimination with priests. I have lived, I lived in Sabana Perdida for three and a half years and we were preparing a group for the first communion and another for confirmation. Two weeks before the celebration that those people received the sacrament the father said they were not prepared. And we prepared them. Therefore, you say, there you see, they have no trust in us. We, as nuns, also experience discrimination on the part of men within the church, where women are not allowed to participate. They believe that the training we give is mediocre that people are not ready because we prepare them. There are struggles there of power and the priest always wants to have the last word. If you are in a parochial council, then. And people unfortunately validate it because they believe that the father is the one who knows. It is strong to digest. I believe that that the church has grown in many things, because you must recognize it, but it must continue to renew itself as regards to ideals, to its mentality. Because instead of attracting people what is doing is to alienate people, who are often discriminated against. And Jesus' values were not those. The values of Jesus were to attract everyone who was excluded and marginalized in society. In one way or another, he claimed for their rights. And I say, that is worth a lot, the message he conveyed. Not the things that men invented

(Marta, Interview, Nun, 28 years old, San Juan, 2018).

As Marta explains, she views the Catholic Church is a stagnant institution; the last reform took place in 1962 with Pope John 23. Vatican 2 changed in many ways the Catholic Church; for example, the way nuns dressed and the language of the mass from Latin to the popular spoken languages. However, there is no space for leadership for the women who perform crucial social work in poor communities. Marta is a Dominican nun dedicated to educating other Dominican Puerto Rican in their rights and improving their lives. Marta does important and life changing work for others and is very much aware that the Church is not

doing justice to social status of women, not just in the church but also in the world. Her claim for leadership is because Marta is not isolating herself from the gendered problems in society. Marta understands herself as the same as the rest of society because she navigates herself in an institution that she perceives as unfair. Why she remains in the religious community is because she is committed with the social cause of the congregation. She understands herself to be living a life of service for the unprivileged that in this case are Dominican migrant women suffering domestic violence. She positions herself in an unprivileged position as well. The specific context of Marta growing up in the Haitian Dominican border and working with Dominican migrant women as a social worker in Puerto Rico has made aware of the spiritual needs and vulnerability of women and herself. Marta understands religion as crucial for helping Dominican migrant women navigate through the migratory experience. In conclusion, for some women like Marta, the migratory experience has made her critical of the catholic church and an advocate for women to occupy positions of power in all social institutions including religious ones.

## **5.8 Rising voices against a religious culture of violence and sexual abuse**

This section is about how violence and abuse by religious men has changed the way Dominican migrant women understand and think about religion. Dominican traditional and colonial religiosity regard religious men as powerful and trustworthy but personal and Dominican public experiences have shown otherwise. As Chandra Mohanty reminds us, migration has a gendered face, and it is not possible to separate these forms of analysis (Mohanty 2003, 1988). Violence in general, is common for Dominican migrant women in Puerto Rico and the women in my research who did not have to endure violent situations were exceptional. According to Wright (2016), sexual abuse against women in Dominican culture is something that has become a gender norm in part because of the experience with dictator Trujillo. During his dictatorship, Trujillo performed, as the patriarch who controlled and abused women at will. One of the most well-known cases are the Mirabal sisters who resisted a sexual encounter with Trujillo and became part of the political movement that later successfully ended the dictatorship. The assassination of the Mirabal sisters was

what Dominicans consider the igniting point of a robust opposition of the Trujillo era (Manley 2012). Lisa Blackmore (2015) reminds us that the Mirabal sisters became national symbols of courage and have a monument erected in Santo Domingo that Blackmore describes as a place of trauma (Blackmore, 2015). The Trujillista era as one of infamy and vileness, in which men would offer the dictator their wives and daughters for orgies and sadistic acts of deflowering in exchange for political favors. Trujillo named himself the father of all Dominicans and gave awards to women who had more than 11 children for contributing with Dominican population and prosperity (Manley 2012). The pivotal role Dominican women played in overcoming the regime has not been sufficiently researched. And, according to Manley, Dominican women have been and are still vocal to their dissatisfaction with their patriarchal society (Manley 2012). Some of the women I interviewed are actively pointing out the injustices of the Dominican male Dominated society and the privileged position of religious men.

The example of Guadalupe is important because of the broken trust in religion and the vulnerable position of young girls in migration. According to the Pew research center there has been a decline of 49% in the way Catholics understand Pope Francis is dealing with sex scandals as a top priority (Pew 2014). Guadalupe came to Puerto Rico to live with her grandmother as a child after a process of applying for a US visa. She does not like anything that has to do with religion because twice in her life men tried to rape her. Both times they were religious men. She describes that as one of the worst experiences of her life. She was walking down a dark alley when a man with a Bible under his arm approached her. The man grabbed her and forced her to a dark corner. She started screaming and someone helped her. Religion for her is a terrible thing because of the assumption in Dominican culture that because a man is religious, that man is trustworthy. Guadalupe explains:

Z: The man who brought the Virgin, that man spent 6 years touching me and he was a Catholic. He visited my grandmothers' house. Also, when I arrived here, my grandmother paid a taxi driver who is also a pastor here in the San Antonio church, where practically all Dominicans go. That man took me to school, and he stopped every day, he stopped to touch me. Every day he pulled over to touch me. The man is so cheeky that one day he told my

grandmother. He told my grandmother, but you know how the family is and people tend to take things like that as jokes.

M: So, that is why you do not believe in any religion?

Z: I do not believe, and I have forbidden my daughter to go near religious men because I already went through that. That man still goes to my grandmother's house, I tell her you do not go near him, and you go to the room. Because he has the habit of giving pesos to girls, so they can buy sweets. That is why I tell you I do not believe in religion.

(Guadalupe, Interview, nurse, 35 years old, San Juan, 2018).

The experience of Guadalupe was not something that her grandmother protected her from, not even at the moment when she keeps having to see the men who molested her as a child. According to the Pew research center 79% of Americans say sexual abuse is an ongoing problem in religious environments (Pew 2019) Simultaneously, Patricia Fitzpatrick argues that Dominican migrant women have been for a long-time victim of sexual violence. Fitzpatrick attributes this to the fact that Dominican Republic is a popular place for sexual tourism (Fitzpatrick 2013). Her posture attributes responsibility on the government capitalizing on women's sexual labor and not protect them from violence. However, recent feminist postures qualify this argument as an anti-prostitution posture. For example, Cabezas and Campos argue that there is a relationship between conservative religious postures and anti-prostitution feminists who stigmatize and moralize Dominican migrant women in Puerto Rico. (Cabezas, Campos, 2016). How this religious anti prostitution posture damages Dominican Puerto Rican living in Puerto Rico will be discussed later in detail. Guadalupe remembers the traditional Catholic custom called the domiciliary visit of the virgin where an image of the virgin is taken from house to house among the people of the church. Every time this man came to bring the virgin to her grandmother, he would sexually molest her. Later, Guadalupe described the consequences of all the sexual abuse she had on her life manifested in a struggle with anxiety and depression. After having her daughter, she fell into a profound depression where she was constantly thinking about killing herself and her daughter. She said that because she had been molested at such a young age, she would ask herself why God would choose her to go through that. Now as a grown

woman, she understands she was not exceptional but something common in the social context. Guadalupe is an advocate for not letting her daughter near religious men. Religious men are just not trustworthy people for her. I understand her testimony is important because she is only one of the possibly many other victims of religious men.

Women have important reasons to dislike religion and one of the most important reasons is child abuse within the Catholic Church. According to the Pew research center 27% of Catholics have decided to not attend or attend less mass after learning about sex scandals in the Catholic church and 26% reduced their donation to church (2019). In the Dominican Republic one of the most well-known cases came to international press attention because of the high rank position of the perpetrator who was the ambassador of the Vatican in Santo Domingo, Józef Wesolowski who died in August 2018 before facing the Dominican civil authorities for violations of sexual abuse against children (Martinez 2019). The death of Wesolowski the day before his trial in Santo Domingo raised questions like Vilma; one of my interviewees expressed "Someone should have killed him. Those must have poisoned him or something. Because to do all those things he did, someone had to help him do it. Maybe he was going to involve other people" Sexual abuse that has been systematically ignored by the Catholic Church institution but brought to the attention of Dominicans in the island and women in the diaspora consider this a very important issue to discuss.

## 5.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have **explained** why Dominican Puerto Rican living in Puerto Rico remain in Catholicism and how their Associations attend transnational and local needs of their communities. I have **explained** the spirit of reciprocity of the vows and the transnational benefits of the petitions to Altagracia. I have demonstrated with examples the political and identity discourse of Dominican Catholicism on the day of Altagracia. How there are aspects of Dominican Catholicism that appeal to the senses and experience and how this is attached to the African catholic religiosity rituals. Also, I have discussed why the migration process sometimes leads to women to search for more conservative Catholic revival movements like the charismatic movement. Also, I have given examples of why there seems to be an eroding base of Catholicism due to sexual abuse

scandals and issues regarding gender conflicts like divorce and lack of leadership opportunities for nuns. In conclusion, I have demonstrated how Catholicism, in particular the dynamics of the petition serves as a resource for satisfying their material needs. Catholic Associations like the devotees of Altagracia validates women's potentials to take part in the religious liturgies and give back to their families and community. Simultaneously, Dominican Puerto Rican are not silent about their struggles with Catholicism, they question and wrestle with how the Catholic leadership is not attending the issues of sexual abuse and their need for leadership. This chapter demonstrates how Catholicism is a resource for economic and religious needs and at the same time generated a discussion about how to attend social problems created by traditional religious notions.

## Chapter 6: Production and reproduction of Altagracia in Puerto Rico; Intersections of race, gender, and religion

### 6.1 Introduction

Up to this chapter I have discussed the spiritual and religious meanings of Altagracia for Dominican migrant women living in Puerto Rico. In this chapter I will discuss how Altagracian traditions, devotions and rituals intersect and interconnect with national identity, race, and gender.

Some aspects of Altagracian rituals integrate colonial Catholicism simultaneously with Afro Caribbean ways of interpreting religion. According to Pasura although in the migrant scenario some tend to remain attached to a sense of collective identity and memory there is a process of hybridization and creolization of religion (Pasura 2014). Similarly, Salke notes that Afro Catholic devotions use elements of African religions not to be preserved but are produced or re-enacted in the migratory context (Salke 2019). In this chapter I explain how women who collaborated with this research remember Altagracian rituals but also how they have adapted them to the San Juan setting. Afro Catholic rituals and traditions serve the purpose of publicly integrate experienced ritualists along with new members with the objective to keep alive the devotions for saint and virgins (Copeland 2000) The experience women had with Altagracian rituals in Dominican Republic suggests that this religious devotion is not something they reflected on as an idea but as a community experience. Finally, the racialized dynamics of the Caribbean is, like many scholars argue, a constant where the local in this case the Puerto Rican as the white majority and the Dominican migrant as the racialized other (Duany 2012) Balibar and Wallerstein argue that religion is used as a justification for racism or a way of purifying society (Balibar, Wallerstein, 1991). In this chapter also, I explain why some women consider the Afro Catholic rituals done for Altagracia as in need of reconsideration because of a rationalization process of religious beliefs in the migratory context. The historically constructed Dominican national identity considers Catholicism to be along with the Spanish language and the Spanish race to be the most important traits that distinguish Dominicans. In the migratory context Altagracian rituals become an intermediate

space between the sacred and profane Afro Caribbean devotions. Altagracia is a spiritual power that is celebrated in embodied ways that provide evidence of the African dynamic of lived religion. In conclusion, this chapter analyzed aspect of race, gender, and migration and how they are enacted publicly and privately, preserved, or reconsidered.

## 6.2 Problematizing Race and migration in Puerto Rico

At the moment of the writing of this chapter there is a political enthusiasm about re-evaluating aspects of colonial history that established race and racism in the Caribbean (refs?). There is a growing awareness of anti-racism accompanied by proposals for revindicating Afro Caribbean identity (refs). Based on the empirical analysis of my data, Altagracian rituals and traditions are connected with marginal and racialized communities in the migratory context of Puerto Rico and to the also racially defined location of Dominican Republic. However, this political climate was not the same in 2018 when doing the fieldwork for this research (winter-summer 2018). Some of the women I interviewed were critical of the racialized terms used to associate migration with race, but they are more of an exception than what most of the women expressed. It is difficult to talk about race, religion, and migration without colonization, but this is not a topic that women wanted to talk about. Skin color was not mentioned and, talking about race can sometimes be perceived as offensive (Godreau 2020). As Nayak explains our own experiences permeate the way the ethnographer defines race and the power struggles of ourselves with our respondents (Nayak 2006). Through this research I understood that racism that is perceived as a personal narrative and not as a political discourse that is designed be systematically targeting the racialized migrant. Frantz Fanon explains to remain neutral in front of racism is to become an accomplice (Fanon 1991). With this research I want to critique the pervasive discourse that claims the racialized other as the problem and confront the lack of representation of minorities in research as one major problem in Academia. As Nayak explains some ethnographers can admit this because culture is only visible through representation (Nayak 2006).

When reviewing the literature there are many scholars that explain the racialized Puerto Rican society as consistent with the pattern where the migrant



in this case the Dominican woman as the racialized other (Duany 2012, Godreau 2002, Nina 2018, Hernandez 2012). In this chapter I want to problematize the ways women who participated in this research referred to aspects of religion related to some Altagracian rituals as expression of African religious traditions and how this belongs to a wider political racialized context. Scholars like Balibar and Wallerstein understand the intersection and interaction between islamophobia and racial imperialism is key to Europe because of the growing number of migrants that threaten European societies (Balibar, Wallerstein, 1991). Similarly, Nazia Kazi invites us to problematize the perceptions of race as an individual predicament on hate to the idea that islamophobia is entrenched into the long history of racism in the US (Kazi 2019). Ryan and Vachelli understand that after September 9, 2001, Muslims are considered the interior threat that make them responsible of violent events worldwide (Ryan, Vachelli, 2013) For the purpose of understanding this chapter I discuss the intersection of race as religious intolerance about the more Africanized rituals for Altagracia as part of the Intra Caribbean migratory religious context.

According to Jorge Duany although the Spanish Caribbean is for many anthropologists considered a common multi-cultural or hybrid region, differences in the colonial systems affected the racial components of the islands and created a chained dynamic of racism (Duany 2012). This dynamic consists of Puerto Ricans comparing themselves racially with the “other” migrants and equating blackness with poverty and social stigmatizing conditions. That is, Puerto Ricans consider Dominicans to be all black or mulatto and themselves as white (Duany 2012). An historical explanation for this is that Dominican Republic and Haiti were under the French colonial system, which relied on imported African labor to support their economies. Duany explains that compared to La Hispaniola (Dominican Republic and Haiti), Puerto Rico and Cuba, received under the Spanish colonial system quite a substantial number of European migrants.

Balibar and Wallerstein note that racial dynamics are not fixed but subject to political and class agendas (Balibar, Wallerstein, 1991). Similarly, according to Isar Godreau the Puerto Rican people have been a subject of division and racist ways of stratifying people racially with the mechanism of the US Census (Godreau 2020). According to Goudreau for fifty years the question of race was not included in the Puerto Rican Census (Godreau 2020) because Muñoz Marin

(Puerto Rican first elected governor) understood that because Puerto Rico is mostly mixed raced it was like a raceless country. For example, negro/a is a term of endearment in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico according to Muñoz was an example of absence of prejudice and discrimination. One of the most cited indicators of how Puerto Ricans consider themselves to be white is the Census data which indicates that in 2010, 76% of Puerto Ricans identified themselves as white only and 8% identified as black only. This 76% indicates the 2010 survey and some Sociologists interpret this as an indicator of how much Puerto Ricans want to erase their African ancestry (Godreau 2020, Duany 2012). Because in 2020, new data will arise as to how these racial terms have changed. The idea of the Puerto Rican as a mixture of Spanish, African and Taino is an oversimplification of race that at the same time is an attempt at homogenizing the race (Godreau 2020). Don't let the Census erase you is an initiative of a community led organization Colectivo Ile that that argue that for this 2020 census Puerto Ricans that are light skinned or white they can also claim their African ancestry and identify themselves as African raced. They argue this is a political answer to the racial question and a way of reclaiming that stratification process that was imposed in Puerto Rico.

According to Velazquez and Rodriguez (2018) although racism has always existed in Puerto Rico there is a generalized idea that in Puerto Rico no one is racist or at least "not as much or as serious as in the United States because in Puerto Rico we don't treat blacks like that (Velazquez and Rodriguez 2018) citizen this generalization arguing that there is a consistent discourse in Latin America, and Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic are not the exception that sustains the African and indigenous "races" to be less important to the European white ancestry (Velazquez, Rodriguez 2018) During my fieldwork Doña Carmen, one of the participants, explained how Puerto Ricans differentiate themselves from Dominicans by claiming think that "all Dominicans are black". This idea was mentioned by one of the women I interviewed for this research, Doña Carmen, who came to Puerto Rico because of her husband who migrated with a fake identity document. He had a Puerto Rican friend who agreed to lend him his passport for traveling purposes. He successfully travelled back and forth twice but then had to stop because someone got suspicious at the airport. Doña Carmen attributed his success to the fact that he is fairer skinned with light

colored eyes and as she anticipated, according to Puerto Ricans, “all Dominicans are black”:

He speaks to you as Puerto Rican, but as he is ... he is a guy... he doesn't look like ... the thing is here (Puerto Rico) everyone thinks that all Dominicans ... They believe that all Dominicans are black or that they can't have light colored eyes...! He speaks like... he rambles into words. but he didn't seem like a Dominican for people here ... They let him pass twice, but the third time he did it, he was stopped ... you seem Dominican ...

(Doña Carmen, Interview, Domestic worker, 78 years old, San Juan, 2018).

This quotation can be interpreted as Dominicans and Puerto Ricans similar to each other in terms of physical appearance, it is very difficult to tell them apart racially and ethnically. I agree with Duany, when he argues that racial differences between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans are more imaginary than real (Duany 2012) However, the point of Doña Carmen's quote is to explain the racist dynamic where Puerto Rican people understand all Dominicans are black, the common misconception that also exemplifies that denial of the black presence. As Duany explains this racism is translated as the stigma of Dominican people as the ones who work in low skilled jobs, the poor people living in urban sectors like Rio Piedras or Santurce, the unsafe places in San Juan (Duany 2012). The Dominican migrant woman is portrayed as the prostitute directly related to drug trafficking and maritime illegal entries. At the same time, the fact that the Puerto Ricans did not notice the difference is an example of how the transnational and mixture of races made her husband unnoticeably Dominican. What let the people at the airport know he was not Puerto Rican was his accent. Godreau would agree with Doña Carmen that Puerto Ricans do consider themselves to be white compared to Dominicans (Godreau 2002). In her ethnography Godreau sustains that many black Puerto Ricans complain that because of their skin color they are mistaken by Dominicans or from other parts of the Caribbean (Godreau 2002). It is important to note that although it is important to acknowledge that there is an underlying racism in Puerto Rican society, there are also many people fighting socially, politically, and ideologically against this social problem.

### 6.3 Intersections of migration, religion, race, and gender

In this section I will discuss how Altagracian traditions, devotions and rituals intersect and interconnect with national identity, race, and gender in order to enhance the understanding of Dominican women's lived experiences of both migration and religion. These intersections are not fixed, for some women migration supposes an emancipatory space and others prefer to remain attached to traditional values. According to Pasura women and children are understood to be the bearers of traditional and cultural values in the diaspora and this supposes a struggle for women who desire an enhanced sense of control and boundaries in their lives (Pasura 2014). For example, Olivetta is a 23-year-old beautician and nail artists that migrated to Puerto Rico more than 15 years ago. In our conversation Olivetta reflects on the social position of women in society and uses the term to describe how with migration the Dominican woman is changed. As Olivetta understands:

The roles have changed, they are not the same. And this is so, because people use the word Chapeadora for women who want men to give her money. But that is how things were before. The woman got married, did not work and you annihilated yourself in the house. She did not study. She had to be subjected to what he gave you. He was going to the street. He could have 20 women on the street and children on the street. And you couldn't say anything because you didn't work or do anything. Since women now work and maintain themselves, men cannot do that. That's how it is! That comes and goes. Men are more chapeadores than women themselves, because if the woman does not work, they will not hit on her. Because they say they won't keep old women.

(Olivetta, Interview, Beautician, 23 years old, San Juan, 2018).

In this quotation Olivetta reflects on the Dominican term Chapeadora (a woman those lives from economic favors) and understands that through education and becoming emancipated economically a woman can save herself from being in that position. This term is comparable to the term "Yal" used to racialize poor Puerto Rican women. The Chapeadora lives out of her hypersexualized body and

capitalizes on having children with men who provide economically for them. In her reflection, Olivetta education and economic are the emancipatory means for women. At a moment where theoretically, class seems to be unimportant and unrelated to race, Balibar and Wallerstein intend to restore the idea that there is a direct relationship of race with nation and class (Balibar, Wallerstein, 1991).

Chapeadoras are condemned for being bad women and bad mothers who use their economic resources in clothes, plastic surgeries, drinking and partying. They are obsessed with beautification in terms of using provocative clothes, hair extensions and accessories. Olivetta argues that this is linked to the social expectation in Dominican society where women are expected to be economically dependent on men, but understands this is no longer the case, things are changing.

The influence of Dominican culture and values is a way of connecting the women with society, both Dominican and Puerto Rican. As Pasura explains, diasporic religious communities offer spiritual and emotional support as well as a sense of belonging (Pasura 2014). Although, some women argue that the rituals and traditions done for Altagracia are attached to the sacred location of Higüey and the specific communities in Dominican Republic. Other women find syncretic, smaller scale or more personal ways of maintaining that sense of religious Altagracian culture. According to Pasura migration challenges the way identities are created because they are not fixed but a construction that requires hybridity, creolization, and syncretism (Pasura 2014) For example, naming girls Altagracia is one of the ways to keep that Dominican identity. Mariana mentions that:

My second name is Altagracia! Most people, over there, I think, the name Altagracia is big, you know. Nowadays people give the little girls many strange names. But most of them use Altagracia and they have the second name Altagracia, because of her.

(Mariana, Interview, Nurse, 72 years old, San Juan, 2018)

Mariana is aware that there are changes that come with migration and recognizes that Altagracia is used alternatively as a middle name. According to Pasura although in the migrant scenario some tend to remain attached to a sense

of collective identity and memory this process of hybridization can be found in the context of Zimbabweans living in the UK (Pasura 2014). In this example, Mariana uses the example to explain that sense of remaining attached with an adaptation. Using Altagracia as a second name provides with the possibility of becoming creative with the first name.

There is a racism that in the Caribbean, where the Afro Caribbean religious woman is treated as the most negative influence in the chain of racism. McCarthy explains that according to people who believe in Afro Caribbean religions, God does not get involved in everyday human affairs because he is too busy and that is why the spirits and ancestors are the ones invoked by this religious tradition (McCarthy 2001). The African based religious culture that holds a close relationship to their spirits and ancestors and suffers the stigma of being less important than the Europeanized Catholic rituals. First because drum rituals are understood in association with spirit positions and the second because God is and should be the central figure of spirituality and Altagracia a female spiritual figure, by Christian values should not be worshiped.

According to Copeland popular religion is a complement to religion by recreating and reconfiguring dimensions of faith by socially and religiously marginalized groups (Copeland 2000). Xiomara Fortuna explains that in Dominican Republic in places like Villa Mella you can African religious traditions that use important African rhythms for their religious rituals (Afi, Quin 2015). As a Dominican Afro musician, Xiomara Fortuna, found in religious rituals a place to encounter musical traditions named the congos, palos, salve, sarandunga, guloya, and gaga— rhythms. In her quest to understand and make tribute to these forms of music (Afi, Quin 2015). For example, Canita remembers about the Altagracian tradition of the sung rosaries which last all through the night, the singing is accompanied by drum playing. Canita remembers she used to attend the sung rosaries with her cousin Chepe who she remembers fondly because he introduced her to how became latter her Puerto Rican husband. Canita sung as she explained:

We sang rosaries at night. And those were some rosaries!! Precious songs we sang for virgin. I remember that they sang. A song that said, "Virgin of Altagracia, pure and beautiful, when a cloud is crossing, a Star

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For Canita, the singing and drum playing was not only a personal spiritual ritual but a community tribute for Altagracia Afro Caribbean style. The beauty of these rituals is that they observe the Afro Caribbean structure of a religious celebration. According to Copeland, Marian celebrations follow a structure where there are some general rules: First, people are encouraged to wear white there are people who lead the ceremonies where there is a time for praying, singing, dancing, and feasting or eating (Copeland 2000). One of the characteristics of these extensive periods of drum playing is that they are improvisations and adaptations of religious salves. Similarly, Dorien argues that music in African American churches is understood to be emancipatory amid racialized violence in America by providing not only an intellectual validation but equating themselves in dignity with others (Dorien 2016). In conclusion, the Afro Caribbean rituals done for Mary serve the purpose of making women remember Altagracia as an experience and not an idea.

According to Copeland popular religion can be misunderstood as widespread religion, when the actual meaning from the Spanish is "Of the people" (Copeland 2016) For Milly, the figure of Altagracia is one of the most important elements that distinguishes her hometown of Higüey. One of the important details of Higüey is that it is also the nearest province of Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico where most of the maritime travels sails from. Also, the Basilica of Altagracia is that is close to a 45-minute drive away from the tourist town of Punta Cana and Bavaro. A place visited by thousands of American and European visitors in search of white sand beaches. Milly describes Higüey as Altagracian territory and as synonymous of the fiestas Patronales or patron saint's festivities. As Milly explains:

Those January 21st. That was the patron saint's festivities. What we call the Patronales. To see so many pilgrims enter the town. All those

people who came from so far to fulfil their promises. Where the Virgin of Altagracia was. My parents, my grandparents who came from the countryside. Dressed all in white all the time to greet the pilgrims. But for me more than religion for me as it has become more tradition. It is cultural. It is no longer, because, for example, I can tell you about my grandfather. From my grandfather on my mother's side, for that, he had to pay tribute to the Virgin of Altagracia. But now it has become the Party. It is not so much out of devotion. It is because the people want to party.

(Milly, Interview, Waitress, 43 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Although Milly remembers the devotion of her grandparents to Altagracia, to that place and the experience of the community party. According to Ruiz and Limon the fiestas Patronales become evidence for what is considered sacred communally and for the construction of memories and ethnic and racial identity (Ruiz, Limon 2019). Martha Ellen Davis explains that Afro Caribbean religions distinguish themselves for understanding religion as an obligation but also as a joyful aspect of social life (Davis 2012). Similarly, Limon and Ruiz argue that the fiestas Patronales usually take place in the town plaza and are a celebration mostly attended by locals who are in the Case of Dominican Republic marked by the sacred location.

Similarly, women mentioned specific people such as family members as key to the Altagracian religiosity. That means their memories of what the rituals and traditions done for Altagracia were attached to family and traditions in Dominican Republic. Nicole Bourque argues that Catholic saints are mostly attached to an exact location, to a sacred landscape and to a particular people (Bourque 2012). For example, Doña Carmen explains that the parties were a family endeavor, a collaboration between families where her uncle was a leader. She explains that:

We had an uncle, there he organized the novena for La Altagracia, called Novenaries. There was always a mass and after that we went out, they threw a lot of fireworks, every night, every night. And then it was, like ... the novena is assigned to specific families, it was organized by



families. And sometimes two families would get together, you know, because of the festivities. And they had parties, and the little merry go round, and we enjoyed all those things. It was a big deal. And the flying seats.

(Doña Carmen, Interview, Domestic worker, 78 years old, San Juan, 2018).

There are economic and mundane considerations into building a devotional party for Altagracia and Doña Carmen understands the festivities as a traditional event that needed sometimes communal collaborations. Ruiz and Limon explain that there is an aspect of honoring the traditions that is directly related to ancestors (Ruiz, Limon 2019) Most probably the uncle was the one with the knowledge of the structure of the rituals, the quantities and providers of the things needed for the party, the specific symbols, music, food, and people who were to take part in the celebration. In the migrant context, recreating that specific scenario is impossible. What is in a sense re creatable is the sense of Joy and experience of Altagracia. As I stated earlier as Davis mentions that, for Dominican migrants the most important thing is the sense of joy of the religious experience (Davis 2012).

Mercedes was one of the women that had more religious knowledge about the history and significance of the protector and patron saints of Dominican Republic, Altagracia, and Mercedes. According to Copeland because of the intimate relationship of history with tradition the reception and transmission of them is almost an impossible task to achieve in the migrant context (Copeland 2000) Although Mercedes understands that the virgin of Mercedes is more significant for herself than Altagracia because of her name, she understands Altagracia, to be a national symbol and thus gives the rituals the importance they deserve with the intention of exposing younger generations of Dominican girls into the Altagracian rituals. The Associations of Altagracia that Mercedes belongs to has the responsibility of re-enacting in San Juan the rituals and traditions every 21st of January. Mercedes explains that part of the ritual is dressing the girls as Altagracia.

Yes! on January 21st and we dressed the girls ... I have the Altagracia outfit for them. and on September 24 also. We dress them with the baby and everything and everything just like the Virgin ...

(Mercedes, Interview, Caretaker, 78 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Giving young girls participation in the rituals for Altagracia is a way of passing the affectivity of this Dominican symbol from one generation to the next. The attention to detail of every aspect of Altagracia is important. Because the virgin is holding a baby, they give each girl a baby to hold in their arms to be accurate with the personification of Altagracia. According to Csordas religion has a discursive and non-discursive aspect that is usually passed as rituals and experiences from parents to their children. (Csordas 2019) Mercedes remembers the festivities of Altagracia as the big festivity in Dominican Republic explaining that there is not only the pilgrimage, but there are also sung rosaries, community visits of the replicas but also accidents because of the people behaving irresponsibly in the festivities. Mercedes explains:

Others go barefoot and do the 9 days. They say the rosaries and do mass. They also visit with a replica of the Virgin house by house. Wherever there is a novena everyone wants to do it. Not only in Higüey, but novenaries to the Virgin of Altagracia are celebrated throughout the country. But the last day they go to Higüey. Many buses, many people, those are thousands and thousands and thousands. Also, from there to here, a lot of accidents occur. Many, many, many accidents because people have no control. They do it in every town. Most especially in Higüey. You know that in that area there are many hotels. When the novena is on, they put machines. They call it machines. What are wheelies, flying seats, hammers. All those machines. Festivities!

(Mercedes, Interview, Caretaker, 78 years old, San Juan, 2018).

In the preceding quote, Mercedes explains how the entire Dominican country is mobilized in demonstrations of faith and devotion for Altagracia in comparison with the smaller acts of re-enactment of the migratory context. According to Copeland popular religion represents living dynamic of the people and a living engagement with a faith tradition (Copeland 2000) These rituals have a purpose that is to preserve Altagracia as a national symbol not in the private spiritual meditations but as a spiritual presence in the Dominican community. Mercedes

mentions this because in the migratory context the work of the Associations is the same, to retain their traditions. It takes a lot of work and creativity to bring the fun activities for the children but never in the magnitude of thousands of people occupying the streets of Higüey in Dominican Republic. Other women who participated in this research mentioned for example that there are replicas of Altagracia that are moved around San Juan, there are rosaries and procession that I personally attended. In conclusion there are community rituals done in Dominican Republic that in a smaller scale are created in Puerto Rico so that younger Dominican generations remember their cultural relevance and identity.

At the moment of this research there is a perception that there is an enhanced anti-migrant and racist political discussion. Unfortunately, the public policies regarding migration in the United States have a direct impact on the Dominican community living in Puerto Rico because of our colonial territory condition of the United States since 1898. According to Nazia Kazi this is something that is not new although this anti migrant and racist discourse is something that was affected by September 11, 2001, where Islam and the war on terror were especially targeted (Kazi 2019). The presence of Associations of devotees of Altagracia serves the purpose of becoming the support system for Dominican migrant women in their private lives. Also, the public rituals done for Altagracia, the petitions, the rosaries, processions are examples of how their presence is visible in our communities.

Afro Caribbean religiosity is an example of how religion can survive circumstances of slavery and transatlantic movement and is still present in the Intra-Caribbean migratory context. According to Selka (2019) the term syncretic to describe Afro Caribbean religiosity is no longer relevant to describe Afro Caribbean religiosity. Selka explains that the term syncretism refers to how African deities used Catholic saints and virgins to resist religious colonization, but that this strategy is no longer necessary (Selka 2019). I would argue that Marian devotions like Altagracia have become subversive in recent times. For example, on the 21st of January 2018 mass the President of the Association of Altagracia in his speech, stated that there is need for the younger generations to preserve and protect the tradition in order to strengthen and empower Dominican communities in San Juan. The Associations of Altagracia in San Juan are mainly for the purpose of organizing the 21 of January celebrations. Migrant

religious associations as Pasura argues can serve as a safe place or refuge for the people who have become disillusioned with the migratory experience (Pasura 2014). In conclusion, community expression of Altagracian devotion are public displays of affection for a community that is marginalized, racialized and a target for government violence.

## **6.4 Interconnectedness of Altagracia with Afro Catholic traditions**

There is the interconnectedness of Afro Catholic religious traditions in the Caribbean where Altagracia is one of the important figures that is re-enacted in the intra migrant scenario. As Jones explains there are cultural/ public and private/ psychological ways of living religion (Jones 2019) During my fieldwork experience, the festivities of Altagracia a public display of culture and faith (21st of January of 2018) was one of the indicators of that interconnectedness or transnationalism. On that day, the church was not big enough for the people that showed up Dominicans and Puerto Ricans or both. This was for me, evidence that Dominican migrant women find in religion a way of connecting themselves with their cultural roots, and simultaneously occupying the churches and street in many communities of Puerto Rico. It was also a revelation of the Afro Dominican religious traditions that can be found in other places of the Caribbean region like Haiti and Cuba. Altagracia is a Catholic religious figure celebrated as African religious traditions in Puerto Rico. For example, Dominga described the festivities of Altagracia as rituals carried out on her hometowns where there were community processions and drum playing. When I asked Dominga if she did something on the 21st of January, after migrating she replied, "I light a candle and that is all basically." But she remembers the festivities as a community ritual that connects her to childhood and her Dominican identity, she remembers as.

Well, the Virgen de la Altagracia. There is a place in the countryside I'm from (the rural part of Santo Domingo) that is called the Ermita and every January 21 at 5 in the morning a lot of people travelled from the street above and people from downtown ... The carried the Virgin to the Church ... they go down on foot, but many walk a lot ... to the town to carry the Virgin. and then they walk back to the Ermita again

... singing to her! and that's very nice! and people got up ... everyone was waiting for the Virgin at 5 in the morning to go to town to walk with her. Good because they passed by there ... and since I was a child, I didn't see that it is a custom to light a candle for the Virgin to pass by there ... I listened to the palos Friday and very early.

I was awake waiting for the Virgin ...

(Dominga, Interview, 43 years old, Domestic worker, San Juan, 2018).

Dominga mentions the ritual taking place in what is called the Ermita which is a small chapel that is usually used for Marian devotions in both Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. There is not much literature available about Ermitas, but they are small chapels built mostly in remote places like plantations where it was difficult to walk all the way to the town church. Similar to the Ermita is the plantation church that Soares (Soares 2016) argues is reason to consider religion in America as conceived in the womb of slavery and simultaneously the most powerful way of keeping up faith in the middle of oppression (Soares 2016).

Xiomara Fortuna argues that when she became involved in religious rituals of African religious traditions, she became aware of her as part of a larger African ancestry (Afi, Quin 2015). The Ermitas is an example of the places where former enslaved people and plantation workers used to be involved in their spiritual and religious traditions. Xiomara Fortuna explains that she found in religion and

music a way of connecting herself to what she considers the African legacy that inspires her. Because the scope of this research is about the sociological considerations of the Dominican-Puerto Rican context I suggest further historical research done into the roots and rituals done for Altagracia that can only be witnessed and encountered in religious rituals of Dominican Republic. As Selka (2019) explains, Afro Caribbean traditions are not merely preserved but are reenacted and re signified. Also, as Fortuna argues Afro religious traditions remind us of trans cultural complex traditions that celebrate our African ancestry (Afi, Quin 2015).

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Party. It is not so much out of devotion. It is because the people want to party.

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Altagracia that are moved around San Juan, there are rosaries and procession that I personally attended. In conclusion there are community rituals done in Dominican Republic that in a smaller scale are created in Puerto Rico so that younger Dominican generations remember their cultural relevance and identity.

At the moment of this research there is a perception that there is an enhanced anti-migrant and racist political discussion. Unfortunately, the public policies regarding migration in the United States have a direct impact on the Dominican community living in Puerto Rico because of our colonial territory condition of the United States since 1898. According to Nazia Kazi this is something that is not new although this anti migrant and racist discourse is something that was affected by September 11, 2001, where Islam and the war on terror were especially targeted (Kazi 2019). The presence of Associations of devotees of Altagracia serves the purpose of becoming the support system for Dominican migrant women in their private lives. Also, the public rituals done for Altagracia, the petitions, the rosaries, processions are examples of how their presence is visible in our communities.

Afro Caribbean religiosity is an example of how religion can survive circumstances of slavery and transatlantic movement and is still present in the Intra-Caribbean migratory context. According to Selka (2019) the term syncretic to describe Afro Caribbean religiosity is no longer relevant to describe Afro Caribbean religiosity. Selka explains that the term syncretism refers to how African deities used Catholic saints and virgins to resist religious colonization, but that this strategy is no longer necessary (Selka 2019). I would argue that Marian devotions like Altagracia have become subversive in recent times. For example, on the 21st of January 2018 mass the President of the Association of Altagracia in his speech, stated that there is need for the younger generations to preserve and protect the tradition in order to strengthen and empower Dominican communities in San Juan. The Associations of Altagracia in San Juan are mainly for the purpose of organizing the 21 of January celebrations. Migrant religious associations as Pasura argues can serve as a safe place or refuge for the people who have become disillusioned with the migratory experience (Pasura 2014). In conclusion, community expression of Altagracian devotion are public displays of affection for a community that is marginalized, racialized and a target for government violence.

## 6.5 Altagracia as a symbol of Dominican religious nationalism

Along with the Spanish language and race, Catholicism is considered one of the building blocks that support Dominican identity. According to Brubaker religion can be understood either as analogous to, an explanation of, a part of or a form of nationalism (2012). In this part of the chapter, I want to discuss how Altagracia is for the women I interviewed part of their national identity that is based on their experiences in their memory and the connectedness to the location of Dominican Republic. Simultaneously, to that social remembrance there is a need to maintain that memory but also to make that experience possible in the new Puerto Rican scenario. Rosemary Polanco argues that migration represents a contradictory experience, both traumatic as well as liberating, that produces an enhanced hybridization of the home and host cultures (Polanco, 2006). This experience of migration is the reason why Afro Caribbean rituals for Altagracia are then used to fit the specific spiritual needs of the women in the migratory context. Peter Berger reminds us that in the context of globalized religion there can be a tendency to return to the traditional values or there can be a mixing of new effervescent religions (Berger, 2004). When reviewing the literature Manuel Vásquez argues that in Latin America, in general and because of the history of Roman Catholic education there is a tendency to remain loyal to the traditional values (Vásquez 2014). For example, when I asked Eusebia about the relevance of Altagracia for her, she explained:

In other words, the Virgin of Altagracia is something supreme in Santo Domingo. It is like here the Virgin of Divine Providence. For us the Virgin of Altagracia means. Well, the Virgin of Altagracia and the Virgin of Mercedes, which is also the patron. But for me the virgin of Altagracia is something supreme

(Eusebia, Interview, cook, 47 years old, San Juan, 2018)

Eusebia uses the word supreme to describe Altagracia because in Dominican

Republic, she referred to as Santo Domingo, there is a cultural devotion for Altagracia that is not experienced in solitude or meditation but publicly and culturally lived. According to Jones there is a tendency to disassociate the concept of religion with the cultural context and associate it with doctrine (Jones 2019) When Eusebia is explaining the relevance of Altagracia, she compares it with the Providence in Puerto Rico as a cultural reference, other women would compare Altagracia with Guadalupe of Mexico. All these Marian devotions in the Latin American context are all expressions not of Catholicism but as folk religious festivities and local devotions that are celebrated around the world. As Jones explains there is religious knowledge and there is lived religion (Jones 2019) When Eusebia mentions the Virgin of Mercedes, she mentions her in the sense of granting credit to the other official patron of Santo Domingo. But Altagracia is the supreme one, not because she is the official patron, or even the only one, but the most popular one and the one Dominicans love the most.

Other women described Altagracia with a more intimate and personal significance that is also an embodied expression of religion. As Salke argues there are ways of demonstrating devotion, some rather attend public rituals and others have private affections with their saints and patrons (Salke 2019) For example, La Colombiana who I introduced in the previous chapter and when I asked her about the importance of Altagracia for her, she replied:

I never go to bed without saying the Rosary to Altagracia. And I do it alone, I don't care. No one has to help me. I take a bath and take my bathrobe and say my rosaries. It doesn't matter that at 12 o'clock at night I haven't gone to bed, but I have to pray my Rosary. When I finish, I go to bed. And if sometimes because of tiredness because I don't feel well, I can't do all 5, I almost do, even if it's two. But I don't go to bed without making my Rosary no. I am so grateful to that mother. because that mother has taken great care of my children. That mother has protected my daughters. and it has freed me from many things, from many dangers. I feel that with the prayer and faith that I have in the Virgin, my family is a blessed family. I can't square it any other way. Because we, I think that a person always prays. And I can't say I have done this in my own strength. No! You did it because the blessing of

God and the Virgin Mary accompanied you and guided you. But you can't do it alone!

(La Colombiana, Interview, Nurse, 60 years old, San Juan, 2018)

Saying the rosary before sleeping is for La Colombiana her way of demonstrating devotion which I understand is a way of meditating or changing her state of mind or calming herself before going to sleep. As Jones explains different postures people use when praying or meditating have different effects on the body and mind (Jones 2019). It is important to remind us that La Colombiana is the president of one of the Associations of Altagracia and a community leader in her parish of Las Lomas in San Juan. This means that La Colombiana is very much involved in the cultural public festivities for Altagracia. This is important because as Davis reminds us of this gives women like La Colombiana decide on important aspects of the religious community life like how, who and when are the festivities of Altagracia taking place (Davis 2012). La Colombiana has a personal and public devotion for Altagracia. Both according to Jones are ways of expressing lived religion (Jones 2019).

Most of the women I interviewed understood their home is Puerto Rico and most would not consider going back to Dominican Republic. As Pasura argues this transnationalism should not be conceived of as opposed to integration, both processes coexist (Pasura 2014) In previous chapters I introduced Yandra as an example of a woman who likes the weather, the language, the city, and the people of Puerto Rico and at the same time remains connected to her Dominican roots by becoming involved with diasporic associations. She belongs to the Azuano group which is her hometown association where she volunteers and considers its members her family. Also, because many of her family members migrated to Puerto Rico, they also belong to the Azuano group. Although this is not a religious group and they do not meet at church they use Altagracia as a symbol of their Dominican identity. According to Selka, Afro religious traditions are not simply preserved but they are produced or re- created in the diasporic scenario (Selka 2019). When I asked Yandra if she would consider Altagracia to be a figure of importance and she replied:

Sure! yes! Of course. We have this one sticker in our cars ... My mother is a devotee of the Virgin of Altagracia, and my grandmother was also devoted to the Virgin of Altagracia. And I have a sticker on the back of my car, on the glass, of the Virgin of Altagracia.

(Yandra, Interview, Administrative worker, 40 years old, San Juan, 2018)

Yandra explains that Altagracia is what makes her a part of a community, as she describes her mother and grandmother are devotees and her family members use of the image of Altagracia as a bumper sticker in their cars. As Csordas reflects, the concept of religion works as a binder that connects us with a historical and cultural baggage (Csordas2019) Similarly, Friedland explains their religious symbols become a part of a collective representation (Friedland 2001) In this case Altagracia is what makes her a part of her Dominican community but also her religious upbringing and her cultural formation. Her way of expressing this cultural identity is the sticker that she carries in her car that identifies her as an Altagracian. Yandra is a devotee as is her family the sticker is not the symbol that identifies her with her religion but also to her family and community and a display of her Dominican identity.

## 6.6 Rationalizing Altagracia and Religion

According to Pasura, ethnic Catholic communities distinguish themselves for their drumming and singing and they shuttle themselves from the sacred to the profane simultaneously challenging this as a fixed identity (Pasura 2014) It can be argued that because migration calls for a reflection and rationalization of religious identities some women consider the Altagracian mass ritual with the Afro drum music and the practice of the petition to be an unchallenged ritual that needs to be reconsidered. Altagracian rituals are a popular "of the people" ritual comparable to other in Marian devotions through Latin America and the Caribbean like Guadalupe in Mexico, Caridad del Cobre in Cuba, or Aparecida in Brazil. For example, Marta argues that the practice of the petition needs to be reflected upon not because the ritual is profane but because she considers the dynamic to be materialistic and superstitious. As Pasura argues, in the migration

scenario traditions are contested and negotiated especially women who struggle with old ways of thinking (Pasura 2014). As Marta reflected:

He is a God that, I do not want to scandalize you either. A negotiator. A God who demands sacrifice. God as if he is a trickster. You give me this and I give you this. A God who works like a merchant. I don't see it that way. I see a God full of love and mercy. That he always wants your well-being and does not care what you do. He is always ready to welcome you with open hands. That is the God that I have. Who is willing to forgive? At least that was the God that I saw in Jesus. It is not a God who is always judging you and is always judging your actions with his eye. Because in Santo Domingo many of those paintings were sold. The image of God up there and there is an eye and then there is the devil down there burning very black. Because the devil is always black. They present all those images to you there. What they give you is fear. To me what they make me feel is fear. God is looking at you and will punish you. So, I don't know, there is a mixture there. In the demonstration there is a certain fear too. But I also respect the manifestations of how people particularly celebrate and manifest their faith. Poor Altagracia, so much sacrifice.

(Marta Sánchez, Interview, Nun, 28 years old, San Juan, 2018)

Marta understands that the popular festivities of Altagracia are popular celebrations and people use it as a way of adapting religion to the mundane needs of people. She argues that the dynamic of the petition reflects the religious values that were imposed where the devil is racialized and portrayed as evil, and God is good and implicitly white. Marta understands this is a distorted way of interpreting religion and not helping people free themselves from this religious tradition. Candelario understands that there is in Dominican identity a way of coexisting with what is considered as progressive ways of understanding society mixed with traditional values (Candelario 2016) Marta is trying to promote a progressive way of understanding religion by evaluating religious syncretism as superstitious and misleading.



In the shared migratory context of the United States neither Puerto Ricans nor Dominicans are considered white. Candelario understands this as an alternative way of understanding whiteness as in the United States whiteness is defined by the Anglo-Saxon type of aesthetic (Candelario 2016). Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico share and intersect in a racialized social system but are placed as equally colored or not white in the context of migration to the United States (Candelario 2016). For Duany there is close relationship between Dominicans Puerto Ricans, back and forward movements of migration have created family ties (Duany 2012). This shared migratory movement to the United States is one aspect that connects Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in a shared identity. Other aspects of solidarity and education make Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in better neighboring conditions. Compared with the contentious Dominican-Haitian relationships Puerto Rico does not share a land border and Dominican Republic. The maritime stretch between the islands in a way has prevented territorial occupations. The second reason is that unlike the Trujillo regime where the Haitians are considered enemies of the state, there is no explicit government discourse against Dominicans living in Puerto Rico.

Nestor Rodriguez explains, that at the time of the Trujillo dictatorship existed an active intellectual thinking that worked on defining Dominican identity into history books and portrayed in national literature (Rodriguez 2004) An example of this was the successor of Trujillo, Joaquin Balaguer and Manuel Arturo Peña, who were as Rodriguez explains the authors of the documents that define Dominican identity, giving a unified understanding of the cultural identity of the Dominican. An example of this was the publication of the explicitly racist book *La Isla al revés* or the upside-down island: Haiti and Dominican destiny published in 1947 and 1981. The Haitian invasion on Dominican Republic took place in 1821 and lasted 22 years. During this invasion the island of Hispaniola was unified under the flag of the Republic of Haiti. According to Rodriguez this situation of submission created in the Dominican people a cultural resistance that was defined by the protection of first, the Spanish language, the Catholic religion and the Spanish race referred to as Hispanophilia (Rodriguez 2004). The articulation of the Dominican identity was based in the denial of the African component and was portrayed as a necessity at the threat of Haitian reoccupation and to secure the Independence of Dominican Republic.

The rituals done for Altagracia are Afro Caribbean expressions of spirituality associated with the fiestas de Palos (drum playing) where spirits reveal themselves in the bodies of women described as “se montó”. McCarthy translates the expression “se montó” as “riding”, in her ethnography on a Haitian priestess called Mama Lola. During the African based rituals there is usually clapping, singing and when the atmosphere is “heated up” there is an invitation done to the spirit to join the party (McCarthy 2001). The spirit then makes its presence by riding the body of the priestess. McCarthy explains “her body becomes the horse of the spirit, her voice the spirit’s voice, her words, and behavior those of the spirit. (McCarthy 2001). When I asked Juana about the festivities done for Altagracia Juana explained:

They do the fiesta de palos (drum playing) I think, they dedicate it to Altagracia. I have heard now that they do it for Santa Marta La Dominadora (Saint Marta the dominatrix) and Santa Anaisa. There is a song that speaks of Anaisa walking on foot. So supposedly when those demons are doing those events because I say they are demons. For me those spirits are demons. We are going to call them spirits, to respect what those cultures are. They enter people's bodies. and there is one of them, for example, Anaisa or Santa Marta, the dominatrix is like a snake, then women, that saint gets inside them, at that moment she starts dancing like a snake. And they do.

(Juana, Interview, Waitress, 30 years old, San Juan, 2018)

McCarthy explains that African based spirits are not understood to be role models and they are not always well behaved instead they mirror common people. McCarthy theorizes misconceptions of spirits when people apply their morality to their behavior and then portray them as demonic. In this example Juana says that when Santa Marta or Anaisa come inside women’s bodies they dance or become like a snake. The snake, for Juana, and most people is a symbol of evil or the devil. It is also important to understand Juana is a Pentecostal woman that understands the world according to her Cristian values. Juana in some way justifies her understanding of these spirits as demons because of her fear of the use of symbolic expression like the snake which are interpreted so negatively in Christianity. According to McCarthy, the migrant

woman portrayed by mama Lola is a woman that because of her migratory experience she is not afraid of incorporating aspects of other religious cultures as her own (McCarthy 2001). Similarly, Juana, incorporates her American based Christianity as a way of distancing herself from the catholic folk religious traditions.

## 6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed how the Marian devotion of Altagracia is re-enacted, re produced and reconsidered in the Intra migratory context of the Caribbean and how this intersects and interconnects with aspects of race, gender, and migration. At the moment of writing this chapter (summer 2020) there is a political effervescence where aspects of race and racism seem to be under the heated discussion of the entire world. In this chapter I discussed how sociologists have theorized and made emphasis on how race is connected to social aspects of class, migration, religion, and national identity (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, Duany 201B, Kazi 2019, Godreau 2002). Also, in this chapter I discussed how although the religious tradition of Altagracia is connected to a specific sacred location of Higüey and to a racially defined context of Dominican Republic they are translated to the migration scale. When the Altagracian devotion is transplanted to the Puerto Rican context there is a loss in terms of the community and public ways of celebrating Altagracia but there are private and smaller scale adaptations of this devotion in the migrant scenario. Finally, according to Pasura, women and children are expected to observe and re produce religious tradition in the migratory context, this creates a struggle and a reinterpretation of religious beliefs and rituals (Pasura 2014) In this chapter, I discussed how Altagracia is re produced but also revaluated and reconsidered.

## **Chapter 7: Experience, purpose, and self-improvement: Meanings of faith and spirituality in the Intra Caribbean migration context**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This is the fourth and final empirical chapter of this research. In the previous chapters I have focused on the analysis of the devotion to Altagracia and the social tendencies to celebrate and simultaneously distance European Catholicism from the religious syncretism that surrounds the rituals for Altagracia. This chapter discusses the interpretations and definitions of faith and spirituality as the women I interviewed allocated and related them to experience and purpose in their own terms. Although Altagracia is mentioned the objective is to share their reflections of faith and spirituality without the confinements of Catholicism or the Catholic devotion to Altagracia.

The objective of this research is to incorporate the translation, interpretation and meanings women attribute to faith and spirituality of the specific context of Dominican- Puerto Rican culture with the epistemic validity they deserve. Haraway reminds us that Feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledge (Haraway 1988). Faith or belief was the most significant concept that describes Dominican Puerto Rican's spirituality. Yet, the way they interpret and define faith differs from woman to woman. Finally, most scholars pay attention to the migratory movements from the globalized South to the globalized North. Migration from a Caribbean Island to another has not been sufficiently researched. Migration from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico has been understood as determined by political and economic events (Duany, et al 2012). In the context of Puerto Rico post hurricane Maria, the economic advantage from Puerto Rico to Dominican Republic is not that distinguishable, this situation requires a new sociological analysis. In this chapter I will be discussing the considerations of women in light of their expectations for the future and how their families influence their decisions to migrate to the US Mainland. In this chapter I will be answering the question: How do women define themselves in terms of faith and spirituality?

This Chapter begins with a discussion about the concepts of religion, faith, and spirituality. After that some ways in which women describe their faith in terms of purpose, experience, and self-improvement and how that relationship is translated into their everyday lives. Then there is a discussion on how gender roles change after migration and how women challenge the boundaries of machismo and religious morality. The last section of this chapter is about how hurricane Maria (September 2017) and the economic crisis in Puerto Rico was making Dominican Puerto Rican reevaluate their expectations for staying in PR or continuing their life's journeys to US Mainland.

## **7.2 Lived religion and spirituality in the culturally hybrid Intra Caribbean context**

Based on the empirical data collected for this research there seems to be a hybridization process of defining religion and spirituality. Although most women defined themselves as religious the priority for them was the spiritual meanings they attached to faith. That supposes a need to define faith and spirituality in an expansive way that includes the catholic, protestant and secularized interpretation of faith and spirituality. When reviewing the literature, there are many scholars (Berger 2004, Tweed 2008, Vásquez 2014, Levitt 2018, Pasura 2012, Ryan and Vachelli 2013) who have developed theories that explain the concept of religion in Sociological terms. Starting with Max Weber's theory on how the work ethic that accompanies the Protestant narrative is what makes capitalism work in the western world. In his theory, Weber considers Protestantism as a religion that focuses on individual salvation as opposed to the community-oriented Catholicism (Weber, 1976). The cultural and political context of this research forces to consider that women need to manage themselves in an intense hybrid scenario. In this context coexists simultaneously, a strong religious culture based on a colonial Catholicism and the political structure that privileges the Protestant American value. Then the concept of religion alone is not enough to understand the empirical analysis of this research. Meredith McGuire reminds us that there is a tendency to prioritize on the concept of religion because the meaning she understands comes in a "package" (2016). There is a neglect of the individual ways of defining faith or

spirituality that can be understood through everyday experiences, what McGuire defines as lived religion (2016).

Ammerman argues that the concepts of religion and spirituality are interdependent (2013). Also, Ammerman gives a definition of spirituality that seemed most appropriate for the purpose of this research. She describes spirituality as the “experiences of awe, cosmic connection, life purpose, and self-development” (Ammerman 2013, page?). This definition is one that offers a unifying element to all the ways that faith is interpreted and defined by the women of this intra-Caribbean migration context. Although most of the women I interviewed defined themselves as religious this research also resembles what Ammerman, and other scholars of religion describe as the spiritual but not religious (Ammerman 2013). The women I interviewed talked to me as if they had their own individual and personal terms that defined their faith or spirituality. This supposes a sociological challenge because as Ammerman describes there seems to be a missing connection of spirituality with social or cultural context (Ammerman 2013). Also, there are scholars like Nehring (Nehring 2018) that regard this spirituality culture as a transnational psychological self-improvement global tendency that promotes an individualistic approach to life. In conclusion, most of the women I interviewed disliked the contentions and contentious nature of the concept of religion but all of them with one exception defined themselves as having faith. Faith combined with a spirit of self-development, and the belief in the power of the interior, positivity and resilience resonates with what Ammerman defines as spirituality. (Ammerman 2013).

### **7.3 Religion is losing ground**

In this chapter I want to explain how the sociological aspects of migration have developed new understandings and meanings of faith and lived religion. Hirschman (2004) reminds us that there is a category of migrants who can have a hostile or indifferent attitude to organized religion. Simultaneously another group that remains committed to their historical religious identity (2004) For example, Marta a Catholic nun compares the power of the Catholic church and the influence of the Bishops in Dominican Republic’s political system with the power of the Puerto Rican archbishop:

There (Dominican Republic) the bishop has a lot of power. When you think about it. Here, the archbishop sometimes makes little statements. People here are like “Thanks” it almost doesn't matter. There the Catholic Church does have great power.

(Marta Sánchez, Interview, Nun, 28 years old, San Juan, 2018).

From this quotation it can be interpreted that migration has had an impact on her and her community as a woman belonging to a religious congregation. Because Dominican Republic remains a Catholic country by conserving the Agreement or Concordato con la Santa Sede in their constitution as I discussed in chapter 1. The bishops, particularly the Archbishop of Santo Domingo, are almost considered public figures who make statements and opinions on television and in the press regularly about the political decisions made by the president or any other politician. According to Marta nobody cares or pays attention to the opinions of the Archbishop of San Juan. I would add to that, that because of the growing religious plurality in Puerto Rico, the voice of the archbishop is becoming more irrelevant. Because Marta belongs to what she describes a liberal congregation this is not a problem for her, in fact she is very proud to have replaced the traditional way of nuns wearing their distinctive habit with regular clothes. As Marta expressed.

It is a Catholic religious congregation but, each congregation has its own charisma and lifestyle to follow the message of Jesus. It is a very open congregation; we do not use habits. There are many nuns who still use habits, because we believe in the promotion of women's education and rights. We have a well-established line of working in the times we are living in, but it belongs to the Catholic Church.

(Marta Sánchez, Interview, Nun, 28 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Marta considers she lives her religious life in a way that is not consistent with what many people consider to be the social norm of Catholic nuns to dress or behave. Meredith McGuire (2008) reminds us that there is a general expectation that religious affiliation needs to be always congruent with an established set of norms that determine the way an individual should define their faith and

religious practices (2008). Marta was trying to make me understand that her congregation is very conscious of the times they are living in and wants to maintain their particular identity in the middle of the Catholic Church as what she defined as a stagnant institution.

The way women define their commitment to religion is many times transformable especially after the migration process. When reviewing the literature McGuire reminds us that especially migrants reconsider their religious identities and commitments, and they adapt these to their new cultural resources (2008). For example, Vilma decided to migrate to Puerto Rico after a divorcing her first husband in a situation that she described as an escape to his insistence and not being able to live her life. Vilma works as a beautician in San Juan but was educated as a lawyer and worked as a judge in Dominican Republic before migrating. Vilma describes her version of religiosity in what she describes a normal Catholic:

I'm Catholic! But normal! You know a normal Catholic. How can I tell you... without holding on to, without fanaticism? Without religious fanaticism. I know many people that become religious fanatics. I go to church on Sundays. I go when I want to go. Not that I necessarily have to go every Sunday as an obligation...

(Vilma, Interview, Beautician, 48 years old, San Juan, 2018).

According to Hirschman knowledge and the heightened sense of control that modernity supposes a clash between faith and reality (Hirschman 2004). Similarly, I understand that it becomes difficult for some women to reconcile with the traditions and religious norms that do not seem as logical or reasonable. For example, Vilma goes to church when she feels like it not because she has to comply out of guilt or because it is a social expectation. This chimes with Hirschman, who argues that most migrants remain faithful because of the solace it brings when unexpected events of death and loss show up (2004). That is why families who are vulnerable to crime and death sometimes are a target of literal interpretations of the bible. Like Vilma explains:



That's why you see how many people go crazy. The more they study the Bible, the crazier they get. Because now a days, yes, people get killed, but not like those people killed. Those people killed for a holy war with knives and cutting people's head. I say, but those people were worse than the people of today.

(Vilma, Interview, Beautician, 48 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Vilma was brought up a Catholic but dislikes the literal interpretations of the bible and understands this message to be counterproductive for an already violent society. This reinforces the theory that there is a hostility towards organized religious discourses (Ammerman 2013). That use of literal interpretations of the bible is the reason why Vilma is not that committed to organized religious groups that she describes as crazy fanatics. Her catholic religious identity and commitment is being challenged and also changing. As Malara reminds us that religious traditions are contested, shifting, and malleable as the definitional boundaries of religions (Malara 2018).

## **7.4 Defining faith as self-Improvement and purpose**

In a society that places the migrant as the displaced person, social change and mobility is something that can be seen as unattainable. Faith and belief as expressed by the women is a resource for validating the expectation of improving their lives in economic and social terms. According to scholars like Nehring (Nehring 2018: page no for direct quote): "popular psychology's pervasive discourse of self-improvement expresses and legitimizes contemporary capitalism's modes of social organization and socio-economic stratification". To help analyze and validate interpretations of faith and spirituality as expressed in terms of self-improvement and purpose, feminist theory is crucial. Donna Haraway highlights that there has been in Social Sciences a tendency to privilege objective scientific knowledge (Haraway 1988) Faith is something that cannot be measured as a knowledgeable power on scientific terms but is understood as powerful for many of the women who contributed with this research. I want to bring the example of Doña Francisca who migrated to Puerto Rico in the 1990s, a decade marked by a massive migration of Dominicans as explained by Duany et al. (Duany, Thompson, Hernandez). Doña Francisca considers herself a born and

raised catholic and describes one of her greatest support, prayer, and regular visits of her church community. Because she does not like leaving her husband unattended, a group of church members bring her the Eucharist on Sundays and visit her during the week. For her, faith is at the core of religious practice. As Doña Francisca understands this:

It's good to have faith! Because faith moves mountains! We say, we believe, but it is faith that moves people. To have faith in something. If you have faith in something and ask God with faith from the heart, and with reality. Even if you don't expect things to change immediately. But if you ask with faith, fervent in the Virgin, the Virgin responds. She intercedes, she intercedes.

(Doña Francisca, Interview, Fabric worker, 70 years old, San Juan, 2018).

From Doña Francisca's quotation we may interpret that to have faith is to have the idea that there is some dream that can come true. Meredith McGuire would define Doña Francisca's experience as an embodied experience of prayer (McGuire 2016) An interior work that gives meaning to life. According to Ammerman religious institutions help women establish spiritual habits and routines (Ammerman 2013). This is especially true with Doña Francisca who is used to saying the rosary and collects prayer books that help her when she is in need. For Doña Francisca there is a strength and capacity to cope with things through faith. According to Ammerman, Sociology has regarded religion to be a way for people explaining unexplainable events (Ammerman 2013) It can be interpreted from Doña Francisca's quotation that her definition of faith is not based on magical or supernatural events to happen to her life. She explains that we need to have faith, and then clarifies "With reality" that means Because Doña Francisca is conscious that there are no magical ways of meeting a desired reality. She remains realistic as she calls for being reasonable with our expectations from God.

Ammerman reminds us of many people understand spirituality as an experience (Ammerman 2013). Wanda is the daughter of a man from Saint Thomas (US Virgin Islands) and a Dominican woman. As a child her mother sent her to the Dominican Republic so that her family could take care of her. This made her very close to her uncles and cousins. Eventually she moves to Puerto Rico with her

mother, where she met her husband who was also born in the Dominican Republic. Wanda's mother was a businesswoman who owned a small restaurant and a single mother. Wanda grew up Catholic, but later converted to Pentecostalism because of the influence of her husband's family religious tradition. Wanda attributed her faith to that initial Catholic formation that was instilled by her family. However, she considers Catholicism to be more about the idea of God and not a God that can be felt and touched. Along with her husband, Wanda is a Pentecostal pastor and talked about the benefits of having faith especially in the difficult times Puerto Rico is going through. As Wanda explains:

And that faith, I tell you, that is the basis for me in everything, because those moral values that were instilled in me, freed me from many failures. Faith is what helped me achieve many things, all I have basically, knowing that God is a superior being, that is supporting me, that is looking after my affairs. Not a God that he is in the sky there sitting on the throne and that does not care about me. He is a personal God, who is beside me day by day, that although I might be happy or sad, going through a tough time or whatever, God is there. Faith is what helps us move forward. I cannot imagine, a life without faith. It would have no sense.

(Wanda, Interview, Pentecostal pastor, 35 years old, San Juan, 2018).

It can be interpreted from Wanda's quotation that faith is what has helped her achieve many things. This is important for the migrant woman because as Hagan and Ebaugh (2003) explain, there are many stages to the migratory process. In the case of Wanda, by her becoming a pastor in her Pentecostal community she has been successful in her migratory process. She belongs and is also a leader. As Sanchez Walsh (2008) reminds us of becoming a pastor for a migrant woman becomes a symbol of recognition and status. According to Wanda, God is interested and present in her own individual affairs and gave her the power of healing. Nehring reminds us that self-improvement narratives in the context of the Caribbean specifically in Trinidad are many times used by women to determine success in situated problems (Nehring 2018). Nehring calls this the acceptance of "Western entrepreneurial individualism"(Nehring 2018). Sanchez Walsh reminds us that the success of Pentecostalism is the focus on healing

(Sanchez Walsh 2008) Thus, the element of Faith is fundamental to healing and the way Wanda transmits her faith in her message is fundamental to her success as a pastor. As Ammerman explains there is an element of mystery and magic to the way women understand spirituality (Ammerman 2013). In the case of Pentecostalism there is an economic dependency of pastors on their communities. Van de Kamp argues that in Brazil the economic position of the pastors is unfair to the working-class people who sometimes leave their salaries at the hands of their pastors (Van de Kamp 2008). It is important to mention that although it was not reflected in the specific data of this research according to the Pew research institute Pentecostalism and other revival movements are the most preferred religions among Dominican migrants living in the US.

For example, Eusebia is a religious woman that has used her Catholic church community as way of giving back to her community and even as means for economic income when working as an employee for her local parish. In previous chapters I explained that Eusebia is one of the many women that described having embodied spiritual experiences. According to Ammerman (2013) one of the ways of understanding spirituality is by experiencing unexplainable events (2013). Apart from having spiritual experiences, Eusebia understands she has endured many ordeals in her life and describes her faith and patience as her way of persisting complicated and difficult things. As Eusebia describes faith:

So, you see these people who complain. But me, my faith. I have a great faith in God. I know that everything he sends my way; he does for something. And I've always tried to instill that in my children. Difficult things? Yes. Complicated things? Yes. But if you despair and don't know what to do you won't get anywhere. You hold on to God.  
Hold on tight to God and you will see that everything goes well.

(Eusebia, Interview, cook, 47 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Eusebia positions herself in opposition from the people who complain. By this, she does not mean that she is passive in the middle of injustice. On the contrary she has developed strategies as a housewife to empower herself and attain recognition and validation in her community. She understands complaining as feeling pity for herself when she is not feeling her best. Eusebia is a cancer

survivor and has been through some invasive surgeries in her life. She understands pushing forward as a strategy for not staying at home lamenting herself for her circumstances. One of her questions during our interviews was if I was a woman of faith, because I answered yes, she felt like she should give me the same advice she gives to her son and daughters. Her most important advice is to me is to endure or hold on when things are difficult and complicated because everything will be well. Eusebia understands her faith as her resource to endure and in our conversation when she says “You hold on to God” it felt like she was talking directly to me as an advice, that I do the same.

Another woman that understands faith as a way of resilience is Juana who had a few near-death experiences with her son. Hume and Wilding remind us that in the context of urban violence, these can manifest themselves in multiple ways by different social actors (Hume and Wilding 2019). Institutional violence can be exemplified in the case of Juana, she defines her experience with health services in the local San Juan public hospital as violent. Since her son was born, he had a cerebral hemorrhage where he almost died. As a consequence of this, or not, it is not very clear to Juana her son has been diagnosed with a series of problems like autism, microencephaly and other problems that in the end have been proven inaccurate. Juana believes her son was healed by the power of God and disregards doctor’s languages and diagnosis because of their inaccuracy and insensitivity. Arguably, the way she was treated by doctors and nurses at the hospital with her sick son is something that merits a legal pursuit on her behalf. However, for Juana her most important resource in those moments was the Facebook page of Restaurando Corazones and the support she had from her pastor. Juana describes her way of enduring those difficult moments by keeping her faith. As Juana explains:

I don’t limit myself with whatever is happening because I have been through so many negative things. Actually, I think that God is going to continue to glorify me. I think that I am a living example of, also perhaps this will serve as a testimony, to many people, that God exists. That you can ask him, you ask God with faith. There is nothing impossible.

(Juana, Interview, Waitress, 30 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Juana interprets her spirituality by giving meaning to the events that occurred to her and her son in a way that is not tangible or explainable. Ammerman argues that spirituality is a way of understanding reality at a level that is removed from history or scientific materiality (Ammerman 2013) God has glorified her by keeping her son alive which she understood as her life's illusion. Becoming a mother for Juana was the reason why she named her son Isaac, which she said has a meaning like God's promise. Evelyn Stevens in her seminal work *Marianismo the other side of machismo* argues that one of the attributes that distinguish women's moral superiority is by assuming their role as a mother, the *mater dolorosa*, or the suffering mother. This type of women's religiosity is a common explanation for which why women are understood to be morally superior and spiritually stronger to men in Latin America (Stevens 1979). From doing my interviews I can conclude that becoming a mother is regarded in Dominican culture as the most important role for a woman. But for Juana this was especially important because her son has been closed to dying a few times. Also, because her son had a brain hemorrhage when he was born, he has some learning problems at school but for Juana, he is very intelligent. As she later explained "You know, that is something I don't accept in my heart. I say no, he is my only son, and if he is like that, God will take it away from him". Juana considers that her son is capable of overcoming his learning problems because he is her only son. Being an only son, she is confident God will not take him away from her. Just like Abraham named his son Isaac, Juana named her son Isaac, because she considers him a promise from God. When concluding our interview Juana expressed:

Happiness is not only about having the house of your dreams and the love of your life by your side. I tell you something, sometimes I walk around, and I see a person and I tell them mentally I wish you true love. I wish God would bless you.

(Juana, Interview, Waitress, 30 years old, San Juan, 2018).

From Juana's quotation we can explain a very Sociological theoretical debate that supposes faith as this individual introspection. There is an absence of engagement with the other. As Hannah Arendt reminds us "An experience makes its appearance when it is being said". According to Arendt if this

experience is not expressed it is as if it did not exist in the first place. This research in a way serves as that missing verbalization of spirituality that women live in their everyday lives. Her statement reminds not of her Pentecostal community that is so distinct because of the loud and heart felt preaching. Juana's quotation is an example of a growing movement of spirituality and self-improvement provided by self-help advice books that recommend desiring and attracting good to yourself by wishing positive things to others and yourself. As Nehring et al (2016) remind us there is a perception that people can achieve their goals and dreams by the power of introspection (Nehring 2016). Juana's interpretation of faith is exemplified by a personal redemption story, and she does believe in her personal power to heal and actually influence another person's life positively. The objective of this research is to understand and legitimize the interpretations of faith of Dominican Puerto Rican living in Puerto Rico. According to Juana her faith makes her capable of achieving her dreams. Although there is a growing individualistic spiritual mainstream culture there are interpretations of faith that oriented to a social and family wellbeing.

## **7.5 Service and morality at the core of religion**

During the process of this research women's testimonies revealed aspects that were related to the way faith was expressed as a moral compass, and also service and belonging to a community. Hirschman (2004) understands that most scholars understand faith in migration as a reaction to the traumatic experience of migration but there is not enough attention being paid to the associations and migrant organizations that are shaping and changing the way organized religion is understood in the United States (Hirschman 2004). Hirschman argues that migrant Associations inside churches are a way of finding strength in community when family is not available (Hirschman 2004) For example, la Colombiana is a woman who works for the Association of Devotees of Altagracia in her local parish in San Juan. Part of the work the Association does is to visit and help people who are sick in the community. For her the most important aspect of religion is the active service that she understands as a moral responsibility. La Colombiana explains:

T. Yes, sometimes you have to do it, act. You can't do it all, because in reality you cannot solve everything. But you can relieve it. You relieve

people because if you are a person who is taking care of another, and that person cannot take the food to their mouth, it is fair that you do that for them. That you take food to their mouth. Yes, the person cannot. You have to feed them. If the person is in bed because they can't go to the bathroom. He has to do it there because he has no alternative. Well, you see the need. You wear two double gloves and you put a muzzle and a robe ... And you come in and you clean them, and you bathe them. Because if you start thinking and if it were me? You have to think about that! What if it was my mom? Or if it was a brother of mine? If it were someone related to me? You can't spend your life thinking about work and money. You have to think about humanity. Our humanity. Because we have that responsibility you have to rise to the challenge

(La Colombiana, Interview, retired nurse, San Juan 2018).

La Colombiana has a sense of religiosity that is directly proportional to the actions invested in caring for the members of her community. Ammerman reminds us that many people understand spirituality is directly related to morality, that is the way in which we act in relation to the other (Ammerman 2013). For La Colombiana, her effort and solidarity are a commitment that she understands as something that will be reattributed to her or her family in some way. In the end she talks about our responsibility with humanity as a whole and our duty to make it better. Not to solve every problem but the ones that are immediate and closer to us in order to alleviate the burden of others. Her active work on caring for the ill is something she has done her whole life as a paying job as a nurse. La Colombiana found inspiration in Saint Francis of Assisi theology of caring for the lepers and the poor. The most important aspect of her faith is demonstrated with concrete actions and not necessarily in the times spent on prayer or self-reflection.

Other women more importance to their own interpretations of how religion served as an internal moral compass and how that can be conflicted with their identity. Patricia Hill Collins reminds us in her reflection on intersectionality that for black women as a collective minority there needs to be a deep construction of identity (Collins 2019) This is important in the particular case of



Cirielle because of her privileged position as a Dominican migrant woman navigating herself in a powerful position at the most important public hospital of San Juan. Cirielle was born in Barahona, Dominican Republic and brought up by a Catholic family. She migrated to Puerto Rico as a teenager and went back to Santo Domingo to pursue a career in medicine. Cirielle returned as a physician and has an administrative position in the public hospital of Puerto Rico called Centro Medico. Her job consists of solving collection cases of mainly migrants and people who do not have a medical insurance to pay for the emergency services provided by Centro Medico. Her position on public Health services is that they should not be free of charge as Centro Medico incurs in high expenses to provide those services. Perhaps to compensate for her conflicted position, she attends the construction employees that her husband hires for the different housing projects in which he works as a civil engineer without charging them. Cirielle understands the figure of Christ as an example of how to live a life where she can free herself from harming others and herself. As Cirielle explains:

I have never really said this to anyone because I, this is my way of seeing things with religion. I think that I have to be me. I try to have my personal life philosophy of not doing harm to anyone, because I would not like them to do harm to me. And I think that was the philosophy of Christ. I understand that it is a good way to live, but I am not perfect. And I do things sometimes that do not go according with my philosophy, with my way of thinking, then I look for ways to amend that situation.

(Cirielle, Interview, Physician, 58 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Cirielle understands her moral compass as something that needs to be in check constantly because she can easily go against her own personal philosophy of not harming people. Cirielle explains that her Christian spirituality is her personal life philosophy. This is important because she does not claim to be religious or defines herself in what Ammerman describes as “Theistic terms” (Ammerman 2013). In fact, Cirielle later described religious people as “The more perhaps spiritual need. The weaker in mind ... the less family support you have ... the more financial need they have ... you know people cling on to religion”. Ammerman explains that it is important to consider people’s education when

defining their spirituality. According to Ammerman, educational attainment reduces the theistic discourse (Ammerman 2013). Also, Ammerman disagrees with the idea that the less educated are more religious (Ammerman 2013). Cirielle defines her spirituality in terms of keeping herself in good terms with her own morality. Considering that Cirielle's job is to collect debts of patients who suffer the inequalities of a health system that privileges the people who can afford private healthcare. It is understandable that Cirielle understands that sometimes she can be doing wrong and needed to repair her actions. Like Cirielle latter expressed:

I can do many things without people knowing. I can help people. I can show my appreciation. I can support you; I can be supportive. Without having to tell everyone, crying it out to the wind. Without having the recognition of that. That's why I like Christ.

(Cirielle, Interview, Physician, 58 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Cirielle describes herself as not a very optimistic in terms of faith, she considers herself as having low levels of faith. I understand her job is conflicted with her identity and in a way with her moral compass and feels guilty for her position. She mentions the teachings of Christ as what is valuable for her because for her God is an abstraction, she finds difficult to believe in. In conclusion, for Cirielle the meanings she attributes to religion are based on the teachings of Jesus on self-awareness. I interpret, that because of her privileged position and her difficult job she needs to reflect constantly on her capacity of doing wrong and right.

## **7.6 Challenging Machismo with religion**

Religion for scholars like Evelyn Stevens is the passive way of women enduring machismo. As Stevens explains, in Latin America, women respond to gender violence and inequality with moral superiority (Stevens 1979). Hume and Wilding remind us that in the context of gendered violence against women it is not sufficient to understand women as passive agents in the middle of their violent social circumstances (Hume and Wilding 2019). I argue that if religion is analyzed as a situated knowledge there is an aspect of empowerment for the women I

interviewed. According to Laura a woman working for the Centro para la Mujer Dominicana among the most popular programs the center offers are makeup and hairstyling workshops where the women emerge from the circle of violence by learning to love themselves. According to Campos and Cabezas women's right to their sexualized bodies clashes with the traditional religious values of both Dominican and Puerto Rican culture. According to Campos and Cabezas because many Dominican Puerto Rican work in sexualized labor as domestic worker, waitresses, bar tenders or prostitution, Dominican Puerto Rican living in Puerto Rico are more vulnerable to religious sexual morality (Campos and Cabeza's 2016) There are Dominican Puerto Rican who understand their sexuality as an exchange asset and desire the attention of men who can also provide economically. As Santos Febres reminds us (Santos Febres 2019) there should be no problem with acknowledging women's sexualized bodies and be their decision to use their bodies and attain what they want form it, should be respected. The Centre for Dominican women has made sustained efforts to educate women in terms of their right to live violent free relationships at home and in their work environments. In some cases, religious morality can become an obstacle for solidarity between women or build resistance against their safety by prioritizing on gender roles or marriage commitment. According to Campos and Cabezas "Evangelicals, and the religious right depend on moralizing, anti-prostitution discourses and tend to be heteronormativity and anti-sex work" (Campos and Cabezas 2016).

With this research, I can demonstrate with empirical examples that Dominican Puerto Rican consider themselves to be religious, even in an expansive way of defining the term religion. Because the objective of the work done by feminist organization Centro para la Mujer Dominicana is to respect a woman's process when breaking away from Domestic violence I want to explain how religion can be used as a way of Challenging Machismo. Laura is a Puerto Rican lawyer working for the Centro para la Mujer Dominicana she provides in kind and paid services for the participants of the organization. She explained that although women's religious values can bring contentions for the organization, she has developed a personal strategy to use women's faith in favor of the women's safety process. Laura talked about a specific example where a lady was being physically abused by her husband. According to the woman, he had been very good to her during all her life but had become aggressive because of a mental

illness. Campos and Cabezas contend that religion can become an obstacle for Dominican Puerto Rican escaping violence. In this case it turns out that the lady was a Jehovah's Witness and one of the church counsellors wanted to accompany her to the interventions at the NGO in order to save the marriage (Campos and Cabezas 2016). Wilding and Hume remind us that women are held responsible for maintaining family ties and accept violence (Hume and Wilding 2019). Laura argues that "Saving the marriage was putting the lady's life at risk. But that given the lady was very religious she could understand the internal conflict of saving the marriage or saving herself. According to Laura, "the problem is that church people do not respect women's decisions." Laura considers herself as a spiritual person but not religious. Ammerman explains that this definition of spiritual but not religious serves as a boundary device (Ammerman 2013). This means that the person rejects organized religion but understands spirituality to be beneficial to their lives. Mercadante (2014) explains that being spiritual but not religious is the posture of many people living in secularized societies. Laura disagrees with prioritizing on the keeping the peace in the family before saving the life of women enduring domestic violence. However, she wants to remain sensitive to the fact that most Dominican Puerto Rican are religious, and she uses their religiousness in their favor. Laura explained "I need to talk to myself on many occasions and use the figure of God to help women. I say to them 'We are going to ask God to help us in this process.'" Laura understands that women's faith can be used in a creative way, instead going against it as an agent of passivity it can be understood as the validating resource that can help them get out of the dangerous situation. Hume and Wilding explore the ways in which violence against women can be resisted, challenged, and survived in everyday small acts (2019). According to Laura, one way of resisting domestic violence is encouraging women to pray for strength to overcome violence situations.

## **7.7 Provoking the boundaries of religion**

Particularly the younger women that participated in this research were more creative and sometimes incomprehensible about the meanings they attributed to the concept of religion. As Meredith McGuire reminds us, lived religions are not anchored, definite, or even coherent (McGuire 2008). It was evident to me that there was a different perspective on religion when interviewing the younger

women who were born after the Trujillo era, that is after 1962. Hoffsman Ospino reminds us that there is “minimal or no interest in church-related activities on the part of Hispanic youth and their families” (Ospino 2016). I will be using the term Millennial to describe the generation of women born between 1981 to 1996 as defined by the Pew research center (Pew 2019). Millennial women can use the term religion sometimes in very flexible terms and others attribute commitment and belief to it. Although there is a general negative reaction to the word religion, there are more complicated explanations to Millennial's relationship with faith or spirituality. For example, Rosita is a 27-year-old woman. Who was born in Higüey, the place of pilgrimage of Altagracia and explains her own definition of being not religious:

"Here we are not religious. But the people of the town where I am from (Higüey) they are religious. Mainly now in August have a party that are the patron saint festivities where the Virgin of Altagracia is venerated. You understand? People will come to be at the party, from there, from that region, and from everywhere. People donate calves to the Virgin of Altagracia."

(Rosita, Interview, beautician, 27 years old, San Juan, 2018).

According to Hirschman (2004) although most immigrants are reluctant to immerse themselves in organized religion, the existence of migrant organization inside churches indicative of the need to maintain a sense of historical identity and also a way of creating a new sense of belonging in the new communities (Hirschman 2004). With the example of Rosita, I want to demonstrate that although mostly the younger women tended to understand the benefits of faith as a personal and individual resource for resilience outside organized religion there was still remanence of the historical religiosity that distinguishes Dominican culture and in the case of Rosita her as a woman from Higüey. Rosita is not Catholic but considered the Virgin of Altagracia not as religious figure but a cultural landmark that distinguishes her and the people like her from Higüey, from the rest of the world. Rosita explained later that although she is not religious, she has done petitions because " I am not religious, but we almost always believe in the Virgin". During her first pregnancy Rosita was worried

because on her husband's side of the family, there was a tendency for babies to be born with health conditions. As Rosita explains:

Look, I made a promise when my daughter was born, the first, to go from where I lived, barefoot to the Basilica. And I made that promise out of fear because my husband's families have had children, his brothers, and all those children are born sick. And I did it for my daughter and she is... she will be 13 years old. And she has never been sick!

(Rosita, Interview, beautician, 27 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Rosita does not consider herself religious because she is not committed to church but is familiar with the practice of the petition. According to Dapuez, part of the dynamic of petitions in Mexico is that the petition must be very specific and concrete (Dapuez 2019). If the petition is too ambitious and there is no real commitment on the part of the petitioner, then this is understood as the person is not reliable (Dapuez 2019). Rosita had a very concrete petition, and she feels very secure about her daughter's health as it is protected by *Altagracia*. In the case of Rosita her faith is not positioned on the Catholic church but in *Altagracia*.

According to Dapuez there is a paradoxical economy of the Marian sacrifice where it becomes distorted creatively (Dapuez 2019). For example, Rosita added " I ask the virgin of *Altagracia* please help me stop drinking... But not yet." Linda Mercadante reminds us that there is general rejection of people to institutional religion for a number of reasons (Mercadante 2014). This is the case of Rosita, who would rather use the terms believing but does not consider herself as belonging to religion (Mercadante 2014). It was clear to me that for cultural reasons or just by virtue of being born in Higüey, Rosita identifies herself with the believers of *Altagracia* without considering herself as religious.

Similarly, Aladina who is a 25 Domestic worker was at the time of our interview taking legal action for human trafficking against the father of her twins, a Puerto Rican man. Simultaneously she is undergoing a trial against her for entering Puerto Rico illegally. Aladina was a victim of Domestic violence and according to Aladina under circumstances of domestic violence a woman can

apply for residence in the United States. This is under normal circumstances where there was some kind of relationship between the couple. The difference in her case is that by being a lesbian and having filled her visa application without having a legitimate relationship then it becomes a federal crime to have entered the United States having lied in her application. I asked Aladina if she was a religious woman and she replied.

I grew up in Catholicism and I am Catholic. Every time I talk to my grandmother, she tells me I will pray to the Virgin of Altagracia to help you in the process and every time I go to a court I kneel before the virgin. To ask for her help

(Aladina, Interview, Domestic worker, 25 years old, San Juan 2018).

Aladina explains that she has been openly a lesbian since she was 17 years old. The reason why she came to Puerto Rico was that she had always wanted to be a mother and was offered an agreement from a Puerto Rican gay man to have children together. This man offered her that if she was willing to move to Puerto Rico, he would give her a job and marry her to give her children the best living conditions. A gynecologist friend would do the insemination procedure. Aladina agreed because she thought it was a good offer although at that time, he was not thinking of coming to Puerto Rico. It happens that after doing the procedure, she becomes pregnant with twins and when the children were seven months old then she was able to move to Puerto Rico. It was when she arrived in Puerto Rico when she realized that the man had a business as a substitute home for young people leaving criminal institutions and offered her an unpaid job at this place where she was not able to communicate with her family and was always threatened with being separated from her children. Although Aladina understands herself as a Catholic she is not likely to go to church. As she explains:

I don't spend time in the church, nor do I hang out with those kinds of people. But I believe in God. If I'm here right now talking to you, it's because God doesn't forsake me. If it were not for God none of this would have happened. I am another Aladina. Right now, I am humble, I have patience and I have faith. I live one day at a time, and I am doing very

well being a domestic employee. I have raised \$ 4000 and work as a mule, but I am happy.

(Aladina, Interview, Domestic worker, 25 years old, San Juan 2018)

Aladina is not concerned with the positioning of the Catholic church in terms of same sex relationships. As she explains, she does not attend church or hangs out with religious people. However, she does consider herself to be religious because she does believe in prayer. Aladina describes her migration process as a spiritual awakening because her life in Dominican Republic was privileged. Aladina was born in El Cibao in the Dominican Republic but lived in Santiago de los Caballeros. As Aladina describes it, in the Dominican Republic, women who are lesbians tend to be educated and upper- and middle-class women. According to her being a lesbian and lower class can be very dangerous because of the stigma that exists in the country. After coming to Puerto Rico, she endured a very difficult circumstance that she describes as humbling. She had to change from a privileged upbringing to a life of cleaning houses and asking for help through NGOs to go through her legal process.

Olivetta is a 23-year-old woman living in San Juan. She was raised in Santo Domingo by her uncle and aunt who were Pentecostal pastors. She works as a nail artist but needs to clean houses to earn more income because as she expressed nails women did not consider doing their nails a priority. Olivetta studied cooking at a technical institute that unfortunately closed leaving a considerable number of young people without a diploma. Although she was raised to be religious, she no longer attends church but has a lot of fear of God. As Olivetta explains:

"Things that happen. Sometimes, understanding God is sometimes a strong pill to swallow. A process. When one is young, sometimes one wants the things of the world. It's difficult. But I do have a lot of fear of God. I've always been raised to know that, and I know I'm not right, but ... sometimes you get carried away. I do not attend church. Or practice what the Bible says"...

(Olivetta, Interview, Beautician, 23 years old, San Juan, 2018)



Olivetta considers herself as a believer in God but does not attend church. According to Ammerman people tend to make a connection between belief and belonging to spirituality (Ammerman 2013). This is important because for Olivetta not attending church and considering her faith is not sufficient has made her hesitant of defining herself as religious or spiritual. According to Olivetta sometimes God is difficult to understand. Ammerman reminds us that spirituality is about believing (Ammerman 2013) and Olivetta is finding it hard to believe. Her trust in God is not that strong. I know Olivetta suffered a lot during her migration process because she did not get along with her mother who left her in the care of her brother. Martinez argues that it is difficult to predict if Millennial will remain uncommitted to religion or if people tend to become more religious as they age Jessica Martinez revealed in a comparative study that older Hispanics are 10% more religious than Hispanic Millennial (2014). The criteria Martinez uses to measure religiosity is attending religious services, praying, and understanding religion as important in their lives (2014) Olivetta seemed to prioritize on mundane things than going to church but then felt like she was wrong for doing that (2014). What became evident in my interview with Olivetta is that for her believing in God is not sufficient to be considered religious. According to Olivetta there needs to be a commitment that she does not have. As Olivetta explains:

You always have to put God ahead of you, but sometimes I just remember when I am in the most difficult moments, then I forget that God exists. One has to pray every day and ask God to help one to overcome situations that come in life. Situations that happen on a daily basis with people. To have tolerance with people. We don't have tolerance

(Olivetta, Interview, Beautician, 23 years old, San Juan, 2018).

According to Dapuez (2019) religion brings a fear of God, as Olivetta later admitted to having. Maybe because she attributes her bad experiences in life to God, who can bring tolerance as well as bad experiences. During this interview Olivetta told me about how she was resentful with her mother for bringing her to Puerto Rico. Although she does not visualize herself living in Santo Domingo

anymore. She feels Santo Domingo is unsafe and she feels her life is better in San Juan.

## 7.8 Puerto Rico as an in-between space of migration

Scholars have mainly paid attention to the migration movements that come from the globalized south to the globalized North. This research is about a context that can be considered an intermediary between migration points. A migration that is considered by most women I interviewed as a way into US territory but not quite there yet. I started my interviews in December 2017, only three months after hurricane Maria hit the island of Puerto Rico and this had an impact on the Dominican population in Puerto Rico. According to the Pew research center after hurricane Maria there was a 3.9 per cent drop in the island's population (2019). This population number is interpreted as the lowest cipher in Puerto Rico since 1950 which is the first available data attainable (Pew Research Centre 2019). Most of the women I interviewed came to Puerto Rico before 2006 the year that marks the economic crisis event that has been decreasing the islands population. Some of the women I interviewed were at the point of reflecting if it was a good decision to migrate themselves to the US mainland. For example, Jasmin has been in Puerto Rico for 25 years and came here because she was a single mother and needed to improve her economic situation. According to the Pew research center during the 1990s was the last reported increase in population in Puerto Rico (Pew 2019). That means Jasmin migrated in 1993 during the second massive migration of Dominicans to Puerto Rico. Jasmin was a single mother and brought up her 2 children in Puerto Rico. At the moment of the interview her two children had migrated to Houston Texas to live. Jasmin thinks that life in Houston is good and quieter, but because of the language barrier she can't go there to work. According to the Pew research center around half of Dominicans (48%) speak only Spanish, and four in every ten (43%) are bilingual (Pew 2013). This means that Jasmin represents about half of the Dominican migrant population living in the US. Jasmin has a food truck where she makes mofongo, a Puerto Rican style plantain dish. Her Puerto Rican husband also has another food truck, and they work from three in the afternoon until midnight. Jasmin was pondering on leaving Puerto Rico, but hurricane Maria changed her economic situation. Jasmin explained:

After Maria everything is very complicated. The days after the storm we worked so hard, but we made a lot of profit. I feel a little tired of the process because we worked every day

(Jasmin, Interview, Food truck owner, 50 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Jasmin explained that because their business required them to not be dependent on electricity provided by the government's electric company, they were one of the few places offering hot food after the hurricane. The case of Jasmin can be considered one of the stories where hurricane Maria, became an opportunity for business. This was not the case for most people living in Puerto Rico. The lack of energy was the main reason why many people went out of business for many months. Also, the reason why many people with health complications that depended on machines lost their lives. On the other hand, people like Jasmin and especially people working in the construction sector encountered a high demand of their services that contrasted with the stagnant economic situation for them before Maria.

In the case of Mariana, her husband passed away shortly after, a few months before our interview, she developed an anxiety of being alone in her house. It is as if she lost her sense of safety when her husband died. She attributes her overcoming that fear of loneliness to her faith and the restored sense of safety as a sign of reciprocity from God. Mariana is a woman in her 60s with a warm smile who lives with a big Siberian husky who she cares for, and she says is her only partner in the house. After doing the interview she told me that for a migrant woman, friendships and neighbors become family. Listening to her story, she gave me the impression that she is a woman who has cared for her husband and her stepchildren her entire life and was struggling to adapt herself to be a widow. Mariana was orphaned quite early in life and moved with her brother who migrated to New York. After a few years she married a Dominican man who lived in Puerto Rico and was a widower. The couple never had children of their own but because she took care of them both nephews and stepchildren consider her their mother. When her husband died shortly after hurricane Maria she was left alone in her house and that was terrifying for her. At first, he went to live with a friend until she explains God took away the anxiety she had. Each

morning she devotes time to pray and meditate and that makes a difference in her day. As Mariana explains:

If God will not be making me company, I would not live here, alone, in this house. Because when my husband passed away, I spent 3 months without being able to sleep. I asked the Sacramental God to help me. Please take away all that fear and help me enter the house. I was not calm; I had no peace and little by little he has been helping me. I thank the Lord; he is my company. Now I can lie there to watch the news and everything I watch TV with calmness. I dream of many things, but nothing scares me, not anymore.

(Mariana, Interview, Nurse, 72 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Mariana's quote suggests that she endured a period of mourning that manifested as an intense anxiety of separation from her husband. I argue that the experience of Mariana exemplifies the importance of faith in the social context of Intra Caribbean migration. This has not been sufficiently analyzed in Sociology. Instead of referring herself to a professional of mental health that most probably would suggest a prescription to deal with her anxiety she used her faith as a resource. Mariana argues that she is now calm, and nothing scares her basically because of her using faith as a resource for facing her fear. According to Nehring the context of the Caribbean has had little to no interest in sociological analysis and interpretation of everyday lives situated problems (Nehring 2018). With this research the objective is understand how faith and religion is a resource for women who face the dilemmas of migration, of remaining and belonging and the tensions of family ties and economic necessities. Like Mariana expressed, her stepchildren and grandchildren are pulling her to migrate to the US:

I am practically not their family but for them I am their blood and their everything. They are three. They live there in different parts of the US. Every chance they have, they are calling me. And now when I went to California, my granddaughter, she took me everywhere. Well, in Las Vegas, I spent a lot of time with the other daughter. Now they want me to leave again. I tell you for her, I am her grandmother. She calls me

on Facetime all the time. Last night she called me. Grandmother and this and that

(Mariana, Interview, Nurse, 72 years old, San Juan, 2018).

Mariana explains how different members of her family are pulling her to move to either New York, California, Las Vegas, or Santo Domingo. As Hagan and Ebaugh remind us religion is very important in the decision-making part of the process of migration (Hagan and Ebaugh 2003). Mariana mentions being close with one specific granddaughter that lived with her. Mariana was in charge of taking her to church to prepare for the sacrament of the first communion. Although Mariana said she is not ready yet to migrate, she hinted that because of the aspect of intimacy and shared religion with that specific granddaughter she would probably end up living in California. Because of the circumstances of Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria it was very usual to find people evaluating their decisions to stay or leave. Puerto Ricans and Dominicans have in common that shared experience of becoming migrants in the US before and after Hurricane Maria, with most settling in the states of New York and Florida. This is in my opinion, because Puerto Ricans have never felt like Americans in terms of identity and have a second-class citizenship to US natives. Just months after Hurricane Maria, both Puerto Ricans and Dominicans were discussing the same issues how to escape the harsh circumstances. It is because of that shared experience, of surviving the migration experience and Maria, that the identity gap is closing between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. As Hagan and Ebaugh remind us, there is a two-way incorporation of migrant religiousness (2003). When talking to Mariana I was reminded of the learning and valuable knowledge and wisdom to be shared between women who move constantly.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this research is to de-center sociological assumptions about religion. This is why I prioritized on the concept and practice of lived religion, to be able to assess popular practices. While we may see formal indicators of

religiosity like church attendance decline, we see an endurance of faith/spirituality in the transnational migrant space. This research therefore challenges the boundaries of religion by following the trajectories of migrant women from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico. through their testimonies, we can see how religion remains an important resource in these women's lives over time and over space. This thesis supports understandings of transnational religion done in previous research similar to the works of Pasura, Orsi, Vásquez and Levitt and expands the discussion into a global south Intra migratory context (Pasura 2020, Levitt 2018, Orsi 1965, Vásquez 2016). Using a feminist epistemological methodology, I conclude that women relate to religion and spirituality by performing the rituals and devotions for Altagracia. These rituals are transplanted and translated in Puerto Rico developing new meanings and understandings of religion and spirituality. Using grounded theory as a methodological form and using N Vivo software to support my theme-based analysis that the most important themes of this thesis are transnational caring communities, shared Dominican and Puerto Rican identities, family support, faith, spirituality, domestic violence, love, death, machismo/gendered power struggles, religious values, petitions/ rituals for Altagracia and economic struggles.

This thesis challenges normative assumption of what is migration, we see how these journeys are not uni-directional nor linear by analyzing the stories of women who have migrated from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico in the past decades. The empirical data show that most Dominican born women living in Puerto Rico have strong economic, cultural, social, and religious connections to Dominican Republic further evidencing their transnational practices. The term Sociocultural transnationalism is used by many scholars referring to the cultural practice used to incorporate the sense of identity when feeling in between the country of origin and the host country (Faist,2000; Glick Schiller, 2000. Itzigsohn, 2000; Portes, Guarnizo 2017 and Landolt, 1999; Tambiah, 2000). As Itzigsohn and Saucedo remind us of such activities can be private like maintaining a close relationship with family and friends from Dominican Republic. Although women travel on a regular basis from Puerto Rico to Dominican Republic, there are aspects of residence, visa and citizenship and economic struggles that can be very challenging in the migration process as explained in chapter four of this thesis. Economic aspects of migration are still

important for the Dominican diaspora and most women are very committed to the economic progress of their families in Dominican Republic. With this thesis I am able to validate the theory of Guarnizo that states that Dominicans in the US are frequently the source of income for their families in the Dominican Republic (Guarnizo 2017, 2003, 1997, 2017). Evidence of this can be found on all chapters of this thesis but more specifically in chapter four. Challenging aspects of migration are solved with family support, friendship and community ties and solidarity between family and friends. In conclusion, Dominican migrant women living in Puerto Rico practice transnationalism and their economic stability is important both for mobility and the wellbeing of their family in Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic.

This thesis validates the importance of the Catholic popular figure of Altagracia and how this figure shapes meanings and trajectories of these women's lives. In order to do this, I started with women's own reflections on their lived religious practices and spirituality expressed in the rituals and petitions for Altagracia. This validates the thesis that religion is in need of further research and lived religious manifestation are worth examining as proposed by Pasura and Vásquez (Vásquez 2018, Pasura 2020) Marian expressions in the transnational religious context are an indication that religion is alive and kicking especially in the migrant scenario (Vásquez & Marquardt, 2000) With this research I am able to conclude that literature on Marianism is not sufficient to explain the dynamic of lived Marian devotion. There is robust evidence to conclude that the collective and private Marian rituals are important and crucial for Dominican Puerto Rican women living in Puerto Rico.

Feminist literature helped deepen the analysis of gendered migration in a transnational context. The political and globalization messages of religion (Berger 2004, Tweed 2008, Vásquez 2014, Levitt 2018, Pasura 2012) Others are concerned with the gendered and personal struggles of migration and religion (Friedmann 2014, Sanchez Walsh 2008). With this thesis I am able to conclude that religion and transnationalism are a source of vast knowledge worth considering for Social Science research. In terms of the Intra Caribbean migratory context this research is novel and contributes with a new understanding of the Dominican diaspora living in Puerto Rico.

With this research I am able to conclude that *Altagracia* is a unifying familiar figure in the new environment that provides comfort for women who have left homeland. Women who belong to *Altagracian Associations* serve as social connection for other migrant families and for their Puerto Rican communities. Other studies of Marian devotion in the migratory context evidence how Mary has been translated and tans nationalized by migrants all over the world (Orsi 2011, Vásquez and Marquardt 2000). This suggests that cultural and popular manifestations of Marian devotion play an important role in the integration of people to the host territory. For migrants, keeping their relationship with God and sustain their social bond with the church is crucial and this thesis is evidence that this is the case in the context of Intra Caribbean migration.

This research is a contribution about the cultural and not exclusively socioeconomic factors that lead to Intra Caribbean migration. As I explain in chapter four, Literature on migration tends to focus on socio-economic factors. until recently and despite some notable exceptions (Levitt), there has been less focus on cultural and religious practices. Based on the analysis of my data, aspects of gendered domestic violence, alcohol problems, divorce and objectivation of women in the job marker are reasons why women decided to move from Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico. As Nina Estrella explains Dominican Puerto Rican who live in Puerto Rico many times came to escape personal and domestic violent situations to find a safer and more stable place to live (Nina Estrella 2016). This safe space this is not always found as this thesis provides evidence that women need to endure situations of violence in domestic and workspaces in a situation of vulnerability and lack of family support in Puerto Rico as well.

Although it is possible to conclude that faith, religion, and religious communities most times serve as safe place for vulnerable migrant women and girls, the negative aspects of sexual violence in religious communities are something in need of further discussion. For example, Zori a woman who contributed with this thesis argues that trust in religious men for the sake of being good people can become a danger and a potential scenario for sexual violence. Campos and Cabezas explain that religious morality is an obstacle for Puerto Rican women to support public policies that defend sexual workers where the Dominican community of women is especially vulnerable (Campos and Cabezas 2019) Sexual



and domestic violence is a reality for some Dominican Puerto Rican who live in Puerto Rico and this research does not provide data that can help relief that social problem.

With this thesis it is possible to conclude that Dominican Puerto Rican living in Puerto Rico are mostly women who migrated because either friends or had family helped them move. The data of this research disproves the misinformed claim that most Dominican Puerto Rican enter Puerto Rico illegally and that they work in the sexualized job market as bartenders or prostitutes. This thesis validates Patricia Fitzpatrick's argument that Dominican migrant women in Spain are stigmatized as domestic and sexual workers but have also an important role in the market economy by working as health care workers, education system as well as in restaurants and beauty salons (Fitzpatrick 2013) Although some women who participated in this research arrived in Puerto Rico via maritime travels, and their testimonies are very important to shed light upon because of the violence and cruelties that they endured in process it was the case that most women came to Puerto Rico because of family or friends

## **8.2 A gendered approach to Caribbean religiosity**

This research shows the importance of attending to women stories and their lived religion practices as they move. I am specifically interested in how they remain attached to local/home symbols such as Altagracia. The ideas and the knowledge of this thesis can be found on the words of the women that contributed with this thesis. By sharing their knowledge and their experiences of being Dominican Puerto Rican women who left their place of origin to live the transnational Intra Caribbean migratory context. Their reflections on religion and spirituality and their ways of navigating through the power systems of state and religious institutions. Feminist epistemology is both a methodology and a non-hierarchical form of acquiring knowledge (Santiago 2020) Methodological reflections when conducting this research led me to understand that no matter how open minded and well intentioned my research question are, there were hidden biases that led me to change the way I was researching and thinking. Hume's understanding of the feminist way of conducting research with women in the Latin American context I was able to keep presenting my research with data with women as the epistemological authority of this research and not academic

reflections that reflect the power dynamics of knowledge of the educated versus the uneducated.

With this research I was able to validate that women understand their relationship with religion, spirituality and *Altagracia* as means for self-improvement or as an empowering resource. While Orsi and Evelyn Stevens understand that way women relate to religion is both empowering and powerless as proposed by scholars (Orsi 1965, Stevens 2016). Other scholars like Mahmood explain that while Islamic Egyptian pious women are understood to be as submissive in the western way of thinking, her agency rests in her position to decide how to relate to her moral and religious values as she intends (Mahmood 2004) With this research I am able to conclude that religious women in the Intra Caribbean context many times use religion and faith to their own self advantage as explained in chapters five and six of this thesis.

Feminist epistemology is the methodological compass of this thesis, the foundations for the analysis of the empirical data of this thesis. Scholars like Chandra Mohanty and state that in our globalized world, migration has a feminine face as I was able to validate during my thesis (Mohanty 2008). Hume and Wild state that in Latin American society women are encouraged to keep the integrity of the family in situations of violence (Hume and Wilding 2019) As Stevens explains in her seminal work *Machismo the other face of Machismo*, this Marian way of putting the role of *mater dolorosa* first works as the complementary force that propels machismo under the disguise of moral superiority. (Stevens 1973) At the same time, understanding that women are passive victims of machismo would be offensive for women in the Caribbean and Latino context. With this thesis I was able to conclude that although religion and religious leaders try to manipulate women to remain loyal to tradition and religious values, women use spiritual and sources as *Altagracia* to their advantage as this may work for them.

Sufficient evidence was gathered in this thesis to conclude that women in this Intra Caribbean migratory context use their distance from Dominican religious traditions to evaluate and personalize their religious beliefs and values. Scholars like Pasura and Polanco argue that the enhanced hybridization of the home and host cultures represents a contradictory experience, both traumatic as well as

liberating, that can produce a stronger sense of control or a nostalgia for lost values (Pasura 2020, Polanco 2006). This research supports the idea that changes and adaptations are made in the migratory context. While some women abandon Catholicism altogether, other women turn to more conservative revival stratifications of the church. It is possible to conclude that most women turn to more flexible ways of relating to religion by prioritizing on more on general aspects of faith and spirituality.

It is important to understand I am a Caribbean woman conducting research in the University of Glasgow, in a foreign British/European context during the Brexit transition. My position in the European academia, I considered was disadvantaged in comparison with my peers who navigated themselves in the British Academia much more confidently than myself. I was resistant to understand myself as in the position of the educated woman in front of the women I was interviewing when my own confidence as an academic was very fragile. Feminist literature on positionality and reflexivity like the works of Donna Haraway, Patricia Hill Collins, Luce Irigaray and Kristeva help understand positionality as the advantage of knowledge of the women who I was interviewing because of the location of their bodies when answering my research question (Haraway 1988, Collins 2018, Irigaray 2016, Kristeva 2010). In conclusion, this research is not about me, that is why it is and intelligent contribution and a legitimate reflection to present in an academic context. Although this research is not about me, I learned to be conscious of own biases in research. Our education process is deeply interconnected with who we are as a person and our position in the world.

Much has been theorized about religion and migration in social research and previous researchers have contributed significantly to the articulation of this thesis. According to most researchers like Pasura and Vásquez secularization theory is probably wrong altogether when proposing that religion would disappear to the private sphere (Vásquez 2016, Pasura 2020) I propose that researchers that sustain that religion is no longer relevant propose a challenge for researchers of religion and migration. An invitation to do further research not with the objective of proving that religion is significant, but how it is kept alive by migrants, who are the people willing to change and adapt themselves to another social context in a world that many times disapproves of racial and

religious differences. (Orsi 1985, Levitt 1998, Berger 2004, Vásquez 2014, Pasura 2012, Van De Kamp 2018, Sánchez Walsh 2008, Friedman 2014, Tweed 2008, Davis 2012, Flores Tondo 2014, Orsi 1985, and Polanco 2006). With this research I am able conclude that further research is needed on the context of religion and migration in the Intra Caribbean migratory context where there is an intersected analysis of migration, gender, race and religion in the Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Dominican context.

### **8.3 Purpose and self-improvement in religion and spirituality**

This thesis prioritizes on faith and spirituality as a useful concept and idea because of the flexibility it provides for women who can still have faith but distance themselves from religious values, they no longer find useful. This validates Manuel Vásquez's thesis that the purpose of religion is not to follow a religious dogma but to solve every day and material problems (Vazquez 2014). This faith is most relevant when having to endure experiences of death, domestic violence, and economic struggle.

This thesis validates how personal devotion expressed in the petitions and organized Altagracian associations serve the personal and social needs of Dominican Puerto Rican living in Puerto Rico. I confirmed in this chapter there is a spirit of reciprocity in the petition that starts with a specific problem that needs a solution and ends with an act of gratitude that many times involves a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Altagracia in Higüey, Dominican Republic but that this can be adapted to the migration scenario. The principle of reciprocity is similar to Vásquez's thesis of the materiality of religion (Vásquez 2016). Also, similar to Sánchez Walsh's argument that faith in the Latino Pentecostal churches in America are understood to be an investment made with the idea that God will return the favor with economic prosperity (Sánchez Walsh 2018). In conclusion, there are many aspects of religious rituals for Altagracia that have economic or material growth in mind.

In chapter 5 I provided evidence that petitions are intentions that serve personal and intimate purposes according to the social value and experiences with

Altagracia in Dominican Republic. This validates a similar theory as explained by Mayblin that Catholicism provides a closeness between the people and the saints that is found in Marian devotions (Mayblin 2014). This intimacy between women and Altagracia works as means for self-improvement or as an internal power to overcome situated problems.

Also, in this chapter I was able to validate that Dominican Puerto Rican are central for organized religion in Puerto Rico and evidence of this is their leadership in the Associations of devotees of Altagracia. This makes me conclude that Davis accurately states that religious associations in the Dominican Diaspora are mostly women led in contrast with other male dominated Catholic Associations (Davis 2012) Women are in charge of making decisions in terms of the logistics of rituals and festivities that includes managing finances, organizing liturgies, and identifying the necessities of people in need in the community.

Finally, in this chapter 5, I was able to validate that there are aspects of institutional religion that women disapprove of and have an impact on their faith and spirituality. In the Catholic church, the lack of female leadership and sexual violence in private and public sphere are social problems that raise concern and indignation in the Dominican community. As Chandra Mohanty reminds us, migration has a gendered face, and it is not possible to separate these forms of analysis (Mohanty 2003, 1988). Based on the empirical material gathered in Chapter 5, Dominican traditional Catholicism consider men as the most important authority in religious communities. Sexual abuse cases have eroded trustworthiness of men in positions of power and make women in the migrant scenario vulnerable and reflect in an anti-establishment way against catholic religion.

## **8.4 Race and Afro Caribbean Altagracian rituals**

After a careful analysis of the findings of this thesis, it is possible to conclude that aspects of race and colonization in Altagracian rituals intersect with national identity, traditional values, and gender. Pasura mentions these intersections between gender, religious values and traditions are not fixed but they are negotiated and changed in the migrant scenario (Pasura 2014) With many examples I was able to validate that woman associate their Altagracian

values with experiences they had with family and friends in their communities of origin, in pilgrimages to Higüey most of them, locations that are attached to Dominican Republic. These lived religion experiences have to be creatively recreated, re-enacted and re-evaluated from their religious traditions.

Altagracia as the patron saint of Dominican Republic Altagracian is honored every year with many Afro catholic rituals that culminate on the 21st of January. Altagracian rituals include fiestas Patronales or town festivities, petitions, pilgrimages, rosaries, and the Afro catholic ritual of the fiestas de palos with drum playing. Salke reminds us of those Afro Catholic devotions use elements of African religions are difficult to preserve but are crafted or re-enacted in the migratory context (Salke 2019). Based on the data collected for this thesis it can be concluded that community rituals are creatively crafted and performed to reinforce a sense of collective belonging and build a sense of Dominicanness for younger generations.

Based on the empirical analysis of the data I was able to understand that Altagracia as a popular religious figure is attached to the racial and ethnic particularities of a Dominican woman with all the racial tensions that characterize the location of Hispaniola. Balibar and Wallerstein explain that violence and racism against the migrant is a global phenomenon that is justified when national identity is threatened (Balibar and Wallerstein 1993). Similarly, Altagracian rituals and traditions are understood to belong to the marginal and racialized communities in the migratory context of Puerto Rico. Elements of race and racism that exist between Haitians and Dominicans are brought to the migrant scenario where racial prejudice is also performed and re-produced against the Dominican migrant woman. Gathering evidence of this racism is something that has limitations because women are reluctant to talk about this especially with a Puerto Rican woman.

There is sufficient literature including this thesis which concludes that it is possible to maintain a relationship with 'home' while settling in new context. The idea of transnationalism as a proposal to shift the idea that migrants have to completely assimilate. According to Pasura in the migrant scenario some tend to remain attached to a sense of collective identity and memory and others re-consider and adapt their religious and spiritual understandings in a process of hybridization and creolization of religion (Pasura

2014). Based on the findings of this research it can be concluded that the intersections of race, colonization but also elements of religious plurality and modernization have an effect on the way these Altagracian rituals are experienced in the migrant scenario. It can be concluded that especially women that belong to protestant religious communities tend to reject afro catholic rituals in the Spanish Caribbean.

## **8.5 Further work Interconnectedness of Altagracia with Haitian religious rituals**

For this thesis, sufficient evidence was provided to understand that Altagracian community traditions in Puerto Rico are related to an Afro Catholic religious heritage. Furthermore, women who participated in this research mentioned Haitian-Dominican religious rituals as something that was present and at the same time rejected by Dominican society. Edward Paulino describes this dynamic as a contingency between racial and ethnic discrimination and an attempt to convey the western sensibility that describes the tense relationship of Dominicans and Haitians (Paulino 2016). I understand research done in Dominican Republic would give a further insight on the discrimination and interconnectedness of African based religious rituals.

For this research I could provide robust evidence that most Dominican Puerto Rican manage themselves in both Dominican and Puerto Rican cultures with religious transnational dynamics. According to Duany, although there is discrimination against Dominican migrants living in Puerto Rico many transnational dynamics are friendly and possible because there is no explicit government discourse against Dominicans living in Puerto Rico (Duany 2016). I understand that further research on Haitian Dominican religious transnational dynamics would provide important knowledge about the political and sociological Haitian Dominican relationships. For example, in chapter 5 of this thesis I discussed the relevance of the Altagracian and hometown associations as a way of maintaining a collective identity while settling and sustaining long term relationships in Puerto Rico. There is little but interesting data in my research about the anti-Haitian political agenda in Dominican Republic. For example, Yandra explained:

Human rights have always been violated by Dominicans towards Haitians. And obviously, everything is because of the entrenched hatred that we Dominicans have towards Haitians. I say “we”, not because I approve what is happening. Because I do not approve. But this, the Dominicans, in general we have a deep-rooted hatred towards Haitians.

(Yandra, Interview, Administrative worker, 40 years old, San Juan, 2018)

Yandra is reflecting on the straight-forward political anti-Haitian migrant policies that have been happening in Dominican Republic since the Parsley massacre in 1937. According to Eduard Paulino this massacre was planned and implemented by Trujillo to instill in Dominicans the idea that Haitians are enemies of the state (Paulino 2016). This idea persists in the Dominican mindset and evidence of this was discussed by some of the women who collaborated with me in this research. Further research done in Dominican Republic about racial discrimination based on religion would help understand why this enemy of the state agreement is widespread and legitimized in Dominican society.

According to Rita Indiana the relationship between Haitians and Dominicans has always been of cultural interconnectedness that was divided on purpose by a political cultural project that is not relevant for people in their everyday interactions. Women who consider themselves to be educated and sensible to the atrocities committed by the Dominican government against the Haitians can explain this situation. For example, Yandra understands that:

The way Yandra expresses herself Edward Paulino would describe it as “the western sensibility”, an educated version of explaining the relationship of Dominicans and Haitians (Paulino 2016). Another way to understand this, is that shared Spanish Caribbean complicity in front of the Americanized sensibility towards the global south. Jaime argues that the Spanish Caribbean (Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico) share that Latin American identity inside the West Indies geographical region under the political domination of The United States. Yandra expressed a shared responsibility of her as a Dominican woman and the way Dominicans treat the next-door neighbors the “poorest country in America”. Yandra is aware of human rights violations, expresses her disapproval



and includes herself as the problem as an act of compassion. From Yandra's quotation I understand there is a sector of women who are able to analyze critically the historical political discourse. Yandra describes it as that deep rooted hatred, that is a political discourse used to divide and justify violence against the most vulnerable of the places in the Caribbean.

This research was intended to be exclusively about Dominican Puerto Rican living in Puerto Rico, the interesting conclusion is that because of the presence of Haitian traditions are so connected to Dominican religious rituals, they travel all the way to Puerto Rico and become evidence of that interconnectedness of religious traditions in the Caribbean. Because of the strong relationship of Haitians with their spirits and ancestors, Dominicans find legitimacy for their racism, for Haitians are in their point of view, devil worshippers. Altagracian rituals and ceremonies are understood as linked to Haitian Dominican traditions because of her lesser value next to the figure of God. After reviewing the literature, scholars like Durkheim and McCarthy have presented that some religious traditions are considered of lesser value than Christianity (McCarthy 2002, Durkheim 2008). This chapter presents the figure of Altagracia as belonging to an in between space between Catholicism and Haitian- Dominican tradition.

Evidence of racism was presented to me by Mercedes who had a personal experience in her own family and was able to relate her personal experience to the political discourse against Haiti. It is something she lived personally in Dominican Republic during the last years of the Trujillo regime. In the previous chapter I explained that Mercedes argues that she was rejected by her mother because she was born black and was "black as a Haitian". For this reason, she was raised by her grandmother and aunt. To make matters more complicated for her racist family she got married to a darker skinned man. I asked her directly, do you think that people are racist in Dominican Republic. Mercedes answered:

The majority. they say no but yes! Almost no one went to my wedding. Because we kept everything, our relationship a secret. At that time everyone talked Haiti this and that. Because we were young ... They thought Haitians came and left women pregnant and leave and never come back. But I saw him as he was on the inside. He met me and

liked me from beginning and I ignored him. But he kept calling and calling, we talked for 3 months by phone. It stung them when I delivered the invitation. I didn't understand and asked my aunt why to do they treat us like this? My mother's sister, my aunt, explained what happened, I tried to explain myself, but they didn't understand.

(Mercedes, Interview, Caretaker, 78 years old, San Juan, 2018)

From this quotation I interpreted that young Mercedes had a dilemma when she tried to keep her relationship a secret but at the same time understood that getting married was a way of proving that her relationship was legitimate and trustworthy. Nestor Rodriguez explains, that at the time of the Trujillo dictatorship existed an active intellectual thinking that actively worked on defining Dominican identity into history books and portrayed in national literature (Rodriguez 2004) An example of this was the successor of Trujillo, Joaquin Balaguer and Manuel Arturo Peña, who were as Rodriguez explains the authors of the documents that define Dominican identity, giving a unified understanding of the cultural identity of the Dominican. An example of this was the publication of the explicitly racist book *La Isla al revés* or the upside-down island: Haiti and Dominican destiny published in 1947 and 1981. The Haitian invasion on Dominican Republic took place in 1821 and lasted 22 years. During this invasion the island of Hispaniola was unified under the flag of the Republic of Haiti. According to Rodriguez this situation of submission created in the Dominican people a cultural resistance that was defined by the protection of first, the Spanish language, the Catholic religion and the Spanish race referred to as Hispanophilia (Rodriguez 2004). The articulation of the Dominican identity was based in the denial of the African component and was portrayed as a necessity at the threat of Haitian reoccupation and to secure the Independence of Dominican Republic. This Haitian threat was explained by Cirielle in one of my interviews arguing that because of the scarcity of means and services the Haitians are silently taking over:

I saw a video this morning of a Dominican lawyer. I am going to follow her (on social media). She was complaining about the Haitians and explaining her point of view. I found it excellent. Because I always criticized people who attacked Haitians. But she says. This is our country.

In this dammed Island we are the Dominicans. There is no bed here for Dominicans in hospitals because Haitians have them full. All the time I don't know how many minutes go by, a Haitian is born, and their parents leave them, abandoned everywhere. Colana, which is a department of the children of Santo Domingo, is full of Haitians and the Dominicans do not fit. Then she says, all the things she said, she was right and logical.

(Cirielle, Interview, Physician, 58 years old, San Juan, 2018)

As Balaguer stated in the upside-down island and as many Dominicans understand the main problem in Dominican Republic was and is still Haiti (Perez 2013). This discourse that was actively promoted by the state intellectuals is reflected in Cirielle who has been in Puerto Rico for approximately 40 years. Her argument is based on poverty as the dividing element as there is not enough beds for Dominicans and they are given to Haitians. In an island divided in two, and where there is approximately one million Haitians living in Dominican Republic, not having enough is the reason why Haitians should not be welcomed according to Cirielle.

Many Dominican scholars like Amin Perez and Edward Paulino argue that what the rest of the world perceives as Dominican racism is an issue of Dominican nationalist sentiment (Perez 2013) (Paulino 2016). The argument Perez uses is that Dominicans and Haitians have a similar relationship to Germans and French who were later replaced Algerians who are considered as the “enemies of the state” (Perez 2013). In his argument he mentions that at some point Puerto Ricans occupied that position when they were massively employed in Dominican Republic to work at the sugar Industry (Perez 2013). There is a strong resistance of Dominican Puerto Rican to understand themselves as racist mostly because they do not want to appear as insensible or unmoved by the poverty of Haitians. Sociologist Isar Godreau and historian Edward Paulino explain that although Dominican Society has a very strong African presence it is as if they understood blackness to be Haitian (Godreau,2002. Paulino 2016). They usually justify themselves by arguing they have Haitian family and acquaintances as evidence that they are not racist. As Cirielle explains:

It's not that I am racist, I married a black man. And that lady who goes by is the lady who helps me in my day to day. It is not a matter of skin

... It is a matter of the only wars we have had have been with the Haitians.

(Cirielle, Interview, Physician, 58 years old, San Juan, 2018) from Cirielle's quotation I understood the overall fear of Haitian occupation and the fear of me thinking of her as a racist person. Even when Cirielle is herself a mixed raced woman is married to a black man and probably has Haitian family members she understands the Haitians to be a treat. As Historian Edward Paulino explains, at some point of the complicated history of Hispaniola Haitians and Dominicans were all the same people without a border that is most Dominican people because of their interconnected backgrounds have Haitian family members (Paulino 2016). Her argument is, we dislike Haitians because they represent a political threat to our sovereignty not because she dislikes black people. It is important to understand that Cirielle is trying to make me understand, a Puerto Rican woman, the political threat that Haiti represents for Dominicans. Cirielle does not want to appear as insensitive to me also, because Haitians, to the rest of the people of the world, provoke this philanthropic sentiment. A kind of pity for being the poorest country in America. Cirielle reminds me that Dominican Republic fought their independence from Haiti. This portrayal of Haitians as the people we should fear is common in Dominican culture. According to Edward Paulino Haitians are portrayed as barbaric people who like cutting heads and using machetes as weapons to dismember bodies (Paulino 2016).

The experiences the women had themselves had with minority groups or migrants in Dominican Republic, that is, the Haitians, shaped the way they understood the figure of Altagracia. For this reason and because the figure of Altagracia is so closely related to religious syncretism this chapter discusses how the migration from Haiti to Dominican Republic has shaped racial dynamics in the Dominican mind set. Religion is used as a justification for racism. Because the Dominican national identity construct considers Catholicism to be along with the Spanish language and the Spanish race to be the most important traits that distinguish Dominicans, Haitian are understood to be devil worshipers. This, as Karen McCarthy argues is because European religions focus on God as the central and most important figure. This chapter answers the question: Why is Altagracia related to the racialized dynamics of the Intra Caribbean region? Further research and dissemination of works on the topic of religious transnationalism in

Haiti and Dominican Republic can possibly lead to an understanding of racism and discrimination based on religious beliefs.

## Appendix 1: List of Participants and Job Description

Participant	Job
Canita	Cook
Dominga	Domestic worker
Doña Carmen	Domestic worker
Marta Sanchez	Nun
Puchiri	Domestic worker
Irene	Domestic worker
Doña Francisca	Fabric worker
Cirielle	Physician
Juana	Waitress
Olivetta	Beautician
Wanda	Pentecostal pastor
Ruti	Domestic worker
Anita	Caretaker
Fela	Merchant
Angelica	Secretary
Vilma	Beautician (Lawyer)
Colombiana	Nurse
Iris Q	Restaurant manager
Milly	Waitress
Yandra	Administrative worker
Blanca	Caretaker
Mileidi	Domestic worker
Aladina	Domestic worker
Mariana	Nurse
Josefa	Nun
Eusebia	Cook
Rosita	Beautician
Guadalupe	Food truck owner
Xiomara	Office maintenance
Minga	Retired nurse

## Appendix 2: Picture of Altar to Altagracia



Picture of one of the altars dedicated to Altagracia (San Isidro, Canovanas, 21of January 2018)

## Appendix 3: List of Participants and Religious Affiliation

Name	Religion
Canita	Catholic (Villa Marisol)
Dominga	Catholic (Not active)
Doña Carmen	Catholic (Resurrecion del señor)
Marta Sánchez	Catholic nun (Misioneras Dominicanas del Caribe)
Puchiri	Catholic (Resurrecion del señor)
Irene	Catholic
Doña Francisca	Catholic (Resurrecion del señor)
Cirielle	Catholic (Not active)
Juana	Pentecostal (Restaurando Corazones)
Olivetta	Pentecostal
Wanda	Pentecostal pastor
Ruti	Catholic
Anita	Evangelical Christian
Fela	Catholic (Charismatic movement)
Angelica	Catholic (Movement Juan 23)
Vilma	Catholic (Not active)
La Colombiana	Catholic
Iris Q	Not religious (International evangelio)

Milly	Catholic (Not active)
Yandra	Catholic (Not active)
Mercedes	Catholic (Parroquia de Las Lomas)
Mileidi	Catholic
Aladina	Catholic (Not active)
Mariana	Catholic
Josefa	Catholic
Eusebia	Catholic (Sagrado Corazon)
Rosita	Not religious
Guadalupe	Not religious
Xiomara	Catholic (Movement Juan 23)
Minga	Catholic (Movement Juan 23)

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