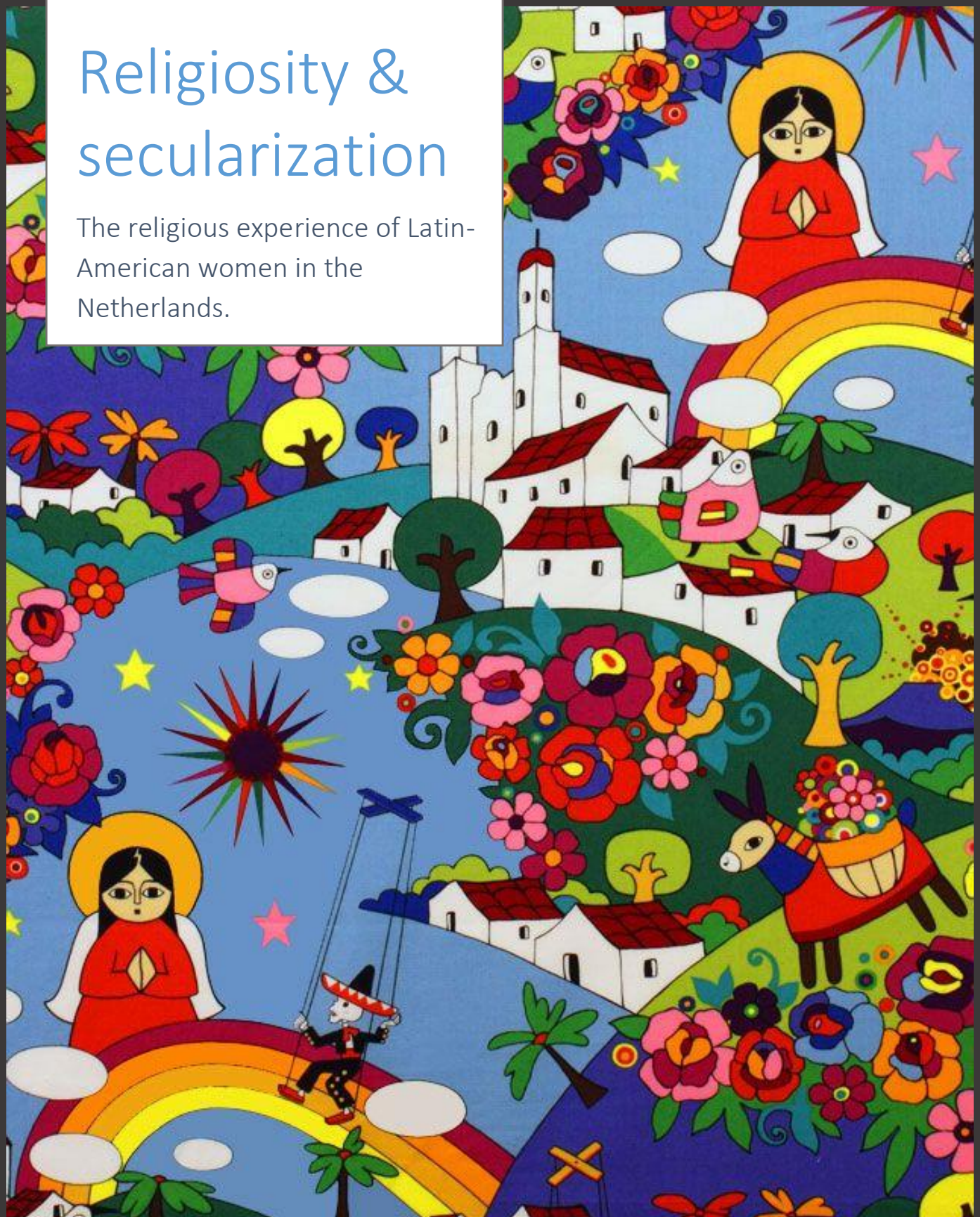


Religiosity & secularization

The religious experience of Latin-American women in the Netherlands.



Maria Jacobs - 3913449

MA1 GENDER STUDIES - UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

LAYAL FTOUNI & Jamila Mascat

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Introduction

I wanted to give a voice to a migrant group, after reading Saba Mahmood's 'The subject of freedom' (2004). It made me realize that there is little research on religion and feminism. Nowadays, the Dutch discourse is mostly about the Islam. Moreover, most research about immigrants is still being written by white male Dutch. Ignoring the voices of many migrants, especially those that are not considered 'problematic' by the Dutch. Then I thought what better migrant group than my own? I decided to write about the religiosity of Latin American women in the Netherlands. It seemed interesting to see what processes the Latin American women went through by moving to the Netherlands. I say processes, because a religious identity is as any other identity: fluid. I wanted to see how the Latin American women negotiated their religiosity within a secular society as the Netherlands. This led to my research question: *How are the tensions between religiosity and secularization negotiated by the Catholic Latin American women in Rotterdam, the Netherlands?*

I am going to answer this question by giving answer to the following questions:

1. What role plays religiosity in the Netherlands?
2. What role plays religiosity in Latin-America, especially the Catholic Church?
3. What is the relation between gender and religion?
4. What is the relation between religion and a sense of belonging?
5. How does religion and the Church contribute to the formation of spaces of belonging for Latin American women in the Netherlands?
6. How do women enact their religiosity in the context of predominant secular Netherlands?

In order to answer these questions, this research will be based on a triangulation between an autoethnography, interviews and discourse analysis of the interviews. An autoethnography is used, because I am part of the group that is being researched. Interviews were done so that the Latin American women got a voice. Lastly, a discourse analysis was done on the interviews, as to expose and analyze the working of power in religious institutions and their discourse and how that is re-iterated by the women.

A few definitions are important to know before we continue. Mahmood (2004) explains religiosity nicely: *“both an inward orientation or disposition and a manner of practical conduct.”* (p. 4). Hans Knippenberg (1998) explains that secularization can be defined on two different levels; *“On a macro level, it means the diminishing importance of religion in society. On a micro or individual level, it means the diminishing reference to the supra-natural or the ‘sacred’.”* (p. 209). He also states that the Netherlands is one of the most secularized countries in Western Europe.

This research consists of four chapters; the methodology, the theoretical framework, the analysis and conclusion. In the first chapter autoethnography (situated knowledge), interviews (positionality) and discourse analysis are extensively explained and their importance for this research. This is explained first, so that it becomes clear how the data was gotten and how it was dealt with. Then I will provide the theoretical framework, by giving a context of religiosity in the Netherlands and Latin America, and also by giving the relationship between gender, religion and belongingness. This is done as to give an idea about the existing discourse about immigrant American women and religiosity and secularization. Furthermore, this was necessary so that the situation of the women, being religious in a secular world, would be better understood. Next I will give voice to the five interviewees and analyze what has been said. The analysis in this chapter is critical to create new or more appropriate data about religious female migrants. I will finish with the conclusion, where I will answer the research question and reflect on the research done. This is important so that we come full circle. Through my research, intersectionality makes its appearance, since for me this is inherent. Intersectionality, according to Kimberly Crenshaw (1989), means that when researching people one has to look to the many ‘axes’ (identities) that shape its life. These ‘axes’ cross each other and consist of gender, class, religion, age, nationality, ethnicity and many others. By doing this, a more realistic and complex image is given of the individual/group that is being researched (Crenshaw, 1989).

On a footnote, this research is meant as exemplary rather than representative, since my analysis is based on a limited number of interviews. Further, it needs to be stated that Latin America has many different cultures and that the Catholic Church has not played the same role in every one of them. In some of them the Catholic Church has been part of the

government/dictatorship and in others Catholics have been pursued. This influences the women's standpoint with the Catholic Church.

Methodology

This research is based on a triangulation between an autoethnography, interviews and discourse analysis of the interviews.

Autoethnography

Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner (2011) explain that an autoethnography is a process that combines an autobiography and ethnography. An autobiography exists from a selection of past experiences of the author. This selection consists mostly of life changing experiences (p. 275). An ethnography is made when the author tries to be a participant observer of a different culture. This means that an autoethnography is an analysis of a selection of past epiphanies that were only possible by being part of a specific culture or cultural identity. The goal is to illustrate characteristics of a culture through personal experience in a way that is familiar to insiders and outsiders of a culture. This is done by interviewing cultural members and comparing it to existing research (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 276). An autoethnography is not only a process, but also a product. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) state that: *“the autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people.”* (p. 277).

Autoethnography is used in this research because I am part of the group that is being researched; I was born in Guatemala and was raised religiously. This equates to what Donna Haraway (1988) would call situated knowledge. She describes situated knowledge by arguing in favor of:

“politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people’s lives. I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.” (p. 589).

What is meant here is that situated knowledge aims for a more humane/realistic view, the view and experience from the body (object) and not the view from above (subject). This research is based on the information given by women that are part of the investigated

group. Furthermore, I am part of this group. So there is no 'view from above'. The women that were interviewed are, or at some point were, members of the Spanish speaking parish I was part of. All of them are also family friends.

Positionality

The Catholic Church has always played a big role in my life. My Dutch father was a brother in the Dominican Order when he met my mother, a Mexican student who wanted to become a nun. They were both doing humanitarian work in the civil war, and invested in Guatemala as director and volunteer with the local radio station of the Dioceses of Coban¹. My father left the monastery to marry my mother and she never entered a convent. Two years later, they had me. They never left the church, however. I grew up going to the church every Sunday. When we came to the Netherlands this did not change. Instead, I did. The older I got, the more I realized that I did not always agree with the Catholic Church. So I took some distance. This has not changed my faith in God. I have always been thankful to my parents for giving me such a strong religious base. It has kept me strong in moments of fear and doubt. I am also thankful that they gave me space, even motivated me, to be critical and figure things out for myself. For me being catholic and trying to be a good human being are entangled.

After the interviews I realized that I have been lucky in many ways. First because my parents have always been critical and very studious. They are still very active with their faith. Secondly, because my mom chose to avoid things she found traumatizing from her upbringing, like all the talks about hell and the devil. Lastly, because by coming to the Netherlands I did not get all the traditions and superstition. I got enough of it to know that they exist, but not enough to traumatize or influence my life.

I think that my background not only helped me with the interviews by being a daughter of the community, but also helped me in the analysis. Since many things that were talked about are things I grew up with, like talking about callings and signs. Things many Dutch would be skeptical about.

¹ A dioceses is a region that falls under a bishop of the Catholic Church. They oversee over all the Catholic Churches in that region and that all the (social) activities that come from it.

Interviews

Interviews are a popular method with feminists, especially semi-structured ones. According to Shulamit Reinharz (1992) there are many reasons why this is the case. Firstly because it gives feminists the means to involve the respondents in composing the data about their lives (p. 18). So it not only connects the interviewee and the research but also the interviewee with the researcher. It gives trust, since it allows open and free interaction between the two. A semi-structured interview makes it easier to discover, get descriptions and non-standard information about diverse people and makes those differences more visible. Moreover, it gives researchers the freedom to ask new questions as new issues arise and it allows researchers to read and play into the emotions of the interviewee. Lastly, it gives people, especially women, a voice since it pushes them to put their ideas, thoughts and memories into words which makes them accessible for the researcher (Reinharz, 1992, p. 18-21).

This research takes into account positionality. Positionality means the power relationship between the interviewee and the researcher, the knowledge producer. Reinharz (1992) argues that in an interview this relationship has to change. The interviewee should not be a subject or feel interrogated, because it influences the answers the interviewee gives. To avoid this, the opposite is necessary: the interviewee gets the power, or at least a more equal relationship is needed. This would mean that the researcher gives up some of its power by giving something of himself back (self-disclosure), hereby creating a true dialogue (Reinharz, 1992, p. 27-33). For these interviews I turned the tables; I went as the student to be taught by the interviewee. The women are part of the church community my mother is from. Many of them have followed the development I have gone through. They consider me a daughter of the community. The women were happy to contribute to my education, literally and figuratively. Furthermore, I think there is an intergenerational trust that allowed the women to be totally open and honest about their lives and opinions. In my opinion my role as insider has its advantages and its disadvantages. An outsider would not have gotten the same information, or would not have been answered so enthusiastically or would not even have known what to ask. A disadvantage could be that I do not portray the nuances enough, because for me they are so visible, so normal.

The interviewees were chosen from the catholic Spanish speaking parish in Rotterdam, since it is visited by many Latin American women. A few of them were contacted through

Facebook. A close contact within the church asked the others if they were willing to participate and if they were, they were handed my number. All the women that were asked, agreed to participate. It was not as easy to meet up, because of vacation plans or children, but it worked out well. I chose these women specifically because they are were old enough to remember the ways and traditions of their country of origin. This was important so that they could answer questions about their country of birth. All of them agreed to meet face-to-face. Most of the interviews happened at their houses, since that caused the least inconvenience. None of the women were worried about talking freely. The interviewees were warned beforehand that the interview could last from half an hour to an hour, depending in how much they talked. All the women took this into account, so we did not have any problems. All five women were asked if they wanted to stay anonymous and they declined. They allowed me to record our interviews, next to taking notes.

Five interviews were done so that they each could be treated with the reverence they deserve, especially since this is a small research. The interviews were done in Spanish for practical reasons: not all the women spoke Dutch and only one spoke English and this would allow them to express themselves easier. I prepared semi-structured interviews for the interviews, meaning that there were questions, but that I was not bound by them, so that I could ask questions about their answers. The interview began with demographic questions, like age, birth country etc., since Reinharz (1992) states that those break the ice and makes the respondent feel knowledgeable which motivates them to talk (p.25). Other questions that were asked where: What role does the Catholic Church play in your birth country? What role does it play in your life? What processes has your faith gone through? What kind of role has your move to the Netherlands played in your religious development?.²

Discourse analysis

Lastly, discourse analysis will be used to analyze the interviews. According to Norman Fairclough (1989) the goal of discourse analysis is *“helping people to see the extent to which their language does rest upon common-sense assumptions, and the ways in which these common-sense assumptions can be ideologically shaped by relations of power”* (1989, p. 4). In this study, discourse analysis is used as a tool to find relationships between what is being said in the interviews. Fairclough (1989) distinguishes between two types of power: ‘power

² All the questions are in Appendix 1.

in discourse' and 'power behind discourse' (p.34). The former means that some discourses are more dominant than others. What Fairclough calls 'power behind discourse' implies the influence that people have on the discourse. This also applies for researchers. In this context it means that I have to be aware of the effect I have upon the research I do. There are pitfalls for every position, even as insider. However, with care, most can be avoided. So was there the risk that I that I would not explain everything that needed to be explained, because I would consider it common knowledge. I avoided this by having people that do not belong to the Spanish speaking community or Catholic Church read it.

Marianne Jorgensen and Louise Phillip (2002) add that: "*Power is responsible both for creating our social world and for the particular ways in which the world is formed and can be talked about, ruling out alternative ways of being and talking. Power is thus both a productive and a constraining force.*" (p. 13). Implying that people in a position of power can define our social world and the language within. By doing discourse analysis you are analyzing and exposing the working of power in religious institutions, their discourse/ language and how that is complying or resisting with the religious norms of these women.

Theoretical framework

This chapter will not only give a context to the main themes, like religiosity in the Netherlands and Latin-America and its relationship with gender, but it will also display the main discourse about them.

Religion and the Netherlands

Knippenberg (1998) states that until 1880 almost everyone in the Netherlands was part of a church, protestant or catholic. He goes as far as to say that being a member of a church was 'socially desirable' (p. 210). After 1880 less and less people were members of any church. The secularization process began slow, but after 1960 it skyrocketed. Not belonging to any church congregation is called non-denominationalism. Knippenberg (1998) points out that this a consequence of secularization (p. 209). He gives different reasons over the sudden boost of non-denominationalism. He declares that the modernization of society had many waves, especially in the church. He explains that: *"In modern society the church lost many of its societal functions due to a process of institutional differentiation. Education, poor relief, marriage, recreation, etc., were more and more served by institutions, which had no connection with the churches. Very important was the increasing impact of the modern welfare state and the rise of modern associations."* (p 211). Meaning that the state and private organizations took over many tasks that made the church popular. This made the state and private organizations popular and pushed religion and the traditional church out of their once important roles in economic, political and cultural life. Furthermore, people began to lose their dependency upon the religious and so the importance of the values of the church declined. Knippenberg (1998) also argues that a pluralism in the fields of theology and philosophy aided this movement towards secularization. Socialism almost became an alternative religion for many people who did not want to conform to any church or did not feel at home (p. 211). He declares that through time religion has gotten pushed into the private sphere and has lost its dominant place in society. According to him now *"The rational, empirical philosophy of modern science dominates modern culture."* (Knippenberg, 1998, p. 211).

Knippenberg (1998) explains that from 1930 until the sixties the secularization process was minimal and it was because of the *verzuiling* (pillarization) that it almost came to a standstill. The *verzuiling* is characterized by the segmentation of Dutch society following the Second

World War. This meant that the society was divided in different pillars. There was a pillar for the Roman-Catholic, the (Orthodox-)Protestant, the socialists and a pillar for the people that did not fit in the other three, like the liberals (Knippenberg, 1998, p. 211). The *verzuiling* was so paramount that they had their own political parties that ruled on national level. It also meant that people were only allowed to socialize and marry with people from the same pillar. The *verzuiling* had its benefits and its disadvantages. A benefit was a great internal cohesion. A disadvantage, was that they determined the rate of interaction with people from other pillars. This was at the same time a benefit for the church, since it kept people ignorant of other ways to live and believe. With the Roman-Catholic pillar being the biggest and the most dominant and segregated pillar (Knippenberg, 1998, p. 212).

The *verzuiling* felt apart, causing secularization to start up once again. Knippenberg (1998) gives different reasons for this demolition. He argues that the increase of “*prosperity, geographical mobility (cars, mass tourism), media participation (television), and participation in secondary and tertiary education*” (p. 211) were the main causes for individualization and *ontzuiling* (depillarization). Moreover, these changes allowed people to come into contact with people of different beliefs, and relativize. People became more critical; critical of the church and their values and notions (p. 211). The fact that the Netherlands is religiously conscious, because of centuries of religious diversity, assisted in this (Knippenberg, 1998, p. 210).

The Post-secular turn?

There are a few things that counter secularization. Knippenberg (1998) argues that the surge in Muslim and Hindus immigrants and the revival of the Protestant church hinder secularization (p. 215). In the sixties the Netherlands had a shortage on the labor market that was filled by non-Christian religious foreigners. At some point, labor migration changed to family reunion and formation. These migrants were mostly Muslims from Turkey and Morocco. Since that time, there has been a wave of migrants and refugees from Muslim countries, like Iran and Egypt, and ex-colonies, like Indonesia and Surinam (Muslim and Hindus) (p. 216-217). According to Knippenberg (1998) they also have a ‘relatively high fertility level’, which has helped these groups to grow. He reasons that migrants have (and had) two possible ways to tread; or they integrate and secularize, or they do not integrate and become fundamentalists (p. 216-217).

The Protestant church has grown thanks to its evangelic groups, like the Pentecostal church. Knippenberg (1998) sees this growth as a consequence of the existing religious situation. He writes: *“there is a neglect of attention for a personal relationship with Jesus, for the working of the Holy Ghost, and for community feeling”* (p. 218). The fact that this movement does extensive recruiting, broadcasts, and has many institutions, helps. However this growth does not increase the denominationalism, since they recruit the apostates of other churches (p. Knippenberg, 1998, p. 218).

Knippenberg (1998) noted that the younger people are, the more secularized they are. So he expects an increase in secularization (p. 219). However not everyone agrees with him. Gerard Dekker (1995) argues that some churches are accommodating to modern times and the ‘privatization of religion’. He is of the opinion that the religiosity of the people has changed and that even though there is a lot of non-denominationalism, it does not mean they are less religious. He states *“religion has adapted to a new situation. Accommodation may also result in a religion that fits better into modern society.”* (p. 86). Dekker (1995) argues that a decline does not mean demise, and that the Churches need to accommodate and therefore actualize, so that it may lead to a way to de-secularize (p. 86).

Some researchers now speak of post-secular times. Yolande Jansen (2011) defines post-secular as: *“the idea that neither secular citizens nor the liberal state can or should ‘expect all citizens to justify their political positions independently of their religious convictions or worldviews’.”* (p. 978). Meaning that both secularization and religion should co-exist peacefully without questioning the position of the other. Jansen (2011) argues that secularism has almost become a (universal) religion that pushes certain ideas, behaviors and sensibilities as part of what modern life means, ostracizing people that are not secular, especially Muslims (p. 978). She suggests that secularization should not be put on a pedestal for its neutrality when there is none to speak of. According to her, secularization is prejudiced and influences the treatment of others (p. 978).

Some go as far as to declare that speaking of ‘secularization’ is questionable. Rosi Braidotti (2008) argues that the norms and values of the Enlightenment are based on religion and therefore also the base of ‘secularization’. She explains: *“If we can understand humanism as the respect for human rights and the modern notion of equality and democracy, which lie at the core of European modernity and drive the emancipatory project of the Enlightenment,*

then it could be argued that the value system of European secular humanism is implicitly religious, albeit by negation." (p. 8). She clarifies that a 'secular distillation' of Judeo-Christian dogma is responsible for following the law. Thus, because of the Judeo-Christian dogma people respected rationality, individuality, autonomy etc. Elements which Braidotti (2008) claims are paramount to the modernization process of Europe, since believe in human reasoning and evolutionary vision are necessary for social progress (p. 8). Moreover, she notes that: *"this specific brand of secularized humanism has passed itself off as the embodiment of universalism, thus achieving absolute moral authority and the social status of a dominant norm."* (p. 8). So that would mean that without the Judeo-Christian tradition there would be no 'progressive emancipation' and hence no secularization.

Religion and Latin America

Eduardo Galeano (1997) wrote a book about the exploitation of Latin America the last six hundred years. Therein, he explains that the Catholic Church started to convert the indigenous tribes since Christopher Columbus first trip in 1492 and since then has grown to be an important part of the culture. However, Daniel Levine (2009) points out that the role of Catholicism is changing in Latin America. Before the twentieth century the Catholic Church dominated the religious field, and more often than not, other fields, in Latin America. However, that has been changing. To quote Levine (2009): *"the church was a lazy monopolist, its power and position guaranteed by law, custom and elite links."* (p. 123). Implying that the Catholic Church got lazy in its power (and) position, opening it to new possibilities, like other religious groups.

Levine (2009) describes how many Latin American countries were marked in the past by multiple images and symbols of religious-civic fusion, such as the presence of clergy's in important events. According to Levine (2009) the omnipresence of the Catholic Church reminded the public that it also had political and economic power and social hierarchy (p. 123). The Catholic Church is not the public face of religion in Latin America anymore: *"Where there was monopoly now there is pluralism, where a limited number of spaces were once officially reserved for religious practice (with limited number of authorized practitioners), now there is a rich profusion of churches, chapels and mass media programming, not to mention campaigns and crusades that carry the message to hitherto 'profane' spaces like streets and squares to beaches, sports stadiums, jails, bars and nightclubs."* (pp. 123-124).

These changes have modified the traditional role of the Catholic Church as the wielder of moral and social authority; from monopoly in a given territory, to one of many influences and churches (p. 124).

This change in power has motivated the Catholic Church to adapt. So, the Catholic Church has made big changes since the conference of 1968, where the bishops of the region came together to confer, attracting activists and people in social movements. Some examples of changes that have been made since are:

- *“the idea that sin can refer to more than individual moral failings - whole social structures can be sinful if they are built on and continue injustice”* (Levine, 2009, p. 124).
- *“the concept of 'institutionalized violence', that unjust societies can condemn many to needless early death through poverty and disease, and that this is sinful.”* (Levine, 2009, p. 124)
- *“the commitment to a 'preferential option for the poor', meaning that given a choice, church resources and people should side with the poor and accompany them in their struggles.”* (Levine, 2009, p. 124).

According to Levine (2009) Latin America has become an arena for competition for members, space, public sanction and goods by a plurality of churches. The Catholic Church took too long to come into action, causing a decline in Catholics and a rise in Protestants, atheists and those that believe in their own way (p. 125). It is not possible to monopolize the religious field anymore, since there are now more options for expression and growth. People cannot be herded anymore or expected to trust blindly as was the case for centuries. Levine (2009) argues that in the world of today: *“loyalty is more likely to be secured through provision of spaces and engagement, not by demarcation of boundaries.”* (p. 126). Levine concludes that Christianity will stay dominant in Latin America. It just will be more plural and competitive. These changes will also change the morals and norms people live by (p. 141).

Women in the church

Katherine Gilfeather (1977) wrote a while back an article about the changing role of women in the church in Chile, based on my experience I think it is applicable to many other countries in Latin America. She writes that the authority structure within the Catholic Church is a male dominated hierarchy, where women are not included (p. 39). Furthermore, norms and ideals

are defined, confirmed and modified by this hierarchy. This hierarchy has not changed, but there are changes visible in its 'pastoral action' which the Church operates through. So there are now religious women helping with the pastoral planning and administration. Gilfeather (1977) explains that women are now doing tasks that were traditionally done by priests, like "conducting paraliturgical ceremonies, Catechetics for adults and children, the formation of Mother Catechists, home visiting, the development of primary communities (Comunidades de Base), parochial administration, and even a limited participation in the administration of the Sacraments." (p. 39).

Gilfeather (1977) argues that the top of the male dominated hierarchy, existing of the bishops, are ambivalent about the role of women in the church. On the one hand women solve some pastoral problems, like the disappearance of clergy and the scarcity of priests, by joining the task force. On the other hand, the bishops fear feminizing the church in a 'machistic' world, alienating men, and giving women too much power. So they have limited the participation of women, so there are things as preaching and priesthood that are not even taken into consideration (p. 41). So women are given important jobs, but no authority.

Lastly, Gilfeather (1977) clarifies that the bishops by opening the doors of the church for women has given women the chance to change the church from the inside out. Change will happen intentionally or by accident (and by some undesired), just by the interaction with women that have other priorities, ideas and ideals than the dominant hierarchy.

Religion and gender

Saba Mahmood (2004) wrote a book about the growth of religiousness of Muslim women. In my opinion there are many parallels between this group and the Latin-American women. Mahmood (2004) writes about different subjects that are of importance for this thesis. Later on I will compare these points with the interviews and show how they come back in the Latin-American case and what the role of faith is in the women's life's, now (in the Netherlands) and then (back in their home country).

First, a few definitions need to be given. Mahmood (2004) describes agency as: "*the capacity to realize one's own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective).*" (p. 8). This means that for someone to be

free, her actions must be of her 'own (free) will', thus, not because of tradition or obligation or (social) coercion. According to Mahmood (2004) this is a critical principle of the liberal world, and means that as long as something is done by an individual's own accord, however dubious, peculiar or disagreeable, it has to be tolerated (p. 11). Freedom would in this case mean, according to Mahmood (2004): "*the ability to autonomously "choose" one's desires no matter how illiberal they may be.*" (p. 12).

Mahmood (2004) shows in her article that Muslim women have chosen 'freely' for piety, religiosity. She explains further how this choice does not mean they will abandon politics and hide in their houses. It means that they will try to change things through the religious way (p.4). This is troublesome for many (feminist) scholars, since religion – not only the Islam – is associated with traditions that make women the subject and "*terms such as fundamentalism, the subjugation of women, social conservatism, reactionary atavism, cultural backwardness, and so on*" (p. 5). Mahmood (2004) also thinks that a rise of orthodox religious virtues is a counter movement against the 'modernist secular-liberal ethos' that conspires with the West and wants to bring the Islam to its downfall (p. 24).

Secondly, Mahmood (2004) argues that women need to beat men in their own game. Rational thought is often used to exclude women, to keep the power male centered, since they are often seen as emotional, non-rational and intersubjective. She thinks that if women tried to take the power through what they consider feminine, it would reinforce their idea that women are emotional. She writes: "*This exclusion cannot be substantively or conceptually recuperated, however, through recourse to an unproblematic feminine experience, body, or imaginary [...] but must be thought through the very terms of the discourse of metaphysical transcendence that enacts these exclusions.*" (p. 13-14). This is also the case with religion. Religion has been a male-defined and dominated sphere. On the one hand, women are managing to enter male spaces and boost their public role in religious and political life. However, in doing so, it appears to be necessary to continue with the "*women's subordination to feminine virtues, such as shyness, modesty, and humility*" (p. 5-6).

Thirdly, Mahmood (2004) disputes the idea that everyone wants to be free from norms. According to her, there are people that like their (by European standards) subjugated roles (p. 14). This would mean that what a progressivist calls passivity and docility is actually a form of agency: "*one that can be understood only from within the discourses and structures*

of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment. In this sense, agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one 'inhabits norms'" (p. 15). Making it important to research the conditions around different types of desire, along with the desire to submit. A desire that seems to go square against everything some feminists stand for.

Lastly, Mahmood (2004) talks about power. She gives two characteristics: *"power is to be understood as a strategic relation of force that permeates life and is productive of new forms of desires, objects, relations, and discourses"*, and, *"the subject [...] does not precede power relations, in the form of an individuated consciousness, but is produced through these relations, which form the necessary conditions of its possibility."* (p. 17). Causing what Foucault calls the 'paradox of subjectivation'. The 'paradox of subjectivation' is:

"the very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent. Stated otherwise, one may argue that the set of capacities inhering in a subject—that is, the abilities that define her modes of agency—are not the residue of an undominated self that existed prior to the operations of power but are themselves the products of those operations." (Foucault in Mahmood, 2004, p. 17).

Meaning, that when you research a group's distinctive social practices, like eating and socializing, you have to pay attention to how those practices embody and symbolize the ethos of the group, insofar that the ideologies of the group has solidified in their social or class 'habitus' (Mahmood, 2004, p. 26). Mahmood's theorization of agency is important for this research, because it will help expose the relation the women have with their faiths and the Catholic Church and how they use it create a sense of belonging in the Netherlands.

Religion and a sense of belonging

Kelly Chong (1998) explains in her article the relationship between religion and ethnic identity. According to her *"religion can interact with ethnicity in one of two ways: either as identical to or precedent to ethnic identity, or as ancillary to ethnic identity."* (p. 264). More often than not, people stick together on base of religion and not on base of ethnicity or nationalism. Chong (1998) also shows how more recent studies demonstrate that religion

and ethnic identity do not have to be identical: *“immigrants can use different aspects of their various religions to develop new patterns of group identity, such as ethnic or national identity, in the new society.”* (p. 264). This proves that the religious identity can be secondary to other forms of group identity. Moreover, Chong (1998) argues that it proves that the religious identity can support, create or maintain other types of group identities.

Additionally, religion can reinforce ethnic identity. This can happen in different degrees and groups (p. 265). Wendy Cadge and Elaine Ecklund (2007) explain that Latin American women *“who are more embedded culturally in the Latino ethnic community place a higher importance on their religiosity.”* (p. 364). Suggesting that religious identities become more prominent for immigrants, since many immigrants consider religion an integral part of their ethnic identities (p. 363). Many ethnic churches support this, since they also try to preserve the ethnic traditions and customs (Cadge & Ecklund, 2007, p. 364).

Chong (1998) explains that religion has many functions. So can religion have ‘ethical and legitimating’ functions, as well as be a ‘vehicle of protest’ (Weber in Chong, 1998, p. 265). So argues Chong (1998) that religion can function to legitimize the immigrant’s ethnic identity, leading it to legitimize *“the various aspects of the immigrant’s sense of shared culture and solidifies the immigrant’s commitment to her/his ethnic identity.”* (p. 265). By legitimizing the immigrant’s ethnic identity a sense of belonging is created.

Avtar Brah (1996) talks in his book about the ‘diaspora spaces’ that are created when transnational migrants settle in new places. Brah (1996) argues that in ‘diaspora spaces’ culture, class and communities become challenged and reshaped when *“individual and collective memories and practices collide, reassemble and reconfigure”* (p. 193).

The Spanish speaking parish in Rotterdam can be considered a ‘diaspora space’. Here come many Latin American cultures together³, creating new traditions and identities. Chong (1998) argues that the church also serves a ‘double function’: *“as an apology and legitimation for the status quo, but means of empowerment, protest, and liberation for the socially subordinate group.”* (p. 282). Thus, that the church can promote integration and create a sense of belonging. So argue Cadge and Ecklund (2007) that immigrant religious

³ The Spanish speaking parish exists of twenty five nationalities.

organizations often do social services that are focused on helping immigrants getting used to the new country (p. 366).

Analysis

These interviewees were chosen for many different reasons. First, because I know them from the Spanish speaking parish in Rotterdam. The Spanish speaking parish in Rotterdam was for me an obvious choice, since I have access to it and its people. Moreover, I elected specifically women from different countries in Latin America, so that I could demonstrate a more diverse picture. Lastly, these five women were chosen because we know each other personally and I knew they would be willing to participate and trust me with their stories.

This chapter is divided in four parts. The first part, explains what faith and religion means for the women and how religion and faith are lived and expressed in their countries of origin. The second part, consists of the women describing faith and religiosity in the Netherlands according to their experiences. The third part, talks about the processes the religious identity of the women has been through here in the Netherlands. The fourth and last part, clarifies if whether the women feel at home in the Netherlands. Every part, ends with its own analysis.

Name	Nationality	Race/coloring	Age	Years in NL	Reason for move	Status	Social class Before (L-A) /after (NL)
Meche	Peruan	Mestiza/brown skinned	57	26	Dutch husband (met on vacation in NL)	Widow	Middle class/ high middle class
Rocio	Colombian	Mulato/ brown skinned	51	16	Dutch husband (got pregnant on vacation in NL)	Married	Working class/ high middle class
Lilia	Mexican/ Central American	Mestiza/ light skinned	55	16	Dutch husband and for the future of	Divorced	High middle class/ working class

					the children		
Aida	Mexican	Mestiza/light skinned	40	20	Dutch husband (met in Mexico) and in search of a job	Married	Working class/ high middle class
Mayenka	Chilean	Mestiza/brown skinned	63	40	Political refugee	Divorced	Middle class/ working class

Experiencing faith: the meaning and experience of living a religious life

To understand the changes the women went through it is important to know what faith means to them and the role it plays in their lives, so that their starting point upon arrival in the Netherlands becomes visible.

Aida

Aida explains that religion is cultural in her home country. It is all about traditions and social interaction, and not about the inside, the spiritual. People are often only religious because they are born into it. However, she has felt attracted to faith and the church since she was a small child. She states that she has only had good experiences in her youth and received a lot of support and love from her the members of her church. She describes: *“I was like a little sponge. I absorbed all the love and support and made a solid base where you can build on.”*.

Aida further explains that she has had experiences that could not be coincidence. They were too great for that, it had to have been God. She gave the example of her husband.⁴ Aida loves him deeply and could not be happier. She has experienced this crossing of fates as a gift from God and as an affirmation of His existence and her belief. In her opinion God knows

⁴ When she was thirteen, she had to take care of an old aunt. Her aunt was so embarrassed that she needed help, she prayed for a good husband for Aida. Which in Mexican culture is a high expectation. A few years later, she found a man that converted to Christianity out of his own will and is now as religious as she is.

what is good for you and gives it to you. In this way her faith has given her many little things that are no coincidence. She feels deep down that it comes from Him.

When Aida was asked to compare her religiosity with that of her family in Mexico, it became apparent that she has gone through a great development and that they have stayed at a 'basic level'. They have not gone on their individual pursuit. Aida explains faith as: *"a beautiful present that God gives to everybody. If you put it in the closet and never use it it is a loss not only for yourself, but also for neighbor. Everybody is needed to create a whole."* According to her, religion gives her hope, peace and power. Also, it frees you from society's expectations, allowing you to be yourself. For Aida faith is of such importance and joy that she wants to share it. She sends her children to the camp of her church, so that they hear about religion from somewhere else. She wants to give them what she had, an abundance of religious activity and support. For her is religion like her favorite candy that she wants to recommend to everybody. How to handle that has been a process, one that I will come back to.

Lilia

According to Lilia, one of the interviewees, faith is active and incorporated in life and politics in Latin America. Especially in Middle America, where it is religion that made the people aware of their oppression and supported them during the civil wars. Every sentence starts with 'with God's will'. From her experience, faith differs from Mexico to Middle America. In Mexico faith plays a more passive role; people accept things like they are. In Middle America faith is a tool for change; it tells people to see, analyze and change, so *"if you see injustice, analyze from a faith perspective with your faith and act on it"*. She does confess that the more poor people do have processions and old popular traditions. Lilia does not think that secularization is happening in Middle America. She actually thinks that churches where testimony has been tangible, are growing, like the churches for the poor. In Middle America she heard that United States was paying and subsidizing religious sects like the Pentecostal churches to attract people, so that they do not touch the reasons behind the social injustice and only practice a very superficial religiosity. On the other hand there is also an institutional church where power is exercised not to serve but to guarantee their powerful position.

For Lilia, faith has played an important role most of her life. She thinks that for some people faith is a calling and for her that is the case. When she was twenty seven she felt a calling to serve Jesus. For her, Jesus is the humane face of God, Lilia has a different relationship with them: she grew up with God, but she found Jesus. She was taught as a kid what the norm was back then; thinking that our sins were the cause of Jesus death in the cross. This experience made her realize how harmful this mentality is. Lilia realized that Jesus did not die for our sins, and life does not and should not move around the negatives or faults in our lives. It is hard enough as it is. Since then she has tried to know him better and he keeps surprising her.

Lilia did not go for some years regularly to church. However, for her, her relationship with God does not depend on that. She did nonetheless return to the Church when she moved to the United States and was scared to lose her path, going to Sunday mass was like a compass for her. So no matter the crazy things she tried out, she would not deter from her religious base, from the things she know.

Lilia considers her faith as a present. It gives her a well, a source from which she gathers strength to look, confront and understand the things that happen every day. She finds faith attractive, because she finds Jesus a fascinating person, from which she does not get bored to learn from. His ways have survived over two thousand years, *“His deep humanity and ways of questioning invite me to question and be open.”*

Lilia’s faith differs greatly from that of her family. However she does not think it is her right to judge: *“My faith has covered kilometers. It has been my shoes for walking the last twenty years.”*. She considers the faith her parents gave her family a gift: *“My mother [Catholic] was a woman of prayer, but still her way of excluding people according to their background did not convince me. My father [Protestant] was also a man of prayer, yet he was deeply humane. His faith and social vision were very clear and he acted upon it. We are responsible for each other especially those in need.* According to her every one of her brothers and sisters received this gift, but everyone did something different with it. Her (life’s) work has been in this direction, her family has taken other ways, their own way.

Lilia explains that she grew up in the Catholic Church and that she felt an indoctrination. Something she considers a big default of the Catholic Church. She thinks that the Catholic

Church should help people encounter Jesus and go from there, so that faith grows from that encounter. Now, it is more a clash against an institution with its rules and things that you had to memorize. At least, so was the church in her time. It has changed since then, though there are still things from the middle ages that should not be there. Lilia thinks that when she reached the age of eight, she was already indoctrinated and totally terrified of everything. She thinks it was her surrounding, like the maids saying that when you do your first communion the devil visits you. There are a lot of tales like that. The whole environment saturated with such a mentality. Lilia realized that she was saved from this mentality by her father being Protestant, moving from Mexico and that her mother had no time to do all traditions with seven children in a foreign country. Her mother was also practical; she did not accept everything. She even fought with the nuns, she did not think that what the nuns said was the word of God. Lilia thinks that thanks to her parents characters she was able to choose how to live her faith.

Mayenka

Mayenka started her interview by confessing that she was not always into religion. She has questioned the church since she was small. At the young age of seven, she decided not to return to the church. Many years after being in the Netherlands it is that she returned to the church. She has always kept in touch because they do the same social work. Fifteen years ago, she got really ill causing a priest to visit her. Every time she thought she would give in, he visited her. When she started to get better, he told her that the church needed her. So she did, she went back to church after almost forty years of not going. At first, everything felt strange, but afterward she started to integrate and help with the social work of the church. It is in social work that she started to live her faith and walk the path of Christ. She decided that her calling was to help the less fortunate. Since then she has helped women in difficult situations, as domestic violence and prostitution, and visited people in jail. For Mayenka everyone should be treated as persons, since we all are the children of God. The church gave her a way to do just that. She loves her job (calling) and the beautiful and satisfying experiences it brings forth.

Mayenka has had experience with two types of faith in Chile, both part of the Catholic Church. Mayenka's mother's faith was a religion of oppression, negativity and punishment; 'the eye of God is always on you'. People live in fear of doing something bad and going to

hell. This mentality seeps through all aspects of life, how you treat your children, how you treat others, etc. Religion plays a big role in daily life. The priest is divine, they are the representation of God on earth. Not how it is in the Netherlands, where a priest can be your friend and is seen as a human being. With nuns it is the same, everything they say is considered law and how they behave is 'perfect'. The oppression of this group goes as far as to say that the class you were in was part of Gods will and should be accepted. The other flow of the Catholic Church, does the contrary. It considers everybody as equals and criticizes the other. Causing it to be persecuted by the more dominant stream and the government, since they are both in cohorts. The priests herein worked with the people and tried to help them, since they saw and heard all the injustice that was happening to them. It is tradition that (make) people go to the church for (economic) help since they are the representatives of God. Making this stream more popular than the dominant stream of the Catholic Church. It is also the tradition that people go to the church for help when they have problems. Another religion that has grown in power is the Evangelical church. Mayenka suspects that it is a countermovement to prevent change in power. She thinks that the Evangelical church makes people dependent of them and God, preventing change and keeping people dormant. So people spent praying to God to solve their problems and not doing anything about it themselves. Mayenka totally disagrees with this mentality; *"you do not request anything of God. He knows what you need and gives it to you. The only thing you should do, is thank Him."* Further, she does not know how things currently are in Latin America, since it has been a while since she has been there.

When Mayenka I asked what role religion has in her life, her answer was important. Since she always has believed in God, she only has not been active in church. According to her it is really difficult to be a Christian, to be consistent. She grow up with a very religious mother, who prayed a lot and often went to church. Her father on the other hand, comes from the villages up north where they celebrate every saint and religious feast by dancing non-stop for a whole day or more. In this villages Catholicism is a mixture of the Catholic Church originating from Europe and the indigenous beliefs. Mayenka explains how the Catholic Church, as opportunistic as they are, came along with the conquistadores⁵ and started to

⁵ Conquistadores were Spanish soldiers that helped the conquest of Latin America. Spain was back then strict Catholic and they wanted to spread their religion.

slowly adapting their feasts to 'pagan feasts'. So are there now saints of and Jesus's of different colors and are their days celebrated with dance and alcohol.

For Mayenka, faith is still important. Especially in such difficult times; *"It is so easy to detract from Gods way. There are so many new options. You have to be able to distinguish the bad from the good, especially when the bad is sold as something good. It is difficult being a good Christian with so many temptations."*

Mayenka is attracted by her faith, because it gives her a lot. It gives her satisfaction and security. She feels that she will never miss something, since God provides. She also feels loved and protected. She has seen it in many occasions in the past. For her being Catholic is the right thing to do.

Rocio

According to Rocio, faith is also important in Latin America. She grew up Catholic and grew up with the traditions, for example, in Easter she had to shower at three o'clock in the evening and wear only black. There are feasts for every saint. Rocio thinks that the church is the biggest business. Children are 'injected' with it from the very beginning. She does not consider this something positive, for her religion has been a burden, a sentence. She argues that children are born atheists and that it is the parents that indoctrinate them. For this same reason she has not taught her youngest son anything about religion. If he wants to believe, then he can. For her, it is his choice.

Rocio proudly tells that she was a rebel. She did not allow to be 'injected' with everything. What also saved her, was the fact that she likes to read. At first she did not dare to read everything in fear of committing a sin, but after a while she did not care. Rocio has also read the Bible multiple times – which is necessary to understand it - and concluded that she liked little of it and hated the Old Testament. Living in Colombia she worked as commercial saleswomen and for her Jesus is the biggest salesman there ever has been. Through time she took more and more distance from the church. Sometimes things like 'My God' slip, but it is logical. It is something that has been part of most of her life and cannot be removed that easily. Rocio tries to be respectful of others, but if they start preaching her the Bible then she loses it. She argues that she does what Jesus has taught them, to help others. These people need help, a hug. They do not need the Bible to be read to them. According to her people have, a lack of soul, of humanity. They are empty of everything. There is also a lot of

hypocrisy. A lot of people in Latin America pray to God to solve their problems. They only search for Him, when things go bad. She does not have patience for people like that. She is not going to be part of a chain of prayer. However, if you do not do it, you are threatened with bad luck, or accidents and even deaths. Rocio calls this religious terrorism. The sad part is that sometimes someone dies, because they are filled with fear of breaking the chain. For her these are stupidities and people that do this are not immediately good people. Often they are women that when the opportunity comes to help...they do not do it. They do not act, they only preach and judge.

That makes no sense to her. This is what disappoints her the most. If it is not war for oil, it is war for religion. There is a lack of respect for the other. If the other one believes, perfect! If not, it does not matter. She has cut friendships with lots of people that have chosen these religious groups. When they try to convert her, she asks them: *"If someone in need comes to your house, what do you do?"* If she answers that she reads them the bible, then they are in the wrong place. For Rocio the church only has brought desolation.

For example when you see her oldest son, she paid his two university careers. He now speaks four languages and works as a CEO. She sees him working so hard to end giving his salary to a pastor that abuses his power. If Jesus and God are love, why then is everything commercialized, she wonders. This is a reason why she has taken steps back. Rocio noticed that the same people that go to church, are the same that look at her as if she were a prostitute when she wears a mini-skirt.

In Colombia, almost nobody in Rocio's family goes to church. Her sister-in-law lost a son and she became more religious. It is difficult for her to express herself and society is making her life difficult because of this. She is feeling guilty about her son's death. She has become more religious as a way to repent. Even though she has no reason to feel that way, she is a good mother; they still live with her even though the eldest is thirty-five. It is cultural. The rest of her family does not go to church anymore. It has become more of a personal process, people can look things up on the internet. People live with God in their mouth but they do not go to church.

Rocio's mother is very religious and for that reason she cannot stand her. Her mother walks around all day with the rosary in her hand, but when someone needs help, she does not step

up. But she has time to criticize everybody. When Rocio gives them her opinion her mother looks at her like if she was a witch, a demon, a possessed woman. All these aspects of religions touch you deep, it leaves scars behind. Rocio feels that it does not allow you live. She wonders if there was no religion, like with the Dutch people, maybe it would be better. They are good people in their own way. People in Latin America live afraid of God. It creates a trauma. She told that she once stole a chicken with her friends when she was small. They saw it as an adventure, however when they were discovered they were treated like criminals, punishing them and making them kneel and beg God for forgiveness. They make you think that you are the worst.

Rocio has lost her faith looking at her son. He speaks about God all the time, and he has not even vaccinated her grandchild. She thinks that they are like a sect: *"It is a combination of the Jehovah witnesses and the Jews; they have money but they do not help anybody."* Rocio explains that when she sees him in person, he becomes the little boy she knows. The last time she visited, he did not even want to carry a box of beer, because he would get infected. It is even forbidden to drink in his house.⁶ This frustrates Rocio and pushes her to give her opinion, bringing her in trouble. The people there are not even happy with all those restrictions, but they still comply. According to Rocio the church has become a mafia, getting money from people. She thinks Latin American people are very ignorant. Specially Colombian ones, since the government does not invest in education. There politics and religion, they go hand in hand.

In Colombia there are many religious sects. The government is corrupt and motivates ignorance. They teach people to hang unto God, because there is nobody else. That is the difference between Colombia and the Netherlands. The Netherlands has everything very well organized. Even though the churches are empty, they use them as museums or disco.

⁶ Rocio thinks that her son became part of the sect because he is insecure, he does not know what he wants. She solved everything in his life. He is easily influenced and his wife made use of that, she manipulated him. Before her he was an atheist. Rocio does not care what religion you choose as long as you are a good human being. When he is alone with Rocio, she sees her son. When he is with his wife, Rocio does not recognize him. Another reason why people would join a sect, is according to Rocio, because they have done a lot of damage to others and their conscience does not leave them alone.

Meche

Meche explained in her interview that most people in Peru are Catholics. That they go to church every Sunday and that the youth is part of one of the many Catholic groups, like the Carmelites and charismatics. She does confess that she does not know a lot, since she was not that active back then. Meche describes religion as something of the family, something you do together. However, in her time there started to be place for other religions and religiosities. Often, they were combined; doing yoga does not exclude going to church.

Meche did experience a bit of secularization in Latin America, but not enough for the church to lose power. She thinks it comes because people receive a lot of social and economic help from the Catholic Church.

Meche has always believed in God. Nonetheless, she has become more religious through time. She likes to study and investigate. For her, faith is the certainty that there is something we cannot see, but we can believe in. Believing in God can be like a grain of sand, but it is capable of moving mountains. According to her we have His words to help us believe and to grow.

Experiences and feelings

All the women agree that people in Latin America are born into religion. It is an integrated part of their cultures and families. All of them grew up hearing, seeing and experiencing the many religious traditions. For Lilia and Rocio, this was a negative experience, they felt indoctrinated. The emphasis in religion was felt as mostly negative, fearful and threatening. Mayenka also saw this in her country. However, she and Lilia saw later in their lives that next to this oppressive, institutional and dominant religion, there was an other stream of Catholicism, where people fought on the side of the poor and were socially active. This change in the Church became a stream after the Bishop meetings in 1968, where they decided to condemn injustice. Something that not all the local churches were happy to apply to. Religion became a tool for change, leading Lilia and Mayenka to find their calling. Lilia grew to experience faith as something beautiful. For Aida faith has always been something beautiful and joyful. All five women, including Rocio, consider helping others as part of being a good Catholic, even though Rocio does not call herself “religious” anymore.

Michel Foucault (1990) explains in his work what ethics means. According to him that means that a subject can transform herself for the sake of positive affect, as happiness, through

practices and discourses. Lilia, Aida, Meche and Mayenka use their faith to change themselves to achieve happiness and joy.

On the other hand, Rocio never totally recovered from her childhood experiences and her current experience with her oldest son joining an extreme religious group, has resulted in a totally negative image of religion and the Catholic Church. For her the church is a business, and religion is a burden children are indoctrinated with. In her opinion many Catholics are hypocrites; they preach Gods Word, but do not act upon it, or they become religious only when in need. This would imply circumstances like the one Meche and Mayenka went through. Meche became more religiously active due to her husband's illness and Mayenka returned to church after being very ill and surviving it, as later would become clear.

Negotiating tensions between religious and secular lives

Aida argues that in the Netherlands religion is experienced differently than Latin America. There are a few religious groups, but those that search it, search it actively and consciously. Aida rationalizes that people believe less because they have an easy life. Everything they need is accessible or is given by an institution, making live really comfortable. Being part of a church demands commitment and endurance. When you feel vulnerable you search for support of someone more powerful, but if you believe that you already have everything then there is no need. She quotes Mother Calcutta by saying: *"Europe is materialistically rich, but religiously poor."* This makes an opposition between the secular, capitalist, materialistic Europe and the 'Other world', where people are the opposite of Europe, thus religious, socialist etc..

Furthermore, Aida argues that the older generation of Dutch were only religious because of cultural pressure. The new generation does not accept being pushed around. They just want a testimony of love. The older generation cannot be blamed for their past experiences that enabled them to produce a healthy religious next generation. It probably began a few centuries back, when some was more focused on power instead of religion. The younger generations are more consciously active. They feel called to it. The younger generation in Mexico is also busy trying to be conscious about their religious upbringing. This however is happening on a smaller scale. Probably because there cultural obligations play a bigger role,

and have for a long while. In the Netherlands most people experience the Catholic Church as oppressor, while if you do not believe in Mexico, it is seen as a taboo. Mexico is belatedly going through the process that the Netherlands has been through.

Lilia

Lilia first thought that the Dutch were leaving their faith. Now she thinks that they are cleaning up their faith from things that are not important. According to her, they do believe, however they do not believe in hierarchies or things that do not give answer to modern problems. Lilia argues that the Dutch are socially active and support many causes, from helping animals to supporting refugees. They are generous on the idea of taking care of those in need. The Dutch do experience and express their faith really differently from people of Latin America. In Latin America family is everything and everything circles around it. In the Netherlands a neighbor is sometime more close than family. Here people are exposed to many cultures, while in Latin America churches and groups rule, *“only a small group of people is different, so that the capacity to question yourself is minimal”*.

In Latin America the priest knows better, while here it is a personal development. She does think that the Catholic Church here as institution is more conservative than in Middle America, since many bishops here are conservative and fear change. She feels that the Dutch church is taking steps backward even though it has the reputation of being modern. In Latin America a national consciousness grows, where the church has become more credible. The steps forward that the Dutch church has made were made in the past, not now. Lilia argues that secularization started in the Netherlands centuries ago and that they are losing the control because they are clinging to it. Initiatives that cause more harm than good. She guesses that the church is not losing people because of secularization, but because the church has forgotten the gift of testimony. They have become a business with nothing to offer. The Dutch church is not active socially. For Lilia a good Christian is someone that does as he/she preaches, someone that serves others. She concludes that there is secularization, but that it is not always negative. So is the church being freed from roles and powers where it did not belong.

Mayenka

According to Mayenka there is little faith in the Netherlands. It is seen as less important. However, she has seen that there is a group of religious elderly and that there is an

upcoming group of prepared youth that wants to be part of a church. She thinks they are searching for something, since society does not give you everything a person needs. They are searching for something to believe in, something to cling to in moments of need.

Rocio

According to Rocio's experience in the Netherlands, the Dutch do not believe in religion. They have found other things to get satisfaction, to 'fly'. Things like yoga, meditation and running. She considers reading also as a form of flying. In Latin America a lot of people cannot read or do not have access to books or schools, so they miss out on a lot. She does say that there are exceptions, like by the Bible Belt.⁷ A colleague told her that the people there follow the Old Testament to the point. Rocio said that they are different than the rest of the Dutch, but that they are more united, like the Latin Americans. Lastly, she concludes that religiosity is not necessary for people to be good persons or correct. She thinks that if all people were atheists, then there would be less war.

Meche

According to Meche, the few people who are Catholics in the Netherlands are very devoted. They are just and knowledgeable about Catholicism. Much more so than Latin Americans. She describes the Latin Americans as emotional and the Dutch as rational. She does express that she does not know many Dutch people. From experience, Meche has not seen much secularization, however she has read that it is happening. She thinks it is because people are prioritizing reason. In her opinion, it is a negative development. People need something, a God. People need the teachings of the Bible. Meche assumes that it is this lack that has led many people to take their lives. In Latin America there is more poverty, but they have something to hold on.

Secularization: positive or negative?

All five women agree that there is little faith in the Netherlands. However, Aida and Rocio do not consider this a bad development. Aida argues that the previous generation went to church under pressure and that it is better that people go from their own free will. So that the people that do believe, are more devoted. It is possible that the older Dutch generations feel pressured to go to Church, since some of them may still have experienced the *verzuiling*, that according to Knippenberg (1998) ended in the sixties. Aida thinks that less people are

⁷ The Bible Belt is a strip of land in the Netherlands where the most conservative Protestants live.

religious because, life has become easier. This agrees with what Rocio said in the previous chapter; people only turn to God when they need something. Aida however does not consider turning to God as something bad, especially since she believes that everything is Gods doing, even if it is something difficult to deal with. Rocio thinks that the Dutch have found other replacements for the things religion gives Latin American people. She also believes that religion is not necessary for people to be good. She does not consider secularization as something bad.

Lilia is ambiguous about secularization. On one hand, the Dutch Catholic church is becoming more conservative in fear of losing more power and has forgotten the importance of testimony. She has even seen the 'business' that Rocio mentioned before. On the other hand, the few that are religious are cleaning up their faith from unnecessary things (outdated customs and traditions). She sees this as positive. Furthermore, Lilia thinks that the exposure to other cultures has broadened many peoples horizon, probably causing among other things secularization. Knippenberg (1998) agrees with her since he thinks the divers society showed the Dutch other possibilities to live. Lastly, she agrees with Rocio, that being a good human being does not depend on faith or religion.

Mayenka and Meche consider secularization as something negative. Mayenka thinks that people have lost their priorities. Meche presumes that people secularize because they have the need to rationalize everything. Both think that everyone needs something more, something to believe in.

Even though there is little religiosity in the Netherlands, there are always exceptions. So believes Meche that the few that believe, know more about Catholicism than many Latin American people. Aida, Meche and Mayenka have seen that there is an upcoming group of people in the church that are prepared, conscious and devoted. Lastly, all five women agree that Latin America is belatedly going through the processes the Netherlands has gone through, meaning that secularization is slowly happening. They see that slowly less people are going to church in their home countries.

Enacting religiosity: transformation and change

Aida

Aida thinks that it depends on the religious base in which they arrived. If Latin American women come with a shaky religious base, it will collapse with little resistance, since it is more difficult to sustain it here. She confesses that she also had difficulty at the beginning. She had to get used to being extra active to maintain her level of religiosity. In Mexico she did not have to work so hard for it. There are many possibilities to express your religion, whereas here you have to search for it. According to her it is still time and energy consuming, but “so worth it”.

Her religiosity has changed. From being passionate about it, she has ended up in a place where people try not to talk about it. It has been a necessary process to develop her religiosity. She had to learn and accept that not everybody believes and that they still could be good people. She cannot be distracted by comfort. She has to consciously search for sources to water the desert. That is also the way she explains the role of her husband: *“When I have difficult moments with my faith, when I waver, my husband is my support in the desert. And when he has his, I am his.”*. Aida gave a few reasons for the changes in her religiosity; like the little access to it, the few believers, not feeling part of a bigger group of believers and feeling like a weirdo for believing. People scrutinize you, watch you closely to catch you making mistakes. This puts a lot of pressure on ‘being a good Christian’.

Another thing she had to learn, was how to convince people that being religious is not something bad or something that makes her perfect. According to her, you do it by lovingly and respectfully showing your norms and values.

Lilia

When Lilia thinks of Latin American women in the Netherlands, she is surprised. The churches are being abandoned by the Dutch, but filled with foreigners that are searching for something that is familiar to them. The people that came with no faith, adapted. Those that come from a Catholic Church become more religious, as if they have to defend their faith and how they do things. Making it difficult to be together in the only Spanish speaking parish in Rotterdam. There are twenty seven nationalities that visit this church and some are more conservative than other. According to Lilia there are women who are scared of the variety and close themselves to it and become defensive, as if there is only one way to do things. If

you go to another church people consider it as if you are betraying your faith, country and church.

For Lilia, the change from Latin America to the Netherlands was difficult. The Spanish speaking parish was a little piece of Latin America, even though the different spiritualities were a challenge. In the Dutch church they express themselves differently; their questions are based on the idea that there is nothing and then the question; how to deal with it. This made it really difficult to fit in, since for her everything is as it should be and the next step should be to use faith in the new circumstances. She explains that for them the 'well' where they gather water from is empty. The Dutch feel relieved in knowing that there are others that feel as they do. Faith has played such a concrete role in Lilia's life that her well overflows. Talking about this however insults the Dutch, since they do not know where it comes from and it puts in evidence their feeling of emptiness. It has been really difficult for Lilia to bridge this difference, but it has been instructive. So she has had to learn cross over to their side and find the way back.

Lilia's faith has gone through many changes. Coming to the Netherlands in 2001 just accelerated those changes. There was a time where she did not feel at home in a religious group, but she wanted to help them. So she did, but it carried too much frustration to continue. They were too conservative. Lilia has worked with many religious groups and churches, some that did not agree with each other. Every experience has helped her define what her faith stands for. So has been giving the Celebration of the Word⁸ in a Dutch church taught her to find a language that did not nullify her religious experience but would not be met with sarcasm and rejection. For her, the faith of every person is unique and it would be too easy to stereotype. So it all depends on how you use it; does it propels life or is it an ornament that you have because of your grandparents. Lilia thinks that her religious experience is very special, because in Latin America it is not common that women celebrate the Word, especially since she has not studied theology. Lilia is happy to have the opportunity to share her faith here in the Netherlands.

⁸ The Celebration has the format of a mass (it has the Word of God and the blessed bread), but it is not celebrated by a priest but by a member of the community. The bread has already been blessed by a priest beforehand.

In Latin America only men are on the altar. She has asked her male friends why they do nothing about it and their answer was that it is not their problem to solve, it is the next generation's responsibility. Lilia did confess that women in Latin America have other opportunities in the Church that are not possible here. Here, there is more freedom, but it is still a church of men where there is little space for the participation of women. Lilia has crashed into many walls by being woman, foreigner and not having studied theology. Further she has experienced being in the 'unemployment benefit'⁹ as stigma. Even though it has given her the social position to see everything from below. However, everything has exacted its toll.

Another change is that her faith has gone through is that the last fifteen years male texts have been her inspiration and that priests have been her advisers. At the beginning she did not dare to do anything without their go-ahead. Later I did it without their 'permission', but still within their frame. Now she has noticed that they do not represent women. So she has started to express her feelings and experiences as a woman. She has come to the conclusion that the Celebration of the Word is all about experience and not a vomit of doctrines.

Lilia is not unhappy with the development her faith has been through, since in Latin America there would be no place to express it. The thing the Netherlands has gone through are slowly happening in Latin America, at least with the middle class. She is a bit ambivalent, because the changes in her faith have caused a gap between her and her family and all the other people she knows in Latin America. She considers this as challenges to grow, to tear her prejudices. She has learned that she has to trust her heart even if it goes against religious men.

Mayenka

Mayenka thinks that Latin American women live their faith differently from the Dutch. They are more expressive and talkative about their religion. Though she confesses that it differs with each country. She considers the Latin American women from the northern part as more religious, with their prayer chains and God in every sentence etc.

⁹ In the Netherlands there is a system in place to help people who do not have paid jobs or are not able to work. Most of them are bound to many rules to get (and keep) this economic help, one of them is voluntary work.

Mayenka's faith has changed. She did not go to church for many years. Now mass is important and she likes to participate in the celebrations. She came back to church, because she experienced a miracle – she was cured¹⁰ - and she wanted to do something in return. She has learned a lot by helping people. Moreover, it has given her a new view of society, leading her to believe that a lot needs to be done.

Mayenka argues that her life did not change much from back in Chile. The changes she has been through are more because she goes with the time and because she has adapted to the Netherlands. At the beginning it did feel a little weird, but after a while she felt part of the Dutch culture. She does confess that being in the Netherlands has opened many doors for her. According to her one changes through time, no matter where you are. It is something natural and part of life and personal development.

Rocio

Rocio has met many Latin American women through her social work with the church. According to her there are two dominant groups. One of them is really gloomy and everything they do is in the name of God. They are a new generation of prepared women that are married to Dutch men. They however do not have their own lives. At one hand they preach and thank God for their lives and on the other hand, they are chasing the husband of another women. Rocio has witnessed how they have broken people's lives. She finds them really hypocrites. The other group is as bad. They are women that came over thirty years ago and often ended in the prostitution. Now they have nothing and are ill. These women were born in Catholic families and raised with God's word. They are simple, uneducated women and everything they do is also in God's name. Both groups preach, but do not act.

Rocio has experienced being in the Netherlands as an injection, where slowly all the indoctrination is pulled out. However she has come to the conclusion that she has to believe in something. So she has decided to believe in herself. Because of what happen with my son, I am more and more away from the faith. I like to investigate things, not to be given digested things. Dutch people live without faith, why not us?

¹⁰ She was really ill and nobody knew what she had, giving her only three months to live. She went on a pilgrimage to Monserrat (unwillingly) and the very next day they discovered what she had, giving her the chance to get better.

She is happy with the changes. She had a very difficult year, personally, emotionally and in her marriage. She was constantly attacking herself: *"I have been here for so long and have achieved nothing."* Living here takes its toll. You judge yourself and all that has been internalized, burst out. Rocio assumes she was depressed. There was a moment where she did not want to confront reality. Nothing helped her to feel complete. So she drank. Rocio wanted to destroy herself and everything around her. It was very difficult for her to reach the bottom and realize that she was not handling things as well as she thought. Her breaking point was visiting Colombia and seeing her grandchild for the first time to be rejected as mother and grandmother not soon after¹¹. From that moment on, she decided to stop believing: *"No faith should ever ask you to take distance from your family, from your mother. What kind of faith is that? I saw all the money I invested in my oldest son going totally to waste."* When she came back, she decided to take distance, to let go of everything and everyone that hurt her. Now she can state that she feels liberated. The fight with her oldest son, an almost divorce, the death of her nephew and the accumulated disappointments with the people that call themselves Catholics became too much for her. It became her totally clear that life is better without faith. She feels that religion has taken her family away. She did not recognize them when she last visited them.

According to Rocio, Latin American women hang on to their religion. She considers herself an exception. For example the Peruvians...they come from all over the Netherlands to celebrate their saint. Rocio confessed that when she started going to church, it was because of the social factor. Rocio thinks it is a female thing; men on the other side are more detached to the faith.

Rocio has wondered how it came that she ended being secular, a 'rebel'. She concluded that having indigenous blood, her grandmother specifically, helped. Rocio does not know how her mother got so Catholic, since her grandmother believed in nature (sun, earth, air etc.). Rocio's grandmother smoked, drank and had three children with three different men, without ever getting married. Her grandmother never went to church. She was independent and did not give a damn about the whole society. She was considered a witch, a whore and a possessed person. Rocio's father was also not religious, one of the reason her parents'

¹¹ Rocio was only 17 when she had her oldest son. She did everything to give him all that he needed and now she heard from him, that he did not receive anything from her.

marriage did not last. Rocio came to the realization that her mother tried to do everything possible not to be as her mother (Rocio's grandmother). It is logical, she grew up with her mother's (Rocio's grandmother) humiliation.

Meche

Meche did not have religious difficulty with the move from Peru to the Netherlands. For her the Netherlands has been a place to meditate, to search and find God. This is a process she has been through. In her youth she did believe in God, but did other alternative things, like yoga. After years of being in the Netherlands her husband got sick and in a visit of her parents her mother told her to pray together. Since then her faith started to slowly expand. It is now the place she escapes to, the place where I tell my sorrow and church is the place to convers with Jesus. For her the move was not the cause of her increased religiosity, but the illness and death of her husband.

She is happy with the process her faith has gone through. She feels good and she has found peace with herself. She did before, but after the death of her husband and everything that has happened, her best psychologist has been Jesus and studying about her faith.

Language, religious base and integration

According to all the women it becomes apparent that there are four types of Catholic Latin American women in the Netherlands: the one that was religious and survived the change, the religious one for the social interaction, the not-so-religious turned religious, and the religious turned secular. Often it depends on the religious base the women came with. Lilia added as personal observation, that the women that become more religious because of difficulties (illness, death of a loving one, legal status etc.), become also more defensive of their faith and more judgmental against others. This image consists with what Cadge and Ecklund (2007) stated previously; that Latin American women that are trying to hold into their culture become more religious.

For Aida and Lilia, who came with a strong faith, the move from Latin America was difficult. In the Netherlands there is not the same access to communal religious practices as there is in Latin America. So it takes more time and energy to find something that fits with their faith. Lilia still has not found a group where she fits perfectly. Lilia, Meche and Aida do not feel free to talk about their faiths, their testimonies. They have had to adapt what they say and even if they say something, to avoid rejection, sarcasm, scrutinized and derision. Meche

is the only one that does not mind that she has to pay attention to what she says. Lilia has to pay extra attention to it, since she holds Celebrations of the Word. So she has had to learn to think from their perspective, without removing female, foreigner voice or reproducing the same male-oriented doctrines. Mahmood (2004) would say that Lilia has used her agency to fight for space by doing things the way of the Dutch, at least qua Celebrations of the Word. So she keeps negotiating a subjugated role, to make that space her own. Aida and Mayenka also argue that it is difficult not to stray from their faiths. Mayenka because of all the variety and distractions, and Aida because of laziness and fatigue.

Aida feels that she is being discriminated because of her religion. Lilia does too, but not only because she is Catholic, but also because she is foreigner, female and has not studied theology. So Lilia has grown because of all the obstacles in her way and Aida has grown because of spending so much time actively searching her place religiously. As a result of all these changes in her faith Lilia has difficulty fitting in with the Dutch and the Latin American people. Rocio has also a difficulty to fit in, but in Latin America, since she has become secular and that is something people in Latin America have difficulty with. However, both Lilia and Rocio suffered from the move emotionally, since both had to give up their lives in Latin America and rebuild new ones here. It has taken its toll.

Rocio, Meche and Mayenka did not have difficulty with the move to the Netherlands. Mayenka and Meche experienced that the move opened many doors. Meche had the freedom to develop her faith and was Mayenka freed from her country's dictatorship. Mayenka and Meche went from believers in God to religiously active.

Aida, Mayenka, Lilia and Rocio believe that change is normal and that from every experience there can be learned. None of the women, Meche included, regrets the move or the changes their faiths have been through.

Here it became apparent that there is a common/dominant discourse, Fairclough (1989) would these call these common-sense assumptions, since the women have some words and phrases in common. So speak Rocio, Meche, Lilia and Aida about being good Christian/Catholics. For all these women this meant following Jesus steps. What this means, differed per women, for some it means helping others, for the other it is love, or a combination of both. Lilia and Aida also use the 'well' as representation of their faith. This

'well' is recurring image as people talk about faith. God is seen as source of strength, inspiration, serenity etc. Aida, Lilia and Mayenka speak of a 'calling'. On this the three women agreed, that a calling is a vocation and direction for their lives. For the women this calling is empowering. It not only gives them security about what to do in their lives and that they will be secure doing it, since He is the one calling for them and sending them out and he takes care of His people. It also gives meaning to their lives. Lilia and Aida talk both about faith being a present from their parents. From the previous part it became clear that Mayenka and Aida do not believe in coincidence; they believe in divine intervention (providence). Further make Lilia, Aida and Meche use of the word 'testimony'. With testimony is meant the shared experiences with God through Jesus. The Bible requests Catholics to share Gods glory. On the other hand Lilia and Rocio talk about indoctrination. It is clear that Bible is behind a few of the common words. In this case I think most women have created their own interpretations about the Church's doctrine, since Meche, Rocio, Aida and Lilia like to investigate and read about their faith. Most people would re-produce things said by priests or learned from their direct environment.

Religiosity and belongingness

Aida

Aida and her husband have explicitly sought a place where they feel they belong. They have visited many religious communities until they found one that fit them. Aida especially needed that, because of the cultural differences. She needed a priest that was not 'cold' and made her feel motivated and inspired.

At the beginning Aida did not feel at home in the Netherlands because her religion was associated with lots of negative connotations, like the revelation that priests have sexually assaulted children. However, through the years she has learned that if she wants to be religious she has to move forward. She felt obliged to show that she is happy being Catholic and that there are negative and positive things about her religion. She fears for the future however. Less and less people talk about religion on the street. To her personally it does not matter, but for her children? She fears that in a few years her children will not be able to say that they are Catholic without it having consequences.

Aida thinks that many Latin-American women approach the church for the social aspect of it. However, she does not go to the church for that reason. If she wants to socialize she has her friends. She goes to church for the spiritual. This is the reason why she does not go to the Spanish Speaking parish anymore, and also what has caused her to feel more at home in a Dutch Catholic Church. Furthermore, Aida has experienced that the Dutch group is more 'close' and supportive than the Latin-American ones. In her opinion the Netherlands has not limited her because she came with a strong religious basis. However, the fact that she has to search and put so much effort into it, has been a confirmation for her that she is in the right religion. Aida made it clear that she also feels Dutch, because a lot of the development she has been through and a lot of her experiences have been here in the Netherlands.

Lilia

The Netherlands has motivated Lilia by raising many walls and closing doors for paid work, because of this she has had to move through small places. In Latin America they would have paid her for voluntary work. Here they do not. The changes have not been negative. They can be difficult but they are part of a natural process for growth.

Lilia does not talk with everyone about her faith, it all depends whom she is with. With Latin American or African women she can talk freely, since they believe concrete signs, forebodings and symbols. With Europeans and Americans she has to pay attention to what she says or she says nothing. They would consider it a scandal, since they live their faith from the Lack, or from a place of not believing. They are stuck in their ways and would consider us superstitious or mentally ill. Lilia does not feel oppressed but her way of being religious does not go hand in hand with theirs.

Lilia argues that it does not matter if people go to the church for social reasons. Everyone needs someone to talk with and the first years are really crucial to function well, especially in a foreign place. The church is an important place to make contacts and to grow. It is something good: *"It does not matter if you believe or not. There are people that believe and there are people for whom faith is a habit. There are good people that have a relationship with something bigger that they do not call God. If people without being religious want to collaborate it ok. What does worry me is that there are people that believe but do not do anything with it. It is like a body missing its arm."* She explains that every body part plays its role, the same is within a church. Every division in the church has services to do from its

faith. If this does not happen, then it is a poverty of the parish itself. According to Lilia religiosity is cultural. She learned from her mother to feel in things in the air and which saint to ask for help. From her father she learned the social/humanitarian part of religiosity.

Mayenka

Mayenka has felt from the start at home in the Netherlands. When they came to the Netherlands they were welcomed with open arms. The queen paid their tickets here and the government paid the rest, even the hotel where they stayed for months. They received their papers easily and the government arranged Dutch lessons, childcare, homes and a support group. This group of people taught and accompanied everywhere. Eventually they became friends for life. She has nothing to complain about the Dutch, she even likes their bluntness.

At some point Mayenka felt so at home that she started to do the work she did before she came here. She started to get involved in the politic and fight for the rights of women. Here she has had the freedom to fight for social change, it is even appreciated, while in Chile it would have been impossible. Further, she spend a lot of time with other Chilean refugees learning the Dutch culture and from each other.

The only things Mayenka really had difficulty with where accepting that she would stay here and the Dutch language. The first few years she lived with a foot in the airport and a packed bag in her closet. She thought she would return soon to her home in Chile. She even came here with the key from her home there. After she realized that her situation would not change, she adapted pretty quickly. Mayenka thinks that her being so young helped. She had difficulty learning the Dutch language, because she could not take the courses¹² and because she became lazy. Everybody she met spoke Spanish and if they did not, she taught them. After a while she realized that she knew more than she thought. After this obstacle, it was easy to feel at home.

Qua faith, Mayenka has never felt limited. For her it is something personal that is not defined by a place. She has also never felt oppressed here. She talks with whomever she wants about her faith. She is pretty straightforward; *“If they do not like it, it is their problem not mine.”*. She even argues that there is nothing like living with other cultures. Mayenka

¹² Mayenka had to take care of her small son, who was traumatized by his experiences in Chile.

lives in a Muslim neighborhood and they have become friends. They invite each other for their religious feasts.

Lastly, Mayenka concludes that the church is a place of encounter and that many Latin American women and men go there for the social, like language, interaction, meeting people, language and food.

Rocio

Rocio has seen and experienced that life is difficult for Latin American women in the Netherlands. According to her many Latin American women take the abuse because in Latin America a marriage with a foreigner is seen as blessing. So the women take a lot just not to return in shame and because they are culturally and religiously taught to endure. Rocio thinks that the women that survive such a marriage have to have strong character, so that they can teach their husbands their culture. Thus, the more religious you are, the worse they treat you.

For her, has integration been pretty easy. She has always been really active and because she has a Dutch husband a lot of activities are with them. Their cultures differ a lot, but she has learned to adapt and respect them. Her method has been to go with the flow and to learn as much as possible.

Her faith has gone through process where it no longer was desirable to be religious. Why do you need religion, when you can be happy without it, Rocio questions? Rocio has learned a lot from the Dutch. The only thing she does not agree with them, is the fact that they teach children to be selfish and that the Dutch can be robotical. She personally has never worked from the normal office hours (8 to 5). Qua jobs, if people try to humiliate her or treat badly, Rocio just leaves. She also has no problem reporting racism by the police or helping women do that. She has developed a sixth sense to smell trouble, something the Colombians call indigenous malice.¹³ Rocio is a fighter, if she sees injustice she fights for them or helps them fight. Rocio argues that people that do not learn the language are too vulnerable for abuse. She says that the Dutch language is important for survival. She does not get how someone can live here twenty years and still not speak Dutch.

¹³ Rocio once worked in a hotel with a bunch of women who did not speak Dutch and she smelt something fishy. They were exploiting the women. So after she had evidence she went with it to the tax office.

For Rocio the move from Colombia was pretty hard. She loves her country and her family. She left all that and her oldest son. Thus after eighteen years of independence she had to learn to live together with a man she barely knew. She had to teach him her ways. She confessed, that at the beginning, every time they fought she would threaten him of going back to Latin America. She also had to learn how to take care of a child, since her first son was taken care of by her whole family. For her it was really difficult, however she has enjoyed her second son. Rocio educated him in the Latin way; he slept with her until he was four and he occasionally crashes with her. If this was not enough of cultural clash, her husband has a difficult family.

Furthermore, what for her was funny, was considered in the Netherlands as an insult. It did not help that Rocio comes from a place in Colombia where women are the matrons: *"We are women with a strong character, we shout, we fight. Imagine!"* According to Rocio the women in the Netherlands have also character, here you see more men in the kitchen than women. In her house however, she is the only woman in the kitchen. Nonetheless, she has reached a moment in her life where she agrees on the path the Netherlands has taken.

Meche

Meche is religiously more at home in Peru. There she can talk freely about her faith, since there most people are Catholics. In the Netherlands she has to search for people to talk about it. However, she does not think that the Netherlands has limited her. For her it is logical, *'you do not talk about cooking with someone that does not like to cook'*. If people ask her, Meche answer honestly that she is Catholic and if they are interested she is willing to share her testimony. It does not frustrate her that she cannot talk freely about her religion. She understands that not everybody would understand her religion, especially since so many do not believe. They would taunt her about it. Her reaction is to read more about the Catholicism to enforce her faith, so that when people ask her questions about it, she can answer.

Meche argues that even though less Dutch people go to church, many Latin Americans are returning to it. People are searching God because they have a need for God and their roots. Many Latin Americans that are returning were baptized. Also the youth is returning to church because they feel lost.

Multiple feelings of belongings

Throughout this chapter it has become clear that the women can feel a sense of belonging with different groups. Aida, Rocio, Mayenka and Meche say to feel at home in the Netherlands. Aida, because she has found a group of active religious Dutch natives. When Mayenka fled here, she was welcomed with open arms and helped to integrate. Rocio adapted fast by being active in the Dutch society and Meche just likes the freedom to take things at her own rhythm. Meche, however, does not have a Dutch group she feels at home with. For Lilia is finding a place of a constant search, since she continues developing at a different space than the people she is trying with.

Lilia, Meche, Aida and Rocio sought at the beginning of their stay something they were familiar with, somewhere to belong. That is how they ended at the Spanish speaking parish. For some of the women, and that includes Mayenka, the church is a place of encounter. For Rocio that is what the parish has become; a place to socialize with others and not a place to be religions. She still feels at home there, just for different reasons.

According to Chong (1998) the church and its institutions often have two roles as regards to belongingness. They work as a glue for uniting and forming a community and they help people with the process of integrating. Both help create a feeling of belonging.

Conclusion

To give explicit answer to my research question, how are the tensions between religiosity and secularization negotiated by the Catholic Latin American women in Rotterdam, the Netherlands?, yes, there are many tensions to speak of. There is the tension between these Latin American women and the Dutch society. To avoid conflict and uneasiness the women have made the choice to not talk about religion with any Dutch, if they were not asked, and if they do, they limit what they say. Since so many Dutch are secular, they do not dare to start a conversation about such themes. Another tension is between the women itself, they come from different backgrounds and experiences and have different degrees of religiosity. This means that not all Latin American are as religious, or religious at all, even though they visit a church. Some women that are strict religious fear the unknown and have many discussions trying to convert the Latin American women that do not believe or are considered not religious enough. This has led the Spanish speaking church to be full of compromises, like every nationality has a day to celebrate their saint. Another tension that some Latin American women experience is that of their religion and that of their country of origin. Religious identity is fluid. This means that it also changes depending its environment. So the religious identity of some of them has changed in such ways that they do not fit in anymore with the religiosity back there. This has led to not having the freedom to express their religiosity at ease. Last and not least, the religious Latin American women suffer from internal tensions. If the women come with a religious base, there is a big chance that at some point they will question and doubt themselves. It is difficult to maintain something, that is active demotivated by the environment.

As became apparent from this research, agency can take two seemingly contradictory directions. In one of them, women make religion their own and gain love and happiness from it. The other direction it can take, is as a way to protest, to struggle. Agency can cause tension and struggle to find a place of belonging. It can cause a struggle between finding a community to belong to and refusing to succumb to its doctrines.

A few questions that arose and could be future research are: How does ethnicity and race affect the religiosity of Latin American women in Latin America and the Netherlands? How has the rise in economic class affected the way they are treated in Latin America?

Reflection and limitations

There are three things that could be considered limitations from this research. Firstly, my limited resources were a bit outdated, but it has helped me to give an idea about what has been written about. The second constraint could be that I have had to be extra careful with the interviews, since I did not want to offend anyone and get out casted from the Spanish speaking parish. Especially because there are not many 'diaspora spaces' for Latin American women. Lastly, since the interviews were done in Spanish, they had to be translated. So not only had I to interpret the interviews, but also translate them. So there is the risk that some things did not come over as they were meant.

This whole research had me a bit nervous since even though I am Catholic I have never spend much time studying it. So there was the worry that I would not know enough. However, apparently religion is not one thing you easily forget. For me the interviews were enlightening and special. It felt pretty good to be spoken about as a 'we', we Latin American women. I had not expected that, since it has been a while since I saw these women and sixteen years since we moved to the Netherlands. I often doubt where I belong, it was nice to hear that they do not, they consider me one of them. I also did not expect to hear such divers and harmonious answers. I had expected more bitterness about the unfairness of the world. It was really interesting to hear how the women from five, in the end totally different countries and backgrounds, experience their faith and religion here in the Netherlands.

As became apparent from my research there are many ways in which agency can be used in women advantage. Mayenka expresses it nicely:

"Women are very important in our religion [Catholicism]. We are the base. Without Eve, there would not have been people. Without Mary, there would be no Catholics. In every miracle of God the woman has played and important role. We carry the church forward. God has made us in his image; we can procreate. Mary did not even need a man."

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Appendix I: Interview Questions

After explaining them that the interview could be anonymous and they could chose not to answer if they wanted. I asked if I could record it and clarified what the interviews were for and what my topic is. Lastly, I gave them my definition of secularization.

Questions:

1. Let us start simple, could you tell me your name, age and birth country?
2. Could you tell me why you came to the Netherlands and how long ago you came?
3. This would mean that you remember your country of birth. Do you also remember how they believe and implement their faith? Could you please describe it (act, believe, live, express etc.).
4. How do you think the Dutch are in terms of faith? What role does religion play in their lives?
5. How do you think the Latin-American women here in the Netherlands are in terms of faith?
6. Do you see secularization in the Netherlands?
7. Do you see secularization in your home country?
8. What importance has the faith in God in your life, before and now?
9. What attracts you to your faith and what does it give you?
10. Was the change from your country to the Netherlands very difficult for you in terms of faith? Why?
11. Do you think that your faith has changed or gone through processes since you arrived in the Netherlands? And if so, could you explain it to me or give examples.
12. If your faith has changed, what do you think were the causes? (what has affected your faith)
13. When you visit your family back home, do you see a difference between your faith and theirs? If so, what do you think have caused them?
14. Do you like to see the changes in the way you express your faith? And can you sustain them when you visit back home? Or do you hide them?

15. What do you think of the changes? Do you think they have been positive or negative?
Why?
16. Do you think that the Netherlands has limited your faith or do you think it has motivated it?
17. Do you feel free to express your religion in the Netherlands? Or do you feel oppressed? Or does it depend with whom you are?
18. Do you think that there are women that go to the church for the social instead of the faith? If you think so, why?
19. Do you see a connection between your way to express faith and your culture?
20. Lastly, what did you thought of the interview? Was everything understandable? Do you think I need to add something or remove it? Do you think I am missing something critical or that there is something according to you that I have to mention?