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Inducing The Holy Spirit through the Pentecostal Message

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Melissa Guzman

Abstract

Pentecostalism (PC) is the most prolific branch of American evangelical Christianity (Jacobsen 2003) as it has been able to provide to its adherents, subcultures and collective identities that bestow meaning and belonging (Smith 1998). PC arose from Methodist and Baptist branches of Christianity at the end of the 19th century (Blumhofer 1993) and was involved in adjusting millions of migrants to U.S. city life (Synan 1997). Because PC has “straddled the race line in ways that most other American religious movements did not” (Jacobsen 2003: 260), it is significant to consider its wide appeal by analyzing how it manifests itself in local ways. Furthermore, if PC can distinguish itself while directly engaging the cultures it interacts with (Robbins 2004), how does it become appealing to the five million Latinos in the U.S. who consider themselves pentecostal (Sanchez 2003)? My attempt is to ascertain the type and extent of influence that Latino culture exerts on the general pentecostal model by considering the language, traditions, concepts, and practices of a local congregation mostly composed of firstgeneration migrants from Guatemala, Mexico, and various other Spanish-speaking nations. I seek to understand how PC transforms along different contexts while focusing on the relation of religion and culture through two pressing themes: Latino culture and gender.

KEYWORDS: Latino Culture, Gender, Guatemala, Mexico, Immigrants, Pentecostalism

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Pentecostalism (PC) is the most prolific branch of American evangelical Christianity (Jacobsen 2003) as it has been able to provide to its adherents, subcultures and collective identities that bestow meaning and belonging (Smith 1998). PC arose from Methodist and Baptist branches of Christianity at the end of the 19th century (Blumhofer 1993) and was involved in adjusting millions of migrants to U.S. city life (Synan 1997). Because PC has “straddled the race line in ways that most other American religious movements did not” (Jacobsen 2003: 260), it is significant to consider its wide appeal by analyzing how it manifests itself in local ways. Furthermore, if PC can distinguish itself while directly engaging the cultures it interacts with (Robbins 2004), how does it become appealing to the five million Latinos in the U.S. who consider themselves pentecostal (Sanchez 2003)?

My attempt is to ascertain the type and extent of influence that Latino culture exerts on the general pentecostal model by considering the language, traditions, concepts, and practices of a local congregation mostly composed of first-generation migrants from Guatemala, Mexico, and various other Spanish-speaking nations. I seek to understand how PC transforms along different contexts while focusing on the relation of religion and culture through two pressing themes: Latino culture and gender.



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Methodology

I collected data over a five-month period and followed the methodology of Wright and Rawls (2005): (1) 130 hours of participant observation during services, prayer and youth-group meetings, fundraisers, and bible studies; (2) personal interviews; and (3) literature review. In part guided by the congregation's two pastors, Juan and Veronica, a snowball sampling method facilitated interviews and other interactions used for analysis. The names of all congregants were changed to protect their identities.

Findings

PC has had a substantial impact among Latinos in the U.S. precisely because it has employed Spanish in the evangelization of recent immigrants (Espinosa 1999). In reflecting upon the linguistic structures¹ of this congregation's Spanish, I discovered that Mexican cultural standards influenced spoken Spanish. Generally, three fundamental themes characterize the culture of this congregation: language, tradition, and migrant status. My analysis considers how the linguistic structures, cultural traditions, and concepts of identity have shifted in this PC context.

Certain suffixes in Spanish make words diminutive, with *ito* being the most common (Stewart 1999); diminutives are used to gently mock or make something seem less significant. When describing the experience of praise as special, Pastor Juan told the congregation to refrain from singing mere *coritos* [little choruses]. The ending of *coritos* suggests that establishing parameters of appropriate praise was important since the congregants created the *culto* [service] and were responsible for keeping it balanced. The balance in praise meant keeping such praise free from music “of the world”, that is, music that was unreasonably loud or fast.

Although the use of diminutives is obvious in statements like this: “*no servimos a un diosito, nuestro Dios es grande*” [we do not serve a little god, our God is grand], in subtler ways, like when the insignificance of a worldly life was explained, diminutives were also employed. A worldly life included a person’s everyday work and family activities. In the following statement, jobs were made less significant to perhaps accentuate notions of God: “*Tenemos nuestros trabajitos, pero sin Dios no tenemos nada*” [We have our little jobs, but without God we have nothing]. Abstract concepts such as perfection also called for the use of diminutives. In this example: “*la perfección no es de los diositos, ni de la gente que se convierte en santito*” [perfection is not of the little Gods, or of people who convert into little saints] perfection is solely attributed to a true God, while *santitos* refers to Catholic saints or “little Gods.” Spanish language conventions belittle Catholic traditions while they introduce and define PC religious conceptions.

A study by Hidalgo (1996) concluded that Mexico had established a Standard Mexican Spanish (SMS). SMS, instantiated by the Spanish spoken in the city, was assessed as “the most prestigious variety of the Spanish-speaking world (Hidalgo 1996: 68).” Furthermore, the pastors, who were from a rural area of Northern Mexico, extemporaneously introduced new words throughout the services. When preaching about asking God for direction and advice, Pastor Juan told the congregation: “*Se mayordomo de tu vida*.” [Be a manager of your life]. The word *mayordomo*, although foreign to SMS, also developed linguistic rules in this sentence: “*La eternidad es tu galardón por la buena mayordomía*” [Eternity is your trophy for good apprenticeship]. The word *Mayordomo* is used as a verb and then conjugated to fit the sentence. But why is the word *mayordomo*, along with its new conjugations, significant?

In rural parts of Mexico, annual celebrations are held for the village saint and arranged by “*la mayordomía*”—a committee that collects what is needed for such festivities (Webster 1989). In this PC context, being a *mayordomo* could mean having the responsibility or ability to administer one’s life. However, its definition closely draws from specific rural Mexican traditions that, although common to the Pastor’s hometown, both urban Mexicans and non-Mexican congregants are likely unfamiliar with.

New words were also created when Pastor Juan described how sin was utilized by Satan to destroy the congregation. When there was sin, there was much *carnalidad* and *mundanidad* [roughly translated as carnality and worldliness], which weakened the spiritual unity of the church. The word *mundanidad*, a non-existent word in SMS, was likely invented from the word *mundo* [world] and an *idad* ending to make the noun *mundo* a condition or verb. Thus *mundanidad* comes to mean “of the world” as in “not divine.” Here, PC’s capability of flourishing “on difference, engagement, tension, conflict, and threat” (Smith 1998: 121) is reinforced by the linguistic fabrication of words and conventions of these in the Spanish language.

Despite the Latino and Spanish cultural and linguistic ancestry that all church congregants shared, not all Latino cultures are the same. Nonetheless, Mexican culture, in particular, constituted the hegemonic standard; the culture of non-Mexican Latinos was often compared against Mexican culture. Seemingly, everything that was Mexican became the norm through styles of music, dress, idioms, references to holidays, and examples used during sermons. Through language, congregants who spoke dialects were ridiculed. In an example used in a sermon, a Guatemalan congregant had lied about being Mexican at work and

denied his ability to speak his native dialect. The pastor assured this person that it was acceptable to not be Mexican, but that being uncivilized was not. Even if someone came from the most remote village, one was not prevented from acquiring the cultural lessons that are necessary to live comfortably in the U.S. Apparently, professing to be Mexican was often a way for non-Mexican congregants to claim a more civilized status in American society.

Finally, language played a crucial part in PC prayer because through it, God could hear the congregation. Like praise, prayer had also established parameters of adequateness; short prayers lasting about 1-2 minutes were undesirable. Prayer did not need to be complex, methodical, or dogmatic but if it sounded like mere human talk, then it was not sufficient to reach God. Consequently, the prayers God heard were spontaneous and profound; ones that functioned like incantations. The success of personal prayers was dependent on the real necessities of the congregant’s lives; prayers which mainly demonstrated a need for God. As the congregation is almost solely Spanish-speaking, individual and collective prayer unavoidably happened through the employment of Spanish linguistic conventions and structures. Spanish, entangled with the congregant’s needs and a private connection to God through prayer, enabled precise definitions of PC religious practice and experience.

The cultural traditions included in examples used during preaching supported and maintained certain values. There was a strong emphasis on the well-being of the family, of mothers or females caring for children, of fathers or males providing financially, and of finding it discouraging that children lose their customs whilst adjusting to life in the U.S. However, in a PC context, Latino culture became most relevant when it came to evangelizing

or *ganarse* [win over] other Latinos with language, culture, and physical appearance. Various groups organized to evangelize different neighborhoods once every week. Therefore this engagement in “being” Latino through culture necessarily allowed these congregants to bring others like them to PC².

In the value placed on family, Latino culture also differs from Anglo-American culture. When speaking of the gifts of God, it was professed that the homes and families of the congregation would be taken care of. Ideas about the love of Christ and notions of corruption referred to the family’s security although Christ’s love was enabled only when the church functioned like a family. As for corruption, it couldn’t plague “*el verdadero pueblo de Dios*” [the true people of God]. While the congregant’s families remained in their native countries, a valuing of *el pueblo* required conceiving of the congregation as a family.

The church achieved a religious “family” union through belief and faith. Furthermore, notions that the devil constantly spread propaganda to damage such unison were prevalent. Media, parties, dances, idols, and other “paradigms of adolescence” such as the *ritmos satánicos* [Satanic rhythms] of reggae, rap, salsa, merengue, and reggaeton, destroyed unity. Given that salsa, merengue, and reggaeton are music forms invented in the Spanish/Latino culture it could be that as such, certain aspects of Latino culture and PC are incompatible and deemed as noxious. Accordingly, breaking away from these gave the congregants a new religious family whose values functioned within the congregation. As in a family, congregants looked after each other for “*La iglesia tiene que satisfacer, contentar, dignar; como tu familia*” [the church has to satisfy, make content, dignify; like your family].

Similarly, Latin American cultural characteristics have sprung from Catholicism (Stevens-Arroyo 1998); its role in cultivating a PC religious identity was obvious in this congregation. The Catholic practice of confessing sins to a priest functioned to explain PC notions of God’s negotiations with sinners, as he is the necessary and official mediator of an individual and God. However, these references could efficiently emphasize PC teachings only because the congregants were familiar with Catholic traditions of confession. In another instance, it was said that one could not “praise or make any claims to Benedict the Pope or Juan Diego. The only way toward salvation is through Jesus Christ.” The most relevant point here is the mention of Juan Diego, a Mexican cultural icon and saint. Juan Diego was the indigenous man to which *La Virgen de Guadalupe* appeared on the Mt. of Tepeyac in Mexico (Zires 1994). The Juan Diego reference aimed towards a Mexican audience familiar with this story.

Through specifically Mexican and Catholic references used to promote and explain the PC message, this congregation created a type of symbolic space, where tradition, in general, and pentecostalism, more specifically, co-existed at a type of crisscrossing of meaning³. Furthermore, the Mexican references used in explaining the PC message are conceptually and symbolically creating within this congregation, a type of cultural and religious chasm through which congregants are able to create, conceive, and thus realize their own religious and cultural norms.

Latino PC is tied to a search for community that is itself linked to the creation of a religious identity (Sanchez 2003). Because this church reaches out to adherents not just as migrants but as people who wish to be renewed, I have employed Paul Tillich’s conceptions of

religion and culture to reconcile a PC religious identity with a migrant identity (Tillich 1959). Tillich proposes that when faith becomes an act of ultimate concern “in which both the rational and the nonrational elements of...being are transcended (Tillich 1957: 7),” religion and secular culture can combine. The process of how a cultural and religious identity could potentially intertwine borrows from Tillich’s suggestion that religion must play a role at every moment of an individual’s secular life.

In April of 2006, there were opportunities to engage in political action regarding changes in immigration legislation during a local 15,000 person march. But in a tamal-making session at a woman’s home, a group of female congregants agreed that in certain situations God took full control. *The Tamal Committee* who through cooking, discourse, and dialogue acquired financial rewards for the church considered that the march was something that they and the congregation should not participate in.

Social and political involvement, then, seemed unnecessary, and perhaps even wrong, when notions of God taking full control of the congregation’s social and spiritual lives were strong. In addition, because these *tamaladas* took place every week, their status as significant social events should be remarked (de La Peña 1981). Moreover, some scholars have noted that through shared action during culinary activities like the *tamaladas*, a common sense of identity, interests, and values is bolstered as Latinas in the U.S. have often “relied on one another and on their faith ... [and] religious practices permeated everyday routines” (Ruiz 1998: 26). Although the congregation could be simply disinterested in politics because of their own citizenship status (Sanchez 2003), the *tamalada* example challenges conclusions that regard PC as a mere process that preserves the cultural identity of its adherents within

a threatening cultural context (Vasquez 1999). A PC identity, because it has been composed through the linking of migrant-cultural identity and God's will, can be enacted by Latino congregants in alternative ways⁴.

Still, the actual condition of living an uncertain legal status in the U.S. remained important. Often it was said that "*No existe el temor*," [fear does not exist]. But exemplified by the fear of deportation, such fear changed for while "*el estatus migratorio esta resuelto para los fieles*" [the migratory status is resolved for the faithful] this congregation continued to seek tranquility through the notion that the word of God was their own. In this way, fear became something that was only present in "*las amenazas espirituales, estan en las falsas doctrinas o religiones. Los extremos son las amenazas*" [the spiritual threats are in the false doctrines or religions. The extremes are the threats].

Obtaining legal status in the U.S., although a vital issue for the congregants of this church, was not the ultimate trepidation. Even if an uncertain legal status, especially while working, was an imminently powerful threat faced by most congregants, they opted for the belief that the status of a spiritual afterlife was far more important. Along with these beliefs, comments such as "you are not an accident," "there are always exits," and "there is always hope" were introduced frequently. Such notions correspond to claims that Latin American variations of PC help immigrant congregants gain self-worth through feelings of acceptance from the congregation (Ramirez 1999). This is also compatible with conclusions of PC as paradoxical because the congregation is able to encompass multiple beliefs about their actual life situations (Droogers 1991).

Perhaps adding to the paradoxical quality of PC, is the way in which it answered the congregation's prayers

through gaining legal status in the U.S. A spiritual life was of utmost concern and the fruits of faith and PC identity creation and maintenance were expected to principally come through obtaining residency or citizenship in the U.S. Overall, PC conceptions of God's purpose were inescapably tied to every stage of the congregants' secular lives, especially when it came to migrating to the U.S.; "*No existen los accidentes ni las coincidencias con Dios*" [Accidents and coincidences do not exist with God]. Even when some pronounced that "*a mi ni la migra me hecha de aqui*" [Not even the immigration patrol can take me out], it was God who willed each individual's future in the U.S. Thus, some aspects of ethnicity, such as language and tradition, remain strong for the congregation. However, other aspects are not compatible with PC, such as the expressive musical forms of merengue and salsa. It could be that ultimately, such conflict, along with an actual legal uncertainty in the U.S., contributes to the congregants' ethnic ambivalence.

Along with culture, gender has also played a key part in the process of constructing concepts within a context of migration (Parrado 2005). However, previous work examining the role and definition of gender among migrant PC congregations has yielded ambiguous conclusions. PC has both prevented and allowed the maintenance of traditional gender attitudes and roles (Vasquez and Williams 2005). In her detailed study of PC Latino identity, Sanchez found that for women the process of shaping a PC identity required a type of "responsibility, discipline, and submission to authority (2003: 116)," which at the same time often became powerfully enabling. These conclusions make it necessary to question how gender relations unfold in the religious PC context of this particular church. I focus on the subtle ways that women have redefined traditional gender

concepts through a PC framework, and I provide examples and analyses throughout my discussion.

During a youth meeting, unsupervised conversations between members of the opposite sex were said to not be good in the eyes of God. But the casual context in which this statement was uttered indicates that the male youth leader holds strong tendencies against interactions that have not even become actual behavior. In other situations, the church expressed the need to find its members marriage partners. For instance, Karen, a young woman, was told by pastor Juan that she would find a good and *fiel* [faithful] man to marry. Similarly, he told a man of 30 that a woman of a certain color, height, and size appeared at his side. God appeared to know the future marriage partners for all the young people of the church and only if they remained on the "*proposito de Dios*" [the purpose of God].

With the lacing of the most private aspects of the congregants' lives into the preaching, the services directly attach the power of God to the lives and fundamental needs of the individuals in the church. In the Karen example, the perfect man was faithful, which suggests that certain expectations exist for Latino PC men. Regarding the role of religion in ethnic identity and the relationship of religion and gender, Chesnut (1997) found that PC generally provides emotional comfort to women who come to redefine common gender-related cultural crises as literal sicknesses; among these were alcoholism, domestic violence, and adultery or unfaithfulness. Thus, it is important that pastor Juan guarantees Karen that her potential partner will be "healthy" (i.e. faithful) and free from cultural sickness if she remains in the purpose of God.

Expectations that males were more willing to actively participate during bible studies were also apparent. Pastor Juan asked volunteers to explain a bible

verse. After only males raised their hands, he chose a young girl named Erika. The day of the lesson, Erika had a male assistant. As she attempted to speak, the pastor noted her shyness and found her a microphone while she stood silently. The voice of her male helper did not need amplification. Interestingly, other women who answered questions were asked to raise their voices. Squinted eyes accompanied suggestions to raise the voice of the women; suggestions often made even before the voices were actually heard.

Erika's response can raise issues about how women reshape their roles in religious settings. Ebaugh and Chafetz (1999) conclude that a passive resistance of women, realized through silence, could help women like Erika achieve a sense of freedom and liberation in this PC religious context. Precisely because of situations like these, we must attempt to find if silence is the only way that these women redefine gender.

Luce Irigaray, in *The Invisible of the Flesh* (1993), attempts to rediscover the maternal-feminine in the understandings of speech, language, and thought. In bringing this approach to language, Irigaray seeks to reclaim for thought, the "power to signify, a birth of meaning (Irigaray 1993: 184)." Most importantly, Irigaray explains that between the words of a language and their meaning, there must be "openness." To her, language is unable to completely fulfill the *ideal* quality of ideas, leaving an opening between the two. This opening is symbolized and interpreted by the concept of a maternal-feminine flesh of the world, a flesh which unites language and meaning and through which their relation is necessarily possible.

Irigaray's insight provides a way to raise issues about the nature of gender relations in this congregation. The words *hombres* [men] and *hermanos* [brothers] were used by pastor Juan and Veronica to address the congregation most of the

time. Also, when introducing praise leaders, men did not call women sisters; pastor Juan was always introduced as *nuestro pastor* [our pastor], and pastor Veronica was identified as *querida hermana* [beloved sister]. Consequently, we must consider that in the realms of language and action, gender issues could potentially arise. In the interactions of this church, the exclusion of men and women seemed to occur simultaneously in language and in ostensibly implicit actions like eye contact and body language. It could also be that through language and both direct and indirect action, a type of spiritual exclusion through gender difference is ensuing.

The *hermanos* of this congregation are united by a common father Jesus while women, as they are not their *hermanas*, are not part of this unity. But couldn't it be that through such language, this congregation, rather than excluding women and men from each other, is actually just enacting a more general difference of gender⁵? Various examples can elucidate how women continually redefine the concept of gender as well as the consequences that these reconstructions and enactments of difference could have for the men in the congregation. As a start, the women referred to each other as *hermanas*. Thus, similar to scholars who have examined how linguistic labels serve to elevate and both restrict PC women (Wacker 2001), I examine how, by becoming *hermanas* on the levels of language and action, women come to include themselves—along with the *hermanos*—in a realm of spiritual openness that has been created in this congregation.

Concerning this issue, praise becomes a crucial parcel in the discussion of how women recognize each other as *hermanas*. The congregation's three-person band featured a woman as the electric bassist, and during each song, their music, along with the powerpoint projections⁶ and singer improvisations,

resulted in much stage performance tension. In moments when the singer and band did not correspond tonally and rhythmically, they were accompanied by phrases of seemingly desperate *Gloria's* or *Aleluya's* from the congregation. Perhaps because "*La musica es fundamental en el culto de Dios*" [Music is fundamental to the praise of God], the congregation and band frenziedly attempted to bring order to and prevent musical discord during the praise. The responses from the band members and congregation during times when the singing and music were not in sync indicate certain inclinations toward spontaneity. In particular, the women mainly perpetrated the order and tension in their embodiment as singers and musicians during praise. Here is a brief story:

Lupita approached the front and briefly glanced at the congregation, shut her eyes, raised her arms, and thanked the pastors. Without any help from lyrics or guides, she soon had a back-up singer harmonizing with her voice. Conversely, when men would sing in front, they would not have "assistants".

Akin to the bible studies, women had assistants while praising. However, in singing, assistance came strictly from other women congregants. While this could substantiate claims that women are less adroit in symbolically reaching the spiritual realm through thought or theology than through physical or emotional praise⁷, PC worship generally points towards a candid expression of emotion (Wacker 2001). The woman-led praise on stage points to an always-assisted expression of religious emotion.

Because the praise portions of PC emphasize emotional expression and the quality of apparent unpredictability, it is important to acknowledge that such matters still require a type of order

(Wacker 2001). When apparent disorder occurred during praise, restrictions were enacted through singers, music, and the responses of the congregants. These women, although not explicitly inculcated to be so by the pastors, were vociferous and physically vibrant during the average service; they were exceptionally loud during the collective singing of services and bible studies. Their hands went up while their bodies moved to the praise music, as their voices faded in with the others.

It seems that gender expectations and modes of operation for the women congregants have become implicitly linked to their somewhat peripheral, yet not any less significant actions. Not solely in language, nor in direct action, but *through* these, as necessarily linked by seemingly unnoticed and unconscious actions, women engage their PC identity by being potent creators and shapers of gender notions. Through subtle action during praise, the women shift conceptions of gender. Such shifts proceed in the realms of language as well.

A lively spiritual life was often described through *el fuego en el corazon* [the fire in the heart], a metaphor which during a service pastor Juan explained by making allusions to wives cooking meals for their husbands. He said that as with cooking, slow spiritual fires did not work well; one could not be *tibio* [lukewarm] with the fire of God. The pastor's statements, enlightened with typical attitudes of machismo in Latin American culture, were clearly directed towards an audience who recognized and perhaps condoned traditional cultural expectations that women are to cook for their husbands. My claim is that the meaning of the *fuego* metaphor is reversed through the women's *Tamal Committee* which is composed of around 11 women who socialized while cooking tamales every week. Instead of being mere wives cooking for a husband, these

young, single, and working women redefined their roles as active contributors to the financial maintenance and improvement of the PC church mission as hundreds of tamales were sold weekly around the neighborhood.

In this case, women are first excluded from the spiritual fire through metaphors plagued with machismo that equated a spiritual fire with a cooking fire. But women seem to subtly reclaim their position in the congregation's spiritual notions through the action of employing and creating precisely with this *fuego* or fire that yields tamales, and most importantly, brings women into the language, spirit, and action realms of this congregation. Thus, *The Tamal Committee* reclaims a pentecostal spiritual fire through specifically cultural means.

The *hermanas* have redefined notions of gender in very subtle and almost indiscernible ways⁸, and I suggest that these slight actions have been the most powerful in the restructuring of gender dynamics for this congregation. But perhaps the most obvious way that gender conceptions were redefined was through pastor Veronica's preaching. When she would preach, she gave disclaimers of not being good enough, even as her preaching seemed well-reasoned and structured—contrary to claims that consider that PC has been disastrous to the life of the mind and thus leaves PC unable to engage people intellectually (Noll 1994). Unlike the style of male preachers, hers rarely invited the congregation to raise the hands or say hallelujah. During an interview, she mentioned her wish for people to “reason” along with her interpretation of the word. Pastor Veronica's approach attempted to simply explain, study, and closely read the bible to potentially understand, along with feeling the word of God as true. One of Pastor Veronica's statements perhaps best demonstrates the potential to shift

concepts through her preaching: “*La busqueda hace la diferencia, tienes que buscar a Dios si no te quedas en el mismo nivel*” [the search makes the difference, you have to seek God, if not, you stay on the same level].

Although not always on stage, but always among themselves, the women of this congregation become spiritual *hermanas* through language and action. Most importantly, the entire congregation engages in this process of becoming *hermanas*, as the men also participate in the praise that the women lead. Hence, the congregants are able to create a realm in which spiritual matters are dealt with through language, action, and the redefining of gender notions and other concepts. The concept of gender as difference⁹, and not as mere exclusion, grants the women of this congregation the potential of reshaping gender notions in a PC context through cultural means. As this reshaping happens on collective levels during praise and services with pastor Veronica's preaching for instance, the entire congregation is involved in the creation of such concepts. Pastor Veronica's embodiment as the bible study/theological notion-bringer, and the women congregants involved peripherally through praise action and directly through *The Tamal Committee* and singing, are relentlessly stirring the power of difference that is necessary for any group of people to remain in the process of changing and revitalizing thought, language, action, and spirit.

Conclusions and Discussion

Latin American pentecostals arrive at new conceptions of their individual and social identities through their engagement and experience as Latinos in the U.S. (Stoll 1990). Most precisely, it is through the intertwining of religion and culture that the PC message is able to proceed (Tillich 1959). Latino PC is tied to the search

for community (Sanchez 2003) and, in turn, this community is often framed by language, traditions, and the potential of constructing and reshaping concepts like culture, identity, and gender. Although the diverse cultural and ethnic makeup of the U.S. has made Latino versions of PC an inevitability (Sanchez 2003), it seems that local congregations such as House of Espiritu, Inc. preserve a relative connection to the more general PC model that values the free expression of emotion. Such emotion

perhaps has taken up “its culturally pluralistic environment to socially construct subcultural distinction, engagement, and tension” which concurrently is able to infuse PC with vitality (Smith 1998: 121).

But practice, experience, and emotional expression alone do not determine PC since in the basic urge to understand one’s individual and social condition along with notions of God, certain beliefs and practices begin to take more definite forms (Jacobsen

2003). Ultimately, along with its vast subcultural manifestations (Blumhofer 1993), PC provides its adherents “(even if in isolation or expulsion) ... a content for ...ultimate concern (Tillich 1957: 27);” a concern which is not necessarily sequestered from secular or cultural life (Tillich 1959) but works through and with it by virtue of a recognition and valuing of the difference that exists not only in the ethnicity and culture of all people, but also in their thought, language, and potential action.

¹ Defined as the social product of our language abilities (de Saussure 1983).

² It was said that God had made the congregants in a certain way just so they could evangelize other Latinos. The group who evangelized for instance included girls who wore bracelets displaying their nation’s flag and young men who placed flag decals on their cars.

³ This interpretation is influenced by Bourdieu’s insights (1991) and various works on religious and cultural production (Leon 1999).

⁴ Therefore allowing the congregants to abstain from enacting or in this case “reacting” a Latino identity by solely engaging in local protests and marches within a threatening legal context. Latino or cultural identity, when linked to PC identity, results in alternative ways of interacting with the surrounding environment.

⁵ It would be unfounded to merely grant that the women of this congregation are powerless in the realms of thought, language, and action.

⁶ which changed as song lyrics were switched, spellings corrected, and often re- misspelled.

⁷ Both Blumhofer (1993) and Wacker (2001) have made comparable assertions about women and PC.

⁸ Through traditions (tamal-cooking), peripheral actions (emotional expression during praise), and language (referring each other as hermanas).

⁹ My analyses are influenced by various notions advanced by Irigaray (2004).

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