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La Familia versus The Family: Matriarchal Patriarchies in Peruvian Mormonism

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Abstract. By sacralizing the Western categories of gender and kinship and by exalting the husband-centric, nuclear version of family, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints not only alienated its transgender and feminist members, but also its Peruvian families. This study employs ethnographic encounters, kinterm linguistics, and home décor analysis to situate the existence of Peruvian Mormon matriarchies in the context of a phallogocentric religion that spanned two strikingly different, patriarchal societies: one in the Southern Andes of Peru and the other in the US state of Utah. Thus situated, the article then dwells on the transcribed oral history of Ofelia, a Peruvian single mother who utilized the power of the male-only Mormon priesthood to preside over her household as the acting matriarch. Ofelia's fealty to patriarchy during the very enactment of forbidden priestesshood brings to the fore the profound contradictions that some Peruvian Mormons in the late 2010s disentangled as they sought to become legible to their church as participants in eternal families.

When marriage is undermined by gender confusion and by distortions of its God-given meaning, the rising generation of children and youth will find it increasingly difficult to develop their natural identities as men or women, . . . to engage in wholesome courtships, form stable marriages, and raise another generation imbued with moral strength and purpose (The Church 2016, para. 36).

Gender Confusion

Gender works differently for Peruvian Mormons than it does for Anglo Mormons. This can cause "gender confusion" of a sort to which the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was probably not referring in the above quotation. I am an Anglo Mormon.¹ I married a Peruvian Mormon inside the holy walls of the Salt Lake City temple in 2001. Despite our both being cisgendered

¹I use the term "Anglo" to refer to the group called "white people" in common US parlance because Anglo is the term that my Peruvian Mormon study participants used. It does not necessarily imply Anglo-Saxon ancestry.

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individuals with lifestyles that matched our societies' gendered expectations, we differed in the phenomena that we placed into the category of "gender." Far from undermining our marriage, such difference was precisely what made ours a "stable marriage" but only in as much as we ignored our religion's drive to value my Anglo, male way of categorizing "gender" above my partner's Peruvian, female way. Amalgamating our gendered ways, we built what we both categorized as "family."

From 2014 to 2020, I conducted a research project involving my partner's large family, hereafter, *La Familia*, many members of which attended a Spanish-speaking Mormon ward (congregation) in a small, upper middle-class suburb in northern Utah that I pseudonymously dubbed "Salsands" in my dissertation (Palmer, 2021a). Our nuclear family officially joined that ward for six months in 2017 before we moved to the mid-Andean city of Arequipa, Peru seeking an ethnographic counterpoint to my partner's family. We found it in a congregation of *arequipeño* Mormons who had stayed in Peru rather than emigrating to Utah. Though my anthropological sensibilities were originally drawn to the migration of families between Peru and Utah in the context of Utah's dominant institution, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter, the church), I quickly realized that the "God-given meaning" of family itself was the more interesting migrant.

Most of my Peruvian Mormon study participants agreed wholeheartedly with the above epigraph and appeared to share, at first glance, the same transphobic sentiment that undergirded the anonymous committee of Anglo Mormons who wrote it and published it on the church's official website. Most Peruvian Mormons with whom I worked, prayed, and partied were not patient with "gender confusion" when they considered that confusion to be a threat to the polarity of "gender" as a load-bearing cultural category in their version of Mormonism. However, if my Peruvian Mormon friends and family would have taken the above epigraph out of its transphobic context and applied it to their own living situations—which I am provocatively deeming "matriarchal"—they would have found in it an instantiation of the myriad ways in which their church pathologized Peruvian family types just as severely as it demonized gender-nonconforming bodies. After all, from an official Mormon standpoint, gender was a simple dichotomous hierarchy, not a complexly complementary polarization as it was for many non-Mormon Peruvians in my study. Furthermore, for the church, only a hierarchy with a patriarch at the apex could imbue the Mormon category of gender "with moral strength and purpose."

In the least Hispanicized portions of the Andes during my study, there was no category remotely similar to what the West called “gender” (Marín Benítez 2015). Yet there was also no real category for “Hispanicized” because that depended on Western conceptions of linear time that textually concretized events (MacCormack 1991). For example, the Spanish colonized the inhabitants of Arequipa in 1540 “after” the Incas colonized them in 1350 but “before” Arequipa was flooded with migrants from Potosi in the late 1600s when the silver mines faltered (Museo Cultural de Arequipa, n.d.). Fundamental cultural categories of spacetime and personhood amalgamated further under “subsequent” migrations, including a large and ongoing migration from the Aymara-speaking, *altiplano* cities of Juliaca and Puno (Durand 2010) where traditional dances often included a carnivalesque form of gender transvestism (Roper 2019). The resulting vortex of conceptual and temporal admixture that was 2018 Arequipa made it difficult for Anglo Mormons, and Anglo Mormon anthropologists, to apply the unquestioned, supposedly universal archetypes of “kinship” and “gender” to understanding the lives of the approximately one million *arequipeños*, let alone the distinct subset of approximately 20,000 *arequipeños* who were devout Mormons, participating in near-daily activities in any one of Arequipa’s 25 Utah-built chapels (meeting houses).

As an Anglo Mormon anthropologist of Peruvian Mormonism, I was unable to define the *arequipeño* Mormon version of the category that lay somewhere askance of gender and kinship by what it was. I could only define it by what it was not. It was not *arequipeño*, it was not *cusqueño*, and it was certainly not *limeño*. While *arequipeño* Mormons were proud of their distinction from those societies, they, like all Peruvian Mormons, were concerned about what else their version of family was not: It was not Anglo. It was neither hierarchal nor patriarchal, which made it, in the Anglo Mormon mindset, immoral, weak, purposeless, and, in the words of the first Anglo Mormon to encounter Peruvians, “sick” (Pratt 1888, 447).

The church’s pathologizing of the categories foundational to the Peruvian family created an ironic tension when Peruvians became Mormons, and that tension deepened into a contradiction when those Peruvian Mormons formed Peruvian Mormon families with matriarchs at the helm. In this article, I explore that contradiction—the contradiction of matriarchal patriarchies.

Unethical Methodologies

That was not, however, the specific contradiction that I set out to explore in my original IRB-approved project proposal. I designed a study to ethnographical-

ly track how transnational Mormon migrant families navigated holy regimes of state sovereignty, geographic inequality, and Mormon kin concepts between Peru and Utah. During a period of 12 months of full-time anthropological fieldwork, I conducted research at congregational activities, public events, and private homes across two sites for six months each: first in Salsands, Utah and then in Arequipa, Peru. As an already baptized Mormon, I had my membership records officially transferred to the Mormon ward assigned to my places of temporary residence in both Utah and Peru. Joining each ward, run by lay clergy, entailed accepting a “calling” or responsibility, becoming a “home teacher” tasked with visiting a list of Mormon families within each ward’s cartographic boundaries, performing rituals, proselyting, and participating in all religious, recreational, educational, and civic activities. In these congregational contexts, I was an “observing participant” (Bernard 2011, 260) in sacred place-making as well as a participant observer. Most of the people in my study were not “recruited”; rather, their participation was a natural outgrowth of our being members of the same congregation or family. As a result of my active participation in these wards, the bulk of my interactions tended to be with Mormons exhibiting extremely high levels of religiosity. Unfortunately, the lives of Peruvian Mormons whose unorthodox conceptions of gender and kinship marginalized them to the extent of precluding their church attendance were usually beyond the scope of my study. However, the lives of Peruvian non-Mormons whom I met during daily living in Arequipa, and the lives of Mormon non-Peruvians whom I met during daily living in Utah, became vital counterpoints that aided my understanding of how distinct Peruvian Mormon society was from both Peruvian society and Utah Mormon society.

For interviewees, I used convenience sampling and received informed consent for all audio, visual, and textual data with the understanding that I would protect participants’ identities using pseudonyms and, if necessary, composite characters. The bishops of both wards approved of my project and, since introducing oneself from the pulpit to the membership as a whole was customary for newcomers to Mormon wards, I announced my problematic dual purpose for joining each ward as being both academic and spiritual. My presence as an anthropologist made Sunday school lessons into focus groups even as my presence as an “elder”—a holder of the male-only priesthood—turned semi-formal interviews into ritual healings. Throughout my encounters with in-laws, coreligionists, and strangers, my study participants became my Sisters and Brothers (Mormon kin titles of respect). We became a “ward family” (Black 2016).

Did this give me, an Anglo Mormon patriarch, the right of representation over the people whom I deemed Peruvian Mormon matriarchs? I will deconstruct this question by first examining the term “matriarchy.” Matriarchy technically means rule by mothers. In this sense it functions grammatically within a gender binary as if it were the antonym of patriarchy, rule by fathers. In Western anthropology, there has been extensive debate on whether matriarchy in this absolute, binary sense has ever been observed in any human society (Kuznar 2008). Some anthropologists considered matrilineality—the kin system wherein property was passed through the maternal line—to be indicative of female rule (Sanday 2003). Others pointed out that the few societies that white, male, armchair ethnologists counted as scientifically matrilineal often did not, on the ground, give females any greater access to power than the globe’s most patrilineal societies (Debevec 2019). In both of those views, matriarchy was made rare.

I was attracted to that which was rare. Therefore, I was happy to categorize what I saw among my Peruvian Mormon study participants as matriarchy. I, along with “self-aware, feminist and indigenous women researchers” (Goettner-Abendroth 2017, 3), define matriarchy as any aspect of a society that is not quite patriarchy, meaning anything that pertains to “women-centered forms of society” (3).

How did my Peruvian Mormon study participants define their own system of familial government? They did not define it at all. The question of how to classify Peruvian Mormon family types was utterly unimportant to them. For one thing, they did not even “identify as” Peruvian Mormons. That was a label that I assigned to them, and it was a highly problematic one given how different *arequipeño* Mormonism was from, say, *cusqueño* Mormonism. Moreover, like most people, “Peruvian Mormons” were not worried about how to taxonomize their own kinship system because they took it for granted. The obsession with taxonomizing was mine. This mismatch between what my study participants considered important and what I considered important, combined with the conundrum of representation, appeared to make my project quite unethical.

I had an ethical end in mind. I was trying to expose what I believed to be a racist and misogynistic regime, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Yet, as a cog in that regime, I could not expose it without replicating it. Vine Deloria (1969) wrote that American “Indians have been cursed above all other people in history,” (78) not because they have the generational trauma of

genocidal centuries, but because “Indians have anthropologists” (78). In this vein, Peruvian women had Anglo Mormons, and to make matters worse, they had a male Anglo Mormon anthropologist who called them “Peruvian Mormon matriarchs.” Embracing these dubious ethics, I wield “Peruvian Mormon matriarch” as less a subject category than as a counterhegemonic, alternate way of doing anthropology.

Marilyn Strathern (1980), the elite, white Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for services to Social Anthropology, made vital contributions to the study of kinship and gender. She cracked the universalistic façade of what turned out to be a very situated, British kinship sensibility by wielding her knowledge of a group in Papua New Guinea she essentialized as “The Hagen,” named after a German colonial officer. I am not one to judge whether the ends justified the means in her case, but I doubt their justification in mine. Coming from a position of US whiteness, I will get things dramatically wrong. Furthermore, my heteronormative, cisgender maleness limits my perspective. For example, in this article, I focus on single motherhood as I inadvertently reinscribe a Peruvian racial discourse—*neoindianismo*—through my “portrayal of *mestizas* as ‘matriarchs by default’ allow[ing] these women to enter the pantheon of [*indianismo*] as a ‘typical folklore’ attraction” (De la Cadena 2000, 239).

Most elite representatives of Arequipa’s twentieth-century racial discourses considered themselves radically anti-racist. Still, each did little more than revamp the requirements of ascension on centuries-old hierarchies of difference that stigmatized those who had more recently migrated to the city from villages at higher elevations. This article—by its very nature an elitist document—cannot but do the same. However, rather than hiding my reinscriptions of the very sexism that I am trying to combat, I offer them as a “critical case” (Flyvbjerg 2006). If an Anglo Mormon anthropologist with my level of critical consciousness can still not manage to stop perpetuating sexism, then the LDS Church, led by critically unaware Anglo Mormons, has a problem. Highlighting this problem by depicting the contradictory resistance strategies of the people who bore its brunt will hopefully produce solutions that eventually outweigh the racism and sexism of the highlighting process. That a positive outcome can stem from the unethical power dynamics that arise when those who embody oppression cross boundaries to help those whom they consider oppressed is not without precedent. After outlining the sexism that pervades Paulo Freire’s boundary-crossing work, bell hooks (1994) wrote,

[I]f we really want to create a cultural climate where biases can be challenged and changed, all border crossings must be seen as valid and legitimate. This does not mean that they are not subjected to critique or critical interrogation, or that there will not be many occasions when the crossings of the powerful into the terrains of the powerless will perpetuate existing structures. This risk is ultimately less threatening than a continued attachment to and support of existing systems of domination. (131)

Therefore, while my research question involving matriarchy is unethical in that it was not of concern to my study participants, I do have an overarching research question that was of vital concern to them: How can Peruvian Mormon kinship become legible as fully Mormon?

Almost Family, But Not Quite

One result of the mismatch between Mormonism and *peruanidad* (Peruvianness) during my study was that, from the church's standpoint, Peruvians were never "fully" Mormon. In much the same way that Indians under British colonialism were seen as "the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized, is emphatically not to be English" (Bhabha 1984, 128), Anglo Mormons saw Peruvian Mormons as perpetually "almost, *but not quite*," (127) Mormon. In a different religion, such as Pentecostalism, it would not have mattered what Anglo parishioners thought of their Peruvian coreligionists' discipleship on the other side of the globe. But in Mormonism—a religion with a core-to-periphery, colonializing framework—Anglo Mormons got to decide what counted as discipleship worldwide (Brooks 2018). Unfortunately for Peruvians, and for most people in the world who wanted to qualify for entry into the highest of Mormon heavens in the afterlife, Anglos decided that what counted was the patriarchal, patrifocal, stay-at-home-mom, US, nuclear family.

In 1995, in a single-page document, *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* (hereafter, *The Family*), the church's First Presidency stipulated that a true family should only consist of six kinterms, two of which overlapped in the same individuals: husband (father), wife (mother), son, and daughter. Nowhere did the document mention any other kinterm. *The Family* proclamation, written as though coming from the voice of God, did not even mention "sister" or "brother" despite the important role those kinterms played in the primordial realm wherein all humans were literal spirit siblings to each other

and spirit children to God and His wife (or wives). *The Family* was part of a wave of homophobia that swept the US at the turn of the twenty-first century. It was widely criticized for its delegitimizing of LGBTQI+ families (meli 2013). What often went unnoticed, however, was its delegitimizing of most Peruvian families and, for that matter, most Earthling families, especially those in the Earth's Global South.

In official Mormon interplanetary cosmology, once a spirit from a planet called “the preexistence” had inhabited a body on Earth, it was forever biologized into the lineage of that body under a Eurocentric kin idiom: “blood.” Therefore, after a person died, their spirit, as an individual with a name and dates, would forever fall into a specific, numbered slot on a modern arboreal flowchart of vertical blood descent. That spirit would become an “ancestor” on the “lineage” of a specific living “descendant” who, forever after, would be able to capture that static relationship visually on the church’s genealogical website, FamilySearch.org.

In Peru, this Western kinship model was hegemonic in most legal, scientific, and political contexts during my study. However, I got the sense in the Andean highlands, even in the cities, that the substance that connected humans together as families was not so much shared “blood” as it was shared food and drink (Roberts 2012). In Anglo Mormonism, proper kinship was only established at the moment two partners met in temple marriage or at the moment their two gametes met in conception. In Peruvian Mormonism, those two sorts of meetings were important, but added to them was a third and just as legitimate form of kin establishment: living, eating, and dancing together in place and over time. This meant that the model of vertical blood descent, fixated as it was on whose sexual relationship produced which offspring, clashed quite dramatically with Peruvian Mormon notions of kinship that were based on what anthropologist, Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) called “immanent obligation” (28).

In many Peruvian Mormon families, this obligation was based on a situated, cyclical reciprocity and indebtedness that was felt equally among all in the kin group. It was not divided between a “nuclear family” and an “extended family,” and these expressions had little meaning in Peru. *The Family*, however, made the division between the nuclear family and the extended family extremely stark. Ninety-nine percent of the document was spent narrowly defining the patriarch-led nuclear family as the ideal family type for “the world.” One percent was reserved for the purpose of reminding the world what the

precious nuclear family needed to be defined against: the “extended family.” The document summarily delegitimized the immensity of family inherent to immanent obligation by reducing it to single glib sentence, “Extended families should lend support when needed” (The First Presidency 1995, para. 7). In so doing, *The Family* made *La Familia* (my in-laws) officially illegible as “family” in Mormonism.

There is no direct translation for “extended family” in Spanish. It was antithetical to both Hispanic kinways and Andean ones. Therefore, the church’s official Spanish translation of the above line in *The Family* used the phrase “*otros familiares*” (other family members), presumably referring to family members assigned kinterms other than the six that mattered to the church, such as the vital Spanish kinterms of *prima*, *tío*, *abuela*, *entenario*, *sobrino*, *ahijada*, *comadre*, or *concuña*. None of those terms had English equivalents that came anywhere close to matching them in valence and power, which was why, during my study, members of *La Familia*’s English-preferring younger generation born and raised in Utah often switched to Spanish for those kinterms even when speaking to monolingual English-speakers. Perhaps more significantly, they did the same with *familia*. “Family” did not do it justice.

Ironically, even though it did not allow their matriarch-led collectivities to count as families, Peruvian Mormon *familias* cherished *The Family*. Part of my study involved home décor photography. I photographed the walls of 20 different Peruvian Mormon homes, 10 in Utah and 10 in Peru, and conducted a content analysis. Inhabitants took me on tours through the decision-making processes behind the decorations that they considered most important. This was meant to be an adaptation on “behavior trace studies” (Bernard 2011, 330), which are archaeological studies of people based on the objects they manipulate. When these objects are religious, the analysis can reveal how religious practice matches proclaimed belief (Mazumdar & Mazumdar 1997).

The only aspect that all 20 homes had in common was their prominent display of *The Family*. Whether it was a water-damaged document tacked up in an unmarried Aymara-speaking mother’s leaking tenement in Arequipa or an expensively framed document centrally hung in a young conjugal couple’s new townhouse in Salsands, *The Family* functioned as sacred iconography in Peruvian Mormon homes. Given its pathologizing of those homes, *The Family*’s sacralization inside them seemed to me dizzyingly contradictory.

The juxtaposition of *The Family*’s patriarchal content with its worshipful placement as sacra in female-led Peruvian homes became even more dizzying

when that content was ritualized. *The Family* was a mere document, and a relatively recent, not officially canonized one at that. However, its stipulation that a true family consisted only of a married heterosexual couple and their cohabiting minor offspring would stand for eternity because those relationships were also the only ones that could be ritually bound in Mormon temples during my study. In the next life, families would not be whole (the etymological twin of holy) unless their relationships had been made eternal through a rite called a “sealing” that could only take place inside a temple. In their temples (one of the few earthly locations that my Mormon study participants considered holy) only two sorts of relationships could be sealed—husband-wife and couple-child. This meant that Mormons for whom other relationships took precedence could not be with their loved ones in the afterlife. The mother-daughter relationship, for example, could not be “sealed” in the holy temple unless it could be first connected to a husband (Palmer 2020).

For the many single mothers born and raised in contexts of generational single motherhood whom I met during this study in the *arequipeño* congregation that I will call *Barrio Periféricos*, their need for patriarchy in order to achieve a family legible as fully “Mormon” seemed impossibly incompatible with their very non-patriarchal lifeways. The question that I will now explore is this: How did Peruvian Mormons attempt to make their kinways compatible with Mormon patriarchy so that their “almost” Mormon *familias* could be included as completely Mormon families while still retaining their *peruanidad*?

Mi Mami Ofelia or Mi Mamá Marisol?

Ofelia Dominguez was a single mother whom I met in *Barrio Periféricos* on my very first preliminary trip to Arequipa in 2016. Ofelia’s faithful Mormon discipleship together with her independence from patriarchy—in a religion that depended on it—made her life an ideal laboratory for the above question involving inclusion into full Mormon status. Ofelia, a proudly Indigenous *arequipeña*, a Mormon, and a single mother, came up geographically short of full inclusion according to a Peruvian racism that privileged those from the “white” coast over those from the “brown” highlands (De la Cadena 2000). She also came up biologically short according to a scientific hegemony that considered matrilineality an earlier stage of human evolution than patrilineality (Peters-Golden 2012). Finally, she came up psychologically short according to the anonymous Anglo Mormon males who wrote this article’s epigraph. Those leaders would consider her lifestyle symptomatic of a neurotic “gender

confusion”—not of gender identity, but of gender role. As Ofelia navigated the stigma of her singleness and her matriarchy, her experiences exposed the fundamental misogyny that made Mormonism’s obsession with the nuclearization of family far more disruptive than its innocent entronement in *The Family* let on.

Though I visited Ofelia’s home dozens of times, she never invited me beyond the curtained-off front room, and she never explained to me how it was possible that her mother (a “less-active” Mormon), her mother’s absentee husband (a non-Mormon), and a constantly variable assortment of her nine siblings and half-siblings with their spouses, kids, and in-laws, managed to fit into what looked from the street to be a one-story building. Inside, it must have been like so many other ostensibly small homes that I had entered before in Peru, homes that opened into a multiplanar labyrinth of finished and unfinished dwellings, courtyards, and annexes. In many such cases of coresident siblingship among Peruvians in Peru and Utah, living arrangements ended up looking a lot like those found in societies that anthropologists deemed more or less “matriarchal.” In those societies, such as the Minangkabau of Sumatra (Sanday 2003) or the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea (Weiner 1988), daughters were not “related” to fathers, and society was structured so that sons would live in the households of their mothers-in-law (matrilocality) while maintaining responsibility for their sisters’ children. Peru’s major cities had no such social structures during my study. Nevertheless, because multigenerational single motherhood in Latin America was quite common, many Peruvians ended up living their whole lives in complex configurations of buildings upon buildings—each with its own matriarch or occasional patriarch—ultimately controlled, and in many cases legally owned, by a high matriarchal figure whom, in the case of Ofelia’s household, all kin called “*Mamá Marisol*.”

Since those who ate enough meals in the same home were often considered kin in the Andes (Weismantel 1995), the four full-time Mormon missionaries who ate three meals daily in Ofelia’s home called her “*Mami*.” Yet, to distinguish between the two matriarchs, they called Ofelia’s mother “*Mamá Marisol*,” as did the ten teenage seminary students who met in her home at 5:45 every morning. *Mamá* and *mami* in Arequipa were almost exclusively used in contexts of established kinship or active kin-building. Unlike other Andean urban centers such as La Paz, in Arequipa, *mamá* and its derivatives were not used as self-deprecating entreaties between strangers on the street.

Arequipeños usually used a different term for that purpose: “*seño*,” short for *señora*. In order to use kinterm analysis as evidence that Peruvian Mormon homes like Ofelia’s were indeed controlled by matriarchs even when Mormon priesthood power-holding males were present, it is important to elucidate further the hard work that kinterms perform in relatedness.

In Australia, “obligations to family expressed in idioms of kinship carry a great deal of weight in affirming one’s cultural identity as properly, authentically Aboriginal” (Fisher 2009, 15). Likewise, being able to use the unique title “*Mamá Marisol*” to refer to the person that other members of *Barrio Periféricos* had to call “*Hermana Cuadros*” set members of Ofelia’s home apart as authentic sharers of a special union. My Mormon study participants in general were highly cognizant of the unifying power of kinterms. They delighted in alerting potential converts to the fact that, unlike other religions, Mormonism used the titles “Brother” and “Sister” to recall a primordial nuclear spirit-family that included all humans under one universal sibblingship. However, Anglo Mormons fractured that universality during my study. They called each other “Sister” at church, but at home they divided that moniker into sectors: “half-sister,” “biological sister,” and “like-a sister.” Peruvian Mormons made no such distinctions. All three of the above relationships were “*hermana*” in an equally literal sense.

Not only were Peruvian Mormons more inclusive with their kinterms than Anglo Mormons, but they were more cognizant of kinterms’ power to evoke and revoke relatedness. For example, it was a sign of respect to invariably refer to one’s Aunt Nilda as “*Tía Nilda*” when speaking to her, or “*Mi Tía Nilda*” when speaking about her, even to people for whom she was equally an aunt. This oneness with the kinterm “aunt” expressed in the word “my” involved an important linguistic awareness in Latin American Spanish that did not exist in English as to what counted as part of oneself. For example, the literal translation of the English phrase, “I broke my leg” in Spanish would be, “I broke *the* leg.” Therefore, one’s leg was less a part of oneself in Spanish than it was in English.

Relatives, on the other hand, were more a part of oneself in Spanish than they were in English. When speaking of the same mother, two English-speaking siblings might have the following conversation: “When did Mom tell us to be back?” “I don’t know, Mom is always changing the curfew.” However, a literal translation of a Latin American Spanish conversation would read, “When did *my* mom tell us to be back?” “I don’t know, *my* mom is always changing the

curfew.” To Anglophone ears, the Spanish conversation sounds as though each interlocutor is talking about a different mother. “My” sounds either confusing or superfluous to people who consider themselves to be highly individuated selves. However, for Peruvians and other speakers of Latin American Spanish, “my” sounds endearing and respectful. Though “my” is not grammatically necessary in the above hypothetical conversation, it is part of the speakers’ “immanent obligation” to the mother-child relationship. The two siblings share the same mother, so they are not using “my” to draw a semantic boundary dividing “my mother” from “your mother.” Instead, they are using “my” in order to encapsulate themselves, their siblings, and their mutual mother under one bond, one “self”—and, in the case of many adult Peruvian Mormons in both Peru and Utah, one roof.

As mentioned, I married into a large Peruvian Mormon family comprising over 150 individuals who all lived within a five-mile radius of each other in and around Salsands, Utah. This family—*La Familia*, as they called themselves, or “the Costa family,” as their coreligionists called them—was led by Jacoba Arriátegui and Arcadio Costa (in that order) who had been married for over 60 years and who had immigrated from Lima to New Jersey in the 1980s. They joined the LDS Church, moved to Utah, and ended up forming the central node on a complex network of chain migration that, to this day, helps an average of four more members of *La Familia* to emigrate from Peru annually.

During my time in Salsands’ only Spanish-speaking congregation (of any religion), the Pioneer Trail Ward, Jacoba’s 50-year-old son Santiago married Teresa, a Peruvian Mormon woman whom he petitioned with a fiancée visa. My mother-in-law, Nilda, Jacoba’s sister (technically half-sister), was at their wedding reception in the Pioneer Trail Ward chapel in July 2017. The groom, my *primo* Santiago, had harbored anger against his aunt Nilda for years and often showed it by calling her “Nilda” to her face, omitting the “*Tía*.” Few epithets could have been more harmful. During the wedding reception, to signify his readiness for diplomacy, he simply came up to her and said, “*Tía* Nilda,” and she knew that the fight was over. It would not occur to most Peruvians to discard a kin title in order to insult even the most despised relative. That it did occur to Santiago was likely due to his biculturalism. In contrasting Anglo and Peruvian kinways, he knew how to hit a Peruvian where it would hurt the most: linguistically revoking her relatedness to *La Familia*.

In family communications, the resilience of kin titles demonstrated just how solid relatedness could remain despite profound disagreements. If fur-

ther rhetorical solidification was desired, however, third-person pronouns were commandeered. I recorded a Peruvian Mormon saying, “please tell *Mi Comadre* Hilda that I want *Mi Comadre* Hilda to let me borrow *Mi Comadre* Hilda’s dress for the baptism next week.” Repeatedly naming the relationship increased the chances that the dress-lending obligations connected to it would not be forgotten.

“*Comadre*” labeled a Catholic relationship between a mother and her daughter’s godmother. It was not a “blood” kinterm or a “Mormon” kinterm. Yet, as its common usage in my recorded, transcribed, and coded conversations with Peruvian Mormons makes clear, kinterms in Peruvian Mormonism symbolized something beyond blood and religion. In 2017, I saw Lorna and her sister Nilda sitting together at a party in Utah when Jacoba’s grandson handed them each an invitation to his temple sealing ceremony or “temple wedding.” His name was Jericó. He was born and raised in Utah. Nilda’s envelope simply stated “Nilda Lloyd” while Lorna’s was addressed to “*Tía* Lorna.” Nilda was Jericó’s biological great-aunt, yet he had experienced almost no contact with her due to a feud that kept her away from *La Familia* for most of his life. On the other hand, Lorna, Nilda’s half-sister from a coupling other than the one that produced Jacoba, was not a “blood relative” of Jericó but lived under the same roof with him when he was young. Lorna noted the difference between the envelopes and gloated to Nilda, “I’m sure it’s no big deal, it’s just that I have a closer relationship to Jericó. You are only Nilda Lloyd, but I am *Tía*.”

This is all to say that Peruvian Mormons noticed kinterms and did not wield them carelessly. They constantly and consciously weighed their meanings and valences. One day in 2018, Ofelia stepped away momentarily during an interview at her home in Arequipa. While she was gone, some *Barrio Periféricos* members knocked on the door. Ofelia’s daughter, Shannon, answered and, as my recorder was still on, I captured the following exchange:

Visitor: Just coming to see your *mami*.

Shannon: *Mi Mami* Ofelia or *Mi Mamá* Marisol?

Visitor: Mari—Ofel—eh, well, your *mami*—Ofelia.

Shannon: *Mi Mami* Ofelia?

Shannon had two mothers because, in 2018 Arequipa, the distinguished title “*Mamá*” could refer to people who were not biological mothers to those who invoked it. This usage did not lessen the literal sense of motherhood involved. “*Mamá*” followed by the first name was a combination only neces-

sary in situations where two mother figures, one of whom was a grandmother, raised many of the household's third generation. When the grandmother died, that generation would continue using the *Mamá*/first name combination for their own biological mother out of habit. The fourth generation would grow up hearing that, so the title would stick, especially if that generation was also being raised by two mother figures.

"*Mamá* Marisol," coming from Shannon, Marisol's granddaughter, indicated that she was in at least the fourth cycle of grandmothers raising granddaughters. Conversely, in Jacoba's case, though she clearly presided over the Costa family, I never heard kin refer to her as "*Mamá* Jacoba" because her kids grew up in New Jersey completely isolated from other generations of their family. She was the only mother that they knew. Shannon referred to her grandmother as "*Mamá* Marisol" rather than "*abuela*" (grandmother) because "*Mamá*" had become an honorific used by all coresident kin regardless of their precise relationship to Marisol. Essentially, it meant "Matriarch Marisol." In this way, among many of my study participant families, *Mamá*, followed by the first name, was a hereditary title bequeathed to the most senior female of the household. There was no male equivalent for that title in these families because it was solidified through generations of single motherhood with only sporadic instances of coresident fatherhood. Marisol was married, but nobody called her husband "*Papá* Eliseo," though some kin called him "*papá*" and others "*abuelo*." Through the linguistics of kinterms, Marisol was semiotically solidified as a matriarch as opposed to merely a mother or a grandmother. Eliseo, on the other hand, was merely a father and a grandfather, not a patriarch.

Out-of-wedlock Pride

A matriarch related to Jacoba (though not by "blood") whom all kin, including myself, called "*Mamá* Marina" before her death in 2016, was at least the second in what had become five generations of single motherhood in *La Familia*. The last two of those generations existed happily within Mormonism. Since this single motherhood often meant out-of-wedlock childbirth, its happy existence inside a faithful Mormon family surprised me. Perhaps the Peruvian immigrant context should have lessened the surprise since statistically on US sociological surveys, "Latinos/as are more accepting of non-marital childbearing than Whites" (Sarkisian and Gerstel 2012, 30). Still, given my judgmental Mormon upbringing, I was baffled as to how the Costa family, being Mormon, could be so accepting of Jacoba's granddaughter Corina and her out-

of-wedlock baby, Elena. I sat down with Jacoba's sister Nilda to reflect on the deep kinship differences this acceptance appeared to expose between Peruvian Mormonism and Anglo Mormonism. I took notes after our conversation:

Corina was even the bishop's daughter at the time [a bishop is a Mormon congregation's highest leader]. They put photos of Elena's birth on the Pioneer Trail Ward's Facebook page, and there was Corina's father, Bishop Zeballos, smiling in the maternity ward cradling his new granddaughter even though everybody in Pioneer Trail knew that the baby's father was not married to Corina. The way Corina was treated throughout her pregnancy and the way everybody treats Elena now is the opposite of stigma.

It is pride.

The Costas are proud of Corina for bringing in another member to fortify that still vulnerable generational group of great-grandchildren born as third-generation, Utah Mormons. They are proud of an increase in *La Familia*. ...

I told Nilda that the bishop of the Anglo Mormon ward of my youth would have encouraged Corina to put Elena up for adoption. Nilda blanched at the mere mention. However, in a way, the entire Costa village did adopt Elena.

An outsider at a Costa party would never know to whom this little girl "belongs." At Santiago's wedding, Elena ran amok and no one person knew where she was half the time, but people weren't too concerned because everybody knew that she was everybody's baby.

Everybody in *La Familia* has an equal stake in her personhood.

Nilda was incredulous that any bishop would encourage someone to relinquish their own *familia* to adoption just because of unwed youth.

"We would NEVER do that to *La Familia*," she asserted.

Familia trumped Mormonism for the Costas. Costa family identity outweighed Mormon commandments and even temple chastity covenants. However, the Costas did not choose between their Mormonism and their family. They simply changed *The Family* to match *La Familia*.

Taking His Name

Costa-style, matriarchal Mormonism resisted Anglo Mormonism's patriarchal tendency to obsess over surveilling female "chastity." Although this resistance of patriarchy seemed like "feminism," it did not match generic Western con-

ceptions of feminism. For example, in the US during the late 2010s, it was the norm for women to legally change their paternal surname to their husband's paternal surname upon marriage. Conversely, in Peru, the norm was for the bride to maintain her paternal-maternal surname dyad. She might sometimes add a “*de*” after her surnames followed by her husband's paternal surname, but she would not usually legally replace her surnames with her husband's. Many US feminists rebelled against US societal norms by keeping their paternal surname upon marriage instead of replacing it with their husband's. Some Peruvian Mormon matriarchs in Peru did the exact opposite. They rebelled against the aforementioned Peruvian societal norm by adopting the US societal norm because they understood it to be part of Mormonism. That is, they replaced their paternal-maternal surname dyad with their husband's paternal surname.

These surnaming practices represented how Mormonism further complicated Peruvian matriarchies, which were already ill-aligned to both patrilineal, Spanish-influenced Peruvian society and phallogentric, marriage-obsessed US society. These practices also demonstrated how Mormon-style patriarchy shifted the focus of Peruvian love from a present father to a future husband, thus linguistically reinforcing the nuclearization of family (splitting the “extended family” into small, self-reliant units) as the key to full Mormon status even among decidedly non-nuclear families like the Costas.

The following interaction took place in the Pioneer Trail Ward's Sunday school on the Sunday after Santiago and Teresa's wedding.

Teacher: *Hermana* Costa, can you say the closing prayer?

Jacoba: Who? Me? You have to specify now because Teresa is now “*Hermana* Costa” as well.

If this were any Latin American context other than Mormonism, “Costa” would not be used, as that is Jacoba's husband's paternal surname. However, because that Sunday school conversation happened in a context of Mormonism, a US-based religion, it did not strike anyone as unusual that Jacoba would be known as *Hermana* Costa at church. She was known as Mrs. Costa outside of church in all public aspects of her US life. She even legally changed her paternal-maternal surname dyad, Arriátegui-Mora, to the singular, Costa, when she became a US citizen.

What did strike people as unusual was that, when Peruvians in Peru became Mormons, they often made that same change—albeit discursively, not legally. More accurately, it was not that Maria Condori-Loaiza, the wife of Justo

Quispe-Quispe “took on” her husband’s surname when she became Mormon, but that at church—in step with the “proper” US Mormonism that Utah-born missionaries tacitly taught—fellow members began to refer to her as “*Hermana* Quispe,” her husband’s paternal surname. Meanwhile, in the workplace she was still known as *Profesora* Condori, her father’s surname.

Since using a husband’s surname was not normal in other aspects of their lives, Peruvian Mormon women in Peru remarked on its uniqueness even after decades in the church. Here is an example that an *arequipeña* Mormon pioneer named Leticia imparted in May 2018.

For example, I am Leticia López-Valcárcel, but nobody at church knows me as López or Valcárcel but instead as *Hermana* Escobar [laughs] because my husband is Ronal Escobar, so it all changes when you become a member. I am going to tell you an anecdote. So, my father passed away, his viewing was in Barrio Umacollo, and this member of my ward who knows me well asks me, “*Hermana*, did you know *Hermano* López?”

And my father, “*Hermano* López,” was right there in his coffin.

“Yes,” I tell her, “he’s my father.”

“[sharp inhale] your FATHER!?”

“Yes.”

“But you are Escobar!”

“Yes, but I am Leticia López” [laughs].

And for me, it is an example of the names by which members know us, “*Hermana* Escobar or *Hermana* So-And-So,” but no longer by the true paternal surname. That doesn’t work in our church [laughs]. But, when I pay my tithing, I write on the envelope, “Leticia López-Valcárcel de Escobar.”

Uniting a Peruvian Mormon woman in Peru so tightly to her husband’s surname usually only happened after he had achieved a high position in the church, as Leticia’s husband had done on multiple occasions. Though the adoption of a husband’s surname may have been a mark of full Mormon status for some, other Peruvian Mormon women recognized the practice as a harmful vestige of husband-centric, familial nuclearization and an unfortunate cultural trapping of Utah that came encrusted upon the essential divine core of Mormonism. They openly resisted it and promptly corrected it: “I am not *Hermana* Quispe, I am *Hermana* Condori.” Surnaming, therefore, became a sensitive issue, similar to kinterm use. For example, in *Barrio Periféricos* there was a particularly large matriarchal and matrilocal family, *Familia* Abedul. As if to point

out the mismatch that such a family represented to Mormonism, parishioners often jokingly—and emasculatingly—referred to any one of that household’s coresident males as *Hermano* Abedul, his wife’s surname. Usually, members in Spanish-speaking congregations in both Utah and Peru avoided the complexities of surnaming altogether by using the Brother and Sister kin titles followed by first names, something that rarely happened in English-speaking congregations. In Pioneer Trail, I heard “*Hermana* Jacoba” just as often as I heard “*Hermana* Costa,” but I never heard “*Hermana* Arriátegui.”

In sum, replacing a father’s surname with a husband’s was an important issue because it made the Peruvian Mormon family more husband-centric and nuclear—and thus, from the perspective of some Peruvian Mormon women, less Peruvian. That it remained a contested practice in Peruvian Mormonism indicated that there was Peruvian resistance to the increased husband-centrism that Mormonism attempted to enforce with *The Family*. Peruvian Mormon women who corrected the practice did not do so because it offended their feminist sensibilities, but because they felt that it was a threat to their family’s *peruanidad*.

Permission to Use My Hands

There were instantiations of Mormonism’s attempted nuclearization of the Peruvian family and concomitant pathologizing of single motherhood that were more difficult to navigate than kinterm and surname linguistics. Those involved temple priesthood power. Up until a 2019 change in the temple rite, an unmarried woman had to vow to obey her future husband as a middleman between her and God (Fletcher Stack and Noyce 2019), and to this day single mothers cannot be sealed to their own children for eternity. Sealing was not simply an administrative technicality one had to fulfill in order to reunite with a loved one in the afterlife. Male temple officiators in my study spoke of it as a “sealing power” that also helped solidify family ties *during* life, causing the wayward to eventually return to the family and to the church. Unsealed Mormon matriarchs of large, unwieldy families torn asunder by emigration and church inactivity could have used the extra help that such a sealing power would have provided. Yet, they were denied it.

Undaunted, *Mamá* Marisol (Ofelia’s mother), and many other “unsealed” Mormon matriarchs like her, presided over their homes in ways that the temple marriage sealing ceremony explicitly reserved for men. In many Peruvian Mormon families, a few males helped to partially fund the household, but the

matriarch ran it, slowly handing off power to one of her daughters, in this case Ofelia, as she aged. Breadwinning and administrating, however, were not the only aspects of the doctrinally male domain whereupon these women encroached. Mormon males were to be the spiritual providers for their families, not merely the material providers. Males were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of their homes, congregations, and temples because they were the only ones allowed to “hold” the priesthood: The power and authority to act in the name of God in establishing his kingdom on earth. Supposedly, males and females benefited equally from that power, but only males wielded it.

In its October 2019 general conference, the church announced that its next conference, in April 2020, would be like no other in the history of the church. Though it ended up being historic because it was the first conference without a live audience due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not historic for many of the reasons that members of the Mormon feminist Facebook group, Exponent II, would have hoped. Members of Exponent II harbored the secret hope that the church would lift the female priesthood ban in its 2020 conference. However, not only did the church dash this hope, but one of its apostles explicitly listed the things that females could and could not do in their “families,” further specifying, “By families, I mean a priesthood-holding man and a woman who are married and their children” (Oaks 2020, 70). This male, Anglo apostle doubled down on the doctrine that only priesthood-holding men could preside over their homes. However, he added a caveat that many Exponent II members, particularly those who were unmarried mothers, considered even more insulting: Women were permitted to preside over their homes, but only when their lawfully wedded, temple-sealed husbands were temporarily away from home—or dead.

During my study, Mormon males used the priesthood to heal “by the laying on of hands,” to bless the eucharist, to conduct the baby-naming rite, to baptize, to “seal” for eternity, and even (as we read below) to exorcise demons. However, there was also a real sense in many Mormon contexts that once a male was ordained to the priesthood at age 11 (a rite of passage for every “worthy” male), every action he performed from then on—from weeding the garden to running for office—was done through “the power of the priesthood.” Needless to say, Mormon families without this power were considered “almost, *but not quite*” (Bhabha 1984, 127) Mormon. Ofelia respected this divine gender inequality. However, contingency demanded creativity. Not only was there no sealing power in Ofelia’s home, but there was also—usually—no official priesthood power, so Ofelia took matters into her own hands—literally.

Ofelia: I have never had the priesthood, but I remember one time Shannon was very sick and it was late at night. I didn't have a telephone to call the bishop, and the mission had closed our area, so there were no missionaries. So, I didn't have the priesthood, and she had a high fever and was crying. So, I asked His permission.

I said, "Father, please, I will use the—I know that I don't have the priesthood, but I want you to please use my hands as the medium through which You help her."

And my daughter got better. I promise you, *Hermano* [Jason], her fever broke immediately. I gave her the blessing even while asking forgiveness from the Lord for maybe doing wrong by giving it.

I told Him, "don't look at me while I do this, just use my hands. Heavenly Father, I know that I don't have the priesthood. In my house, I don't have it."

And I put my hands on her head like you guys do, and I said, "please, Father, help her, if it is Your will, help her."

Jason: And did you use consecrated oil?

Ofelia: No, I just used my hands, nothing more.

Ofelia said "I do not have the priesthood" in so many different ways that it was impossible to decipher when she was referring to the lack of priesthood power inside herself and when she was referring to the lack of a priesthood-holding male inside her home. I had heard Ofelia use the word "priesthood" as a synonym for "men" on other occasions, as in: "the priesthood rode in a separate taxi." In a religious tradition wherein maleness, rather than spirituality, healing ability, maturity, or theological training, was one of the few requirements for priesthood ordination, it was easy to see how the words "priesthood" and "men" could become synonymous. The contributors to *Exponent II* and their foremothers had worked since Mormonism's inception to change such misogynistic, linguistic connotations among their coreligionists. "Priesthood" was supposed to be a universally beneficial power, not a gender (Young Bennett 2013).

As her radically creative story of female priesthood continued, Ofelia ironically distanced herself even further from *Exponent II*-style feminism by continuing to use language that downplayed anything that I might have misconstrued as a counterhegemonic sensibility on her part. Though it did not come through in the English translation, she did this by avoiding the use of the exclusively female "we" (*nosotras*) in order to make her statements sound more inclusive of men and less anti-patriarchy. She often used "*nosotras*" in other

contexts, which was how I knew that her use of the masculine plural, “*nosotros*,” below to refer to a group of all females was deliberately antifeminist. It was almost as if she were trying to provoke the ire of Chicana feminists who considered themselves “robbed of our female being by the masculine plural” (Anzaldúa 2012, 76). Still, Ofelia managed to inadvertently tap what Mormon feminism had been deliberately working for over a century to recover—the healing power used by Mormonism’s first female converts (Stapley and Wright 2011), the history of which Ofelia was completely unaware at this point in the interview.

To witness a modern Mormon disapprove of feminism, even as she contested patriarchy in ways so extreme as to be sacrilegious, was strange enough to call into question the usefulness of modernity as an entity. As Saba Mahmood (2005) discovered among veiled Muslim women in Egypt “whose practices [she] had found objectionable, to put it mildly, at the outset of [her] fieldwork,” the bundle of ideals supposedly belonging to the domain of modernity such as “freedom, equality, and autonomy, that [she herself had] held so dear,” came unhinged from that domain as she realized that the “sentiments, commitments, and sensibilities that ground these women’s existence could not be contained within the stringent molds of these ideals” (198). The illusion of modernity was that entities would fall into clearly segregated, universally understood molds such as “gender” and “kinship,” or “oppression” and “liberation.” In US, white, feminist modernity, patriarchy often became a mold that encapsulated all oppressive things. In a cultural context wherein gender was binary, it became tempting, therefore, to construct matriarchy as the mold that held all liberating things as if females, after patriarchy’s overthrow, would lack the full range of humanity necessary to be oppressors (O’Reilly 2016). Ofelia, in her Peruvian Mormon matriarchy, broke both molds, took the pieces that she liked from each, and mixed them into a new amalgam that received no label. She was not contesting patriarchy by giving her daughter a priesthood blessing. She was, however, blurring boundaries between domains that she sensed were to be kept separate, which was why she did not want Heavenly Father—the ultimate patriarch and the master of all domains—to see her doing it.

Another domain that modernity liked to keep discrete was “religion.” Ofelia saw Mormonism as linked to true religion, and Catholicism as its antithesis. However, she had to grapple with the fact that an idea that she associated with Catholicism had infiltrated her Mormon life: When death was at

the door, Ofelia was always notified. Either an animate portion of the soon-to-be dying person's spirit notified her unbeknownst to the person's conscious "mind" (an option she associated with Andean Catholicism), or some other more malignant force notified her (an option from part of the modern Mormon origin myth known as The First Vision)—she was not always sure which. In March 2018, *Mamá* Marisol got appendicitis and was near death. The events presaging this helped Ofelia and her daughter discover the precise limits of their rung's power on Mormonism's hierarchy as members of a non-nuclear, unsealed, non-priesthood-holding home.

Ofelia: Two weeks before my mom went to the hospital, during my sleep I felt someone sit up, so I opened one of my little eyes, and there was nobody. Just as I was going to shut my eyes again, *Hermano*, they grabbed me. I felt that they got really close to me, so I tried to scream, but I couldn't. I couldn't see anybody grabbing me, I could only feel the force of it.

So, in that moment I said, "My God, please help me!"

But when I said that, the grip got tighter. Then I remembered that the veil between worlds can be torn, and people can come through. When that happens, we are supposed to say, "in the name of Jesus Christ, I order you to leave me alone."

I said to myself, "but I don't have the priesthood."

But I did it anyway, *Hermano*. I mean, it was a fight against those things that were grabbing me. When I said the words, suddenly I could move again.

Then I got the news of my mom's sickness. These things always occur when something bad is going to happen in my house.

So, I told the missionaries, "Elders, I want you to give my home a blessing."

All four elders came, and they said that everyone in the home should be present for the blessing, so all my brothers and sisters came down. Elder Horsthauser said the prayer, and it was such a potent prayer that my sister, Isabel, who is inactive [no longer participates in her congregation's activities], even she said, "I feel peace."

So, everything is once again peaceful because the elder was very emphatic in saying, "you get out of here, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ."

Truthfully, there have been few times, *Hermano*, in which I have felt that kind of power. In very few elders have I felt it.

But there is something that I didn't tell you. Before Elder Horsthauser's blessing, Shannon and I were alone.

It was really late, and Shannon says, “*Mamá*, let’s say the prayer so that we can sleep,” and we knelt down.

Shannon always says the prayer.

She said, “please bless so-and-so, my family, bla, bla, bla,” the normal stuff, right?

But then she said, “bless my home and expel those bad persons and the bad things that are here. By the authority of the priesthood which the prophet holds, and through him, expel all the evil that is harassing this home and get it out.”

But when she started saying those things, a horrible feeling came over the room, really, I felt something ugly.

Shannon asked me, “what’s wrong?”

Jason: So, Shannon didn’t feel it?

Ofelia: She didn’t. She only pronounced the words. She said them very clearly and emphatically. She said it firmly, not doubting. And that is when I felt the evil.

Jason: So, Shannon’s prayer didn’t work? It was necessary to bring in someone who held the priesthood?

Ofelia: Yes, it was necessary. Yes, and it’s because the four priesthoods were here. Not just one was here, all FOUR of them were here. Four elders. ...

Jason: One of my great-great-grandmothers had a similar experience to the one you had. Her son fell down the cellar and broke his neck. Her husband had the priesthood, but he was far away. She used consecrated oil to give him a blessing by the laying on of hands, and he was healed.

Ofelia: But that doesn’t mean that we have it, it just means---on occasion, we are the medium. In one Relief Society lesson [organization for adult females] I shared a similar idea and they said, “no, we can’t do anything because we don’t have the priesthood.”

I said, “hey, wait a minute! *Hermanas*, just because we don’t have the priesthood doesn’t mean that the Lord can’t use us [*nosotros*] as his instruments or that we can’t become the medium through which he causes blessings to arrive. What happens if, for example, I don’t have priesthood in my home, but I need an urgent blessing? Well, I can put my hands on the person’s head and ask the Lord permission to use my hands as the means by which He will act to pour out the blessing.”

Right? But a lot of people don’t understand it simply because they lack a little something with five letters: F-A-I-T-H [laughs]. The Lord can work through us [*nosotros*] in exceptional cases, just like your great-great-grandmother, just like me.

But, at the same time, we can’t say, “the Lord worked through me, so now I too have the priesthood, now I too have the power.”

Ofelia made sure that I understood that female priesthood was a contingency. It was not the way things were supposed to be. Men were batteries who could generate their own power, and some men—in this case, a young man of German descent from Utah—had more power than all the household’s human and antihuman inhabitants combined. Women were merely wires through which an external source of power could flow, and while those wires were sufficient to heal, they could not abide the amperage necessary to exorcise. In her clarification of female priesthood limits, Ofelia was also clarifying how fully powered a disciple she was in her religion. Furthermore, she was clarifying the limits of the matriarchal Mormon family. It too was a contingency, not the way that things were supposed to be.

When I asked other Peruvian Mormon women about the phenomenon of matriarch-led families, they agreed that it was the norm, but they portrayed it as “unfortunately the norm.” They denied that it stemmed from an ancestral Andean cultural preference and instead found it pathological, blaming it on corrupt governmental economic policies (especially those of former president Alan García) and on male infidelity. According to them, if they had the financial luxury of starting a nuclear family home wherein a faithful marriage was the center and all other relations were mere appendages, they would start one. My prediction, however, was that even if they were given said luxury, the mother-child relationship would remain paramount. It was where the strongest kind of love was felt. Conjugal love, where it existed at all, paled in comparison even in the case of an “active” Peruvian Mormon family with fathers married to mothers, such as the Costas. In the Costa family, single motherhood was not common and priesthood power was in full force, but so was matriarchy. Jacoba’s husband was the pioneering patriarchal figure in the Spanish-speaking Mormon church in northern Utah. While he was presiding over his flock, however, Jacoba was presiding over him and *La Familia* through matriarchy and mother-child relatedness.

Contradictory Review

Husband-wife relatedness (in that order) was morality’s core in Mormonism’s global, collective imagination during my study no matter how unusual it was in practice among the world’s diverse, peripheralized, local Mormonisms. Matriarchy, especially when founded through single motherhood, was an embarrassment to *The Family* and a barrier to full Mormon status. In the imaginary of *The Family*, matriarchal situations bred gender role confusion and priesthood power circumlocution, crossing lines of divine authority and disturbing

the holy order. Matriarchy was a harbinger of eventual emergency that, if left unchecked, would get so far beyond the control of the disorganized ganglion of “out-of-wedlock births, sexual promiscuity” (Sarkisian and Gerstel 2012, 14), and helpless women. That four youthful male “elders” would have to close the chasm in the interdimensional veil—a chasm that one priesthood-generating Mormon husband might have kept from opening in the first place.

But would a patriarch dedicated to working outside the home have had the spiritual sensibility and mastery of his home’s human and non-human needs sufficient to detect, diagnose, and solve such an otherworldly problem? No. Ofelia did not demand the right to be the battery in this situation, but she also did not let herself passively become the wire. Neither her daughter nor the most powerful of the missionaries were capable of even recognizing that there was something wrong with the home. It fell to Ofelia and Ofelia alone, as the acting matriarch, to organize and carry out a strategy of attack against the forces of anti-kinship. She, not the priesthood-holders, was the sole human agentive force. Furthermore, the missionaries would not have been in a state of readiness worthy to withstand Ofelia’s battle plan were it not for her methodical kin-building skills that made them already integral parts of her home to the extent that she became, in a sense as literal as anything can be in *arequipeña* Mormonism, their mother. During the exorcism, Ofelia was the carpenter. Horsthauser was simply the hammer.

And yet, which of the two did the church treat as almost a Mormon, but not quite? Horsthauser became my Facebook friend. He went on to follow the church’s script for his life: he found a female mate and formed the nucleus of a *sui generis* patriarchal, Mormon family upon his return to Utah. Ofelia, on the other hand, became *Mamá* Ofelia for a preexisting, non-patriarchal family that somehow continued faithfully adhering to a patriarchal religion. His family became an exemplar of *The Family*. Her family did not. Such were the kinship contradictions that arose when *peruanidad* mixed with Mormonism. Rather than trying to make sense of those contradictions, I sat uncomfortably with them and thought of their implications for making my own category-building, kin-building, and research project-building endeavors somewhat less racist, less sexist, and more inclusive. I close now by listing some of those contradictions as a review:

- Mormonism espoused a globally relevant, universal siblingship yet claimed that the 1950s US nuclear family was the only human grouping legible to God as “family.”

- Mormonism sought to ceremonially bind all humans encompassing thousands of distinct kinship systems, past and present, into a great chain of interconnectedness through ritual temple sealings, yet only two relationships and six kinterms—understood through the modern European kin logic of vertical blood descent—qualified for those sealings during my study.
- Mormonism promoted patriarchal, individualistic families, yet some of its most ardent followers promoted matriarchal, collectivist families.
- Ofelia, as an unmarried, Lamanite², Peruvian co-matriarch, represented one of the most stigmatized alignments of identity in contemporary Mormonism, yet she was also the most faithful, active, temple-going, and tithing-paying Mormon that I met during my study.
- Ofelia was the most faithful Mormon that I met, yet she broke three of Mormonism's most fundamental, implicit commandments: she used the priesthood, she presided over her home, and she swirled together two domains, the strict separation of which was foundational to Mormonism: gender and kinship.

² Lamanite was a contested Mormon identity (Newcomb 2019) with complex connections to indigeneity that Arequipa's cultural context rendered multiplex (Palmer 2021b).

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