

# Card Carrying Christians: Credit, Debt, and Believing in Emerging Colombia

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department for the Study of Religion  
Center for Diaspora and Transnational Studies  
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## **Abstract**

This dissertation addresses the entanglements of Christianity and financializing capitalism in Colombia, South America. At its most empirical, this dissertation details ethnographically the debt upon which the Gospel of Prosperity rests. The ethnographic research, collected over two and a half years of sustained fieldwork, assesses Colombia's largest mega-church, a Protestant micro-credit program in Bogotá, various commercial banks, a rural Pentecostal community, and a multi-level marketing company. Together, this evidence establishes that financializing capitalism in Colombia depends upon a Christian morality. The evidence also makes possible the dissertation's more theoretical claim: that credit is a matter of belief. The argument begins with some reflection on the etymological fact that both words, credit and belief, share the same Latin root, *credere*, but then leans on participant observation, extended interviews, and life narratives to demonstrate how credit has become a matter of belief at the level of lived experience in Colombia.

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Dr Simon Coleman always offered the “big questions” and the intellectual acumen to push my fledgling anthropological pursuits in the right direction. Never was there so sensitive an ethnographer, so astute a researcher, so knowledgeable a mentor. Thank you, Dr Coleman.

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towards improvement, greater creativity, deeper thinking, and excellence. Many conversations and meetings, classes and conferences, and revisions and reviews have served to secure confidence in finding my own voice and how to express it. A more dedicated supervisor there never was. After winning a doctoral scholarship in my first year, I wrote an enthusiastic letter of thanks to my harshest critic and staunchest ally, my advisor. He responded: “Thank me when you have finished your dissertation and you have secured a tenure track job.” Well, Dr O’Neill, here we are. Thank you for all of it.

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During my penultimate year of PhD work at the University of Toronto, 2014-2015, the union representing student workers at the University went on strike (CUPE 3902). This experience was equally frustrating and illuminating on so many levels. It was the most vivid experience of recognizing the University as an increasingly bureaucratized and corporatized entity. This was a painful but perhaps an unsurprising realization to make. However, one positive outcome of the strike were some very special friendships that must be mentioned here. To the Delta Squad (Joe Curnow, Caitlin Henry, Anjali Helferty, Omar Sirri, Abe Singer, Christy Guthrie, and Andrew Kohan). To the many friends I have made through the DSR: Justin Stein, Matthew King, Paul Nahme, Arun Brahmabhatt, Aldea Mulhern, Jessica Radin, Mike Ruecker, Andrew Tebbutt, Rebekka King, Ian Brown, Zoe Anthony, Maria Dasios, Amy Clanfield, Anna Cwikla, Jarian Gahan: Thank you all for being community. I will miss you all. Special thanks to Greg Fewster for a magisterial job in copy-editing this entire manuscript.

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degree. My mother, the financial advisor, accountant, and local economist offered so many intuitions and insights into the religious underworld of the financial economy – sometimes without knowing it! I thank both of them for their endless encouragement and proofreading.

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The many years of living and learning in Latin America, and Colombia, have inspired every page of this work. I am particularly grateful to the Veraguas Community, for their accompaniment and reminder that intellectual pursuits are worthy insofar as they respond to the “real lives” of the marginalized. The influence of liberation theology and pedagogies of resistance still fuel grassroots organizing, community-led political movements, and efforts at transforming systems of violence *desde abajo* everywhere in region, from Mexico to the Patagonia. During my years as regional policy analyst with the Mennonite Central Committee, I travelled throughout Latin America and I was privileged to meet and work alongside the great masses of individuals and collectives who are struggling for recognition and dignity, for their land and the well-being of their future generations, and for economic and political systems that give life, as opposed to taking it. To all of those communities, those individuals, those activists and educators, I am deeply grateful. A few individuals deserve special recognition: To Jennifer Manrique, community organizer, mother, and rebel, thank you for the many conversations that oriented me, so many years ago, to Colombia’s history and context. To Viviana Machuca, philosopher, feminist, theologian, mother, and agitator, thank you for the hours of debate over decolonizing feminist critique, and applying Latin American feminist thought to considering political economies. I never quite accomplished this in the current work, but I intend to continue working at this for the

rest of my career. To Arturo Orrego, *compañero*, philosopher, theologian, historian, father, and husband, I owe gratitude for helping me understand the complex history of Pentecostalism in Latin America, and orienting me to Marx before I even knew I would need to read *Capital* for my comprehensive exams. The hours of debate about the pros and cons of the guerrilla, the tears shed over systemic violence, the liters of wine drunk while discussing the “reality” of miracles and the possibility of revolution, all of this has influenced me and this work. Thank you, friends. *Gracias, compañeros. Hasta la victoria, siempre.*

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*Gracias.*

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Hector Ivan Saavedra

1999-2014

## Table of Contents

PREFACE	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	x
INTRODUCTION	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2
CHAPTER 1: Emergence	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	43
CHAPTER 2: Financializing the Soul	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	81
CHAPTER 3: The Interest-Bearing Christmas Gift: <i>Credere</i>	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	108
CHAPTER 4: From Exclusion to Inclusion	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	134
CHAPTER 5: Disciplining Gender/Reforming Christianity	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	177
CHAPTER 6: The Promise of Becoming	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	207
CONCLUSION	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	232
BIBLIOGRAPHY	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	242





## Preface

“Utopia lies at the horizon.  
When I draw nearer by two steps,  
it retreats two steps.  
If I proceed ten steps forward, it  
swiftly slips ten steps ahead.  
No matter how far I go, I can never reach it.  
What, then, is the purpose of utopia?  
It is to cause us to advance.”  
-Eduardo Galeano

It was 2003. We sat around the fireplace in a small apartment in the colonial corner of Bogotá, La Candelaria. We were six twenty-somethings working with various human rights organizations, from the United Nations to smaller non-governmental organizations, and a number of my friends identified as Pentecostal Christians. We were drinking cheap wine out of a box, smoking Belmonts, and eating tuna on saltine crackers. The fire crackled as Puerto Rican hip-hop chattered in the background. Everyone was Colombian, except for me. We were collectively reflecting on our childhoods and relating what moments in our pasts had drawn us to work for human rights. All of my friends had grown up in Bogotá, and they began recalling the dirty drug wars of the late 80s and early 90s. They began laughing, as only Colombians can laugh at death, recalling the words of their mothers in preparing them for the blast of a car bomb. “Lean over, open your mouth, don’t go see what happened, get as far away from the bomb site as you can, go the opposite way from the ambulances, stay with your friends.” The normalization of violence began at a young age for these friends of mine in Colombia.

My voice quieted, and I began to observe and ask questions. This conversation was one of thousands that I would have over the following thirteen years that insisted upon an irreducible difference between my experiences and those of my friends, interlocutors, and subjects of research. The distinctions lay not only in cultural divides, however those manifest, but more acutely were historically constructed differences of race, class, gender, and sexuality, in hierarchies of power and colonial inheritances. The differences were intersectional, and the distinctions multifarious. This recognition, this difference, of what I refer to as the “intersectional

ethnographic gap” prompts a kind of method and approach to my evidence that seeks to take stories and experiences of others at face value. I resist interpreting the voices that speak in this dissertation in terms of relatability, recognisability, or even “understanding” for I do not, and cannot. Indeed, to do so in many cases would result in a dishonest program of confinement within a particular cultural, academic, gendered, and racialized context of understanding. When I write of the believing practices that my interlocutors engage in, I choose to allow their belief to speak for itself. The credulity of my interlocutors, what some readers might regard as bowing to a certain “false consciousness” is quite the opposite: believing, for many in Colombia, is the very political act of refusing to permit history and critique to cloud the possibility of a better life. They believe because so often there is no alternative.

Within the study of American religion, much of the scholarship continues to seek out rationality and resistance, an embodied agency. I contend that agency, and its pursuit, can become a program of privilege. We, the Western academy, long for individuals to demonstrate agency because somehow this can be read as a disruption of hegemony, the undoing of false consciousness, and a challenge to the logics of patriarchal predetermination. Yet pursuing “agency” can problematically lead to a teleology of individual empowerment that refuses collective participation. The risk lies in rendering social constructions (like agency) into immutably factitious components of a natural human quality that is also accessible and enviable by all facets of humanity. This practice, in the words of Michael Taussig, “desensitizes society and robs it of all that is inherently critical of its inner form” (Taussig 2010, p. 6).

In this sense, my feminist frame is shaped by a critical method, at once intersectional and particular. If submission actually reveals empowerment, then the structural work and responsibility of the observer, or reader, is sidelined. Alienated forms of gendered and political production fall in line with racialized forms of capital accumulation on a global scale in the context of the current manifestations of financialized capitalism. Power operates on context-specific domains of relations, and these domains of relations are what this dissertation seeks to unmake in order to understand in a new way. Recognizing the limits to agency resists the temptation of manufacturing relatability. And it offers insights into the workings of power in the specific context of finance capitalism and Christianity in Colombia. This work holds to an ethic that looks beyond a comforting end to the story. The women that this dissertation focuses on are

emblematic cases of the believability of belief. It would seem that the critique of credulity rehearses a trope within the study of religion that somehow holds belief as unbelievable. Believing, for the women in this manuscript, is the riskiest move, the most agentic practice. For there are few other choices. Again, why believe when one could do something else? I contend that, sometimes, there is nothing else. The politics of believing are precisely the transgressive practices that these women have open to them. Believing that the future can be different, that something beyond the discipline of violence is possible, is a political act.

The universalizing project of relatability is one that I question. This is not a story with a happy ending, and the temptation to interpret the practices and words of my interlocutors as having a subversive and emancipatory backstory is one that I challenge. I challenge this method of interpretation because the political stakes are simply too high. My project is to consider the conditions that make difference irreducible, through the analytical grids of Christianity and credit. To conclude that submission is actually a form of power, in Colombia, or that “there is always more” to belief, excuses the reader from her own responsibility in the structures that foreclose the potential of something better for those who have nothing left to lose. To determine for the women, who I spent years listening to and observing in their everyday struggles, that their commitment to a utopia is a false consciousness that North American studies of religion have revealed, is misplaced. Yet to read an empowering regime of liberation into their actions precludes critique at a structural and epistemological level. The current study differs from other studies of pious women in conditions of Pentecostality in which much is made of an insubordinate program of submissive emancipation.

One obvious reference is Elizabeth Brusco’s 1995 study of Pentecostal families in rural and urban Bogotá. Brusco’s work was an important intervention twenty years ago, insofar as she introduced a feminist Marxist interpretation of domestic economies and the work that conversion to Pentecostalism did for the lives of women in Colombia. Brusco’s study sought out relatability insofar as she identified Colombian evangelicalism as a “strategic women’s movement, similar to Western feminism” (Brusco 1995, p. 6). To be fair, there is much validity to the evidence Brusco introduces, and she is sensitive in her analysis of gender roles and careful not to write her own Western feminist critique over the experiences of her informants. However, many things have changed in Colombia over the last twenty years, and some questions must be raised concerning

the ways in which Brusco presents her arguments. First, Brusco treats Evangelical Christianity in Colombia as a point of rupture and distinction from Catholic forms of popular religiosity. As I discuss below, this is not only a problematic way of understanding “Christianity” (as closed denominational categories), but also a very loose way of interpreting the spectrum of Christian practice in Colombia that is much more hybridized than the way in which Brusco introduces it. Second, the assumption that Colombian men who are not converted to Evangelical Christianity (one might assume, remain Catholic) are smokers, unfaithful, gamblers, and regularly visit prostitutes is problematic insofar as it represents a racialized and class-blind profile of Colombian men (Brusco 1995, p. 5-6, 77-91).

Machismo as the central thematic of Brusco’s work is treated as a universal characteristic of not only Colombian males, but Latin American men more generally. Brusco spends a chapter deciphering the roots of machismo—what she defines as the “culturally constructed aggressive masculinity characteristic of the male role in Colombia as well as in other parts of Latin America” (Brusco 1995, p. 6)—and she does carefully identify historical and socio-economic roots of the phenomenon. However, the connection between a *machista* culture, the encroachment of capitalism and proletarianism in Colombia, and the subsequent breakdown of traditional domestic roles, results in a problematic critique. It is problematic insofar as the socio-economic analysis ties capitalist modes of production to a male individualism which she explicitly delinks from patriarchy (p. 79-80) and even more problematically, defines against women’s “natural” tendency towards communal thinking. Herein is my third, and last critique.

The ways in which Brusco writes her Colombian female interlocutors is emblematic of some feminist efforts at finding a universal womanness that is recognizable to the North American feminist ethnographer. The affirmation that “women in Colombia” operate under such a distinct regime of practice from their male counterparts, is as confusing as it is false. That sobriety, fidelity, family, and fiscal responsibility are essentially and universal female concerns belies the diversity of Colombian womanness and risks an essentializing trope of Colombian women, as well as Latin American women more broadly. The interlocutors I will introduce all experienced and lived contradictory realities to what Brusco introduces as a flattened feminine subject. Ursula, an evangelical doctor, smoked cigarettes and drank, complained about her husband who did all of the cooking and cleaning in the house, and while her commitment to her

family was strong, she was critical of the image of “sacrificial mother” imposed upon Colombian women by media and popular culture. Fernanda, a fervent Evangelical Christian, was also single and childless. She was much less concerned about this condition of singleness than she was of expanding her cell group at the *Misión Carismática Internacional* mega-church and preaching the Gospel to the high school students she taught. Although she told me that “God prefers married couples” to single people, she was proud of her self-purchased home, her independent life, and her very intimate relationship with the Spirit. Sofia, Fernanda’s sister, introduced me to the world of multi-level marketing in Bogotá. She had only recently worked through a number of situations with her also Evangelical husband, who had been unfaithful to her on more than one occasion with other women from the church. And Remedios, the star student of Christian micro-finance, regularly fought with her daughter, also a microfinance client, and was the principle money-earner in the family.

Brusco’s intentions are clear: to introduce a Marxist-feminist interpretation of women in Colombian evangelicalism as a “strategic women’s movement” seeking out female empowerment in the midst of social and economic upheaval introduced by capitalism. I reject the idea of a subversive emancipatory regime, detached from any kind of political and socio-economic engagement and practice. Today in Colombia, women are in a slightly different situation than they were when Brusco wrote. There is now an Office for Women’s Equality, established with the Santos administration beginning in 2010. Colombia has now ratified every international agreement on the equality of women. However, although there are more women in governmental positions than there were in the 1990s, Colombia still has one of the lowest levels of political representation of women in Latin America. And domestic violence against women remains alarmingly high. In 2014, 1,007 women were assassinated and 17,000 cases of domestic abuse were reported (United Nations 2015). To be sure, there still exists a significant gap in equality and recognition of women in the public sphere. The prosperity Christianity I consider, and its relation to financial capitalism, details the debt upon which an emerging shift in modes of production and accumulation relies, and the structures of power that emerge therein. While my central interlocutors are women, and time is spent throughout the dissertation considering the gendered dynamics of financializing capitalism, micro-credits, and prosperity Christianity itself, this dissertation is not about “Pentecostal women in Colombia” writ large. In this dissertation, the primary interlocutors are, indeed, women, yet the central object of study is not Pentecostal

women. I do not write as much about Colombian men as I do about these women for two reasons. The first is a question method, for I would not have been able to establish the kind of intimate relationship with a man, as a single woman in Colombia. It would have been culturally inappropriate. I share interviews I carried out with a number of men and Colombian men are present throughout the study, but I did not primarily focus my empirical research on men. I also did not do research with Afro-Colombians, Indigenous Colombians, Catholics, or LGBTQ Colombians. Research on any and all of these particular factions of Colombian society in relation to prosperity Christianity and finance capitalism would be important interventions. The second reason relates to contribution. The large majority of anthropological research on Colombia has been carried out by men, and men have been their de facto object of study. This is questioned by many scholars, as it should be. However, I do hope that the compelling reasons I chose to do research with the individuals (who all happen to be women), that I did, and the fact that they revealed dimensions of Christianity and financialization to me in new ways, will engage the reader.

Another study of Pentecostal women that this dissertation differs from in its positionality and address is Marie Griffith's ethnography of evangelical conservative women in the Aglow movement in the northeastern United States. Griffith's engagement with the women in her study demonstrates a sensitivity and an openness to difference that refutes the affective reaction of Susan Harding's consideration of the "Repugnant Other" in studies of conservative and "non-feminist" Christian submissiveness (Harding 1991). Her study also challenges what would become the problem Joel Robbins (2003) identifies when describing the "Other Christian" as too familiar yet too different to make a legitimate anthropological subject for North American ethnographers. Griffith wades into the thick description of a group of women who find liberation and strength in their relationships with each other and with a "heavenly Father, son, husband" even, or especially, in the face of struggling marriages and familial relationships (Griffith 1997, p. 25).

This study differs in two ways. First, this study was carried out in Bogotá, Colombia, South America, between 2011 and 2015. Second, this study does focus on women, but it is not a study only of gender or Evangelical Christianity, but rather how both of these might be understood as analytical grids with which to further conceptualize relations of power, prosperity,

debt, violence, and manifestations of finance capital. Griffith offers an important and timely intervention into anthropology, from a feminist perspective that seeks inclusion and diversity within what much feminist scholarship had discarded as “false consciousness” and somehow “wrong feminism.” The current study might be read as attempting to achieve a similar hermeneutical lens, yet within a very different frame.

The invitation to the reader, then, is to settle uncomfortably into this ethnographic gap, and resist relatability. One of the intentions of this dissertation is to leave the reader with questions and to provoke a conversation that takes difference seriously. Difference can be written out only by a privileged voice and this dissertation challenges the universalizing mission of both second-wave feminism (in its pursuit for a recognizable “woman-ness” throughout the world) and self-reflexive anthropology (in its discard of structural analysis). This challenge emerges not because these are not extremely valuable intellectual and political interventions, but because I cannot deny my own white privilege, or the one possibility that I always had open to me when violence came too close: that of leaving, of finding refuge in my passport. For eight years I did not leave. From the age of 22, I also ran away from the bomb sites, I learned that chainsaws are no longer simply tools for making firewood, but can be used as horrific tools of torture, I learned the panic of a car driving beside me too slowly, I learned that certain haircuts revealed certain danger, and I learned to be careful of who I spoke to and about what. I also learned to believe. I began to believe that utopia is possible, that miracles can happen, that justice is real. That the world could be different. Because to not believe, to resign ourselves to the regime of believing as simply a chimera, a mirage, a falsity, is to do a disservice to the millions who have lost their lives in the pursuit of utopia, and the millions who refuse to let go of belief. It also gives short shrift to belief, and believing, as an object of anthropological inquiry.

Back to 2003. I began to listen and ask questions of my friends; perhaps my earliest and most naïve ethnographic inquiries. “How old were you when you heard your first bomb go off? Why did Pentecostalism “save you”? How has your faith become your politics? Where does the economy fit into this story?” The tone of the room changed, and my friends began recalling the first times they had seen a dead body. I was the only person in the room who had never seen a corpse—not even at a funeral, nevermind the *muñecos* (literally translated as “dolls”) that would litter the schoolyard on the Monday morning after a confrontation between paramilitary and



guerrilla in the southern quarters of Bogotá, where the poorest of the metropolis are relegated. Gustavo began to talk about seeing his first *muñeco*. He had been eight years old. The body was thrown into the schoolyard of his elementary school to warn other youngsters against working for the local guerrilla chapter. The victim's throat had been slashed, and tongue had been pulled down to resemble a tie – *el corte franela*. This violent symbolism had a clear meaning in the language of violent discipline. This person had spoken too much about what they had seen. Many years later, reading the introduction to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* in my early years of graduate school, I recalled Gustavo's story, and the hundreds of other similar experiences I had been told during the 14 years of my involvement with Colombia. The public torture and quartering of Robert-Francois Damiens sounded so familiar to the regular deployment of public violence in Colombia and yet Foucault used this example to demonstrate how this no longer happens in modern societies – that discipline and punishment had changed in its modern control of European populations. What, I wondered then, and I still ask today, is the cause of this difference? How is this connected to my own European history? What is the difference? And what do Christianity and political economy have to do with each other?

### **This Dissertation**

This dissertation is the product of over a decade of listening, observing, participating, and living in Colombia, South America. The themes addressed include the context of the on-going armed conflict, the death and contradiction that accompanies such proximity to mortality, the lives lived despite upheaval, aspirations and dreams, the resilience of the human spirit, and the beauty and chaos that is everyday life in Colombia. In the midst of all of this, I center on the intersections, interstices between, and the entangled webs of religion and political economy. The dissertation ethnographically details relationships between Christianity and credit at the level of the everyday and the financial debt upon which the gospel of prosperity rests. The dissertation makes two main arguments. The first is that there is an inextricable link between Christian morality and the morality of financializing capitalism as it has developed in Colombia. The second, related to the first, is that believing is a central component of finance. In the end, the dissertation contends that prosperity Christianity looks different in the context of Colombia than in North America. This is so because prosperity is a regime of believing rooted in the possibility of future and credit cards. Finance promises deliverance into a prosperous emergence, despite the debt that confines anew.

As finance dwells in the realm of speculation, so too ideals of prosperity are tied to wagers made on faith—and credit.

## **The Research**

I formally began this research in 2011, but it really all started before that, with years of listening to prosperity preachers and observing resistance to them. My travels throughout Latin America as a policy analyst for a Christian NGO, permitted an analysis in the shifts in political economies and religious emergences throughout the region. This experience allowed me to develop a preliminary thesis: that religious practice and economic structures are more entangled than most scholars could imagine. This is why I pursued a Masters degree in Political Science at the *Universidad de Los Andes* in Bogotá, focusing my research on the political economy of war and the role of the extractive industry in the prolongation of the armed conflict. This is also why I began the PhD, in order to further explore these entanglements, trace their connections and divergences, and think this relationship between Christianity and neoliberalism all the way down. The credit crisis of 2007-2008 brought me to financialization, as late capitalism and neoliberalism registered on a theological note; now good credit is correlated with good character in a new way. In Colombia, the disciplinary regime of finance is only emerging, which is what makes the field sites so diverse and the research so broad. Colombia is a laboratory for understanding the ways Christianity and credit, prosperity and debt, and religion and economy hang in relationships throughout the Americas.

## **The Evidence**

I established my sites of research and main interlocutors through research visits to Colombia between 2011 and 2013. The sustained research was carried out from January 2013 to July 2014, during which time I also taught at the *Universidad Nacional de Colombia* in the sociology department. In every ethnographic relationship, my interlocutors chose me more than I chose them, although the sites for research had been identified for variation in socio-economic class, access, and legibility. The relationships I formed with each of the women on whom this thesis focuses were different and varied in degrees of intimacy. In this regard, the research methods follow Karen McCarthy Brown's "cluttered image" of scholar and researcher muddled with friend and target of evangelism (Brown 1991, p. 13). Although I differ in my understanding of difference between

geopolitical experiences, rather than naming distinctions as “cultural” and deeply connected, as does Brown, I do recognize my approach to ethnography in Brown’s affirmation that ethnography is necessarily about relationships. What I mean here is that my attention to the “intersectional ethnographic gap” following Brown, strives to continue the work of dismantling the anthropological trope that cultures are closed and distinct systems of operations with regard to rites, symbols, and organizing principles that differ according to geographic location. Instead, I insist on difference but within the analytic of relations of power, historical vestiges of colonial violence, socio-economic hierarchies, and gendered forms of exclusion (Gupta and Ferguson 2002). Even so, in order to approach this recognition, deep and long-term ethnographic engagement is necessary, and in this method, relationships are the revelatory mechanism. For that reason, every one of my interlocutors holds a specific relational weight in my mind. Much of the evidence is based in conversation and the words of these women, rather than extended observations of their activities. For I could never hide myself quite well enough to silently observe. However, the degrees of intimacy and degrees of trust differ with each woman, revealing not only my cluttered image of myself to myself, but also the messiness of relational research. In part, this messiness is due to how close every person allowed me to get to them, as well as the extent to which I chose to engage with life narratives and observation.

### **Ursula<sup>1</sup>**

I have known Ursula for over a decade. During my exploratory research visits, I lived on the second floor of her house, in a small room with a shower and a small kitchen. During the first six months of extended field work, I also stayed in her home. I have witnessed her struggles with faith, doubt, debt, and family. After she confessed her debt problems to me, the vignette that opens the introduction of the dissertation, I spent many weeks speaking with her and her family about what it would mean to publically share her stories in the pages of this manuscript. With the risk of making her a “subject of research” the family balked at my initial approach to formally interview her since the revelation of her expansive debt to her family accompanied my interest in wanting to use her experience as evidence. Finally, with some ground rules established (anonymity, limits to exposure, and full credence to her story of believing), everyone in the family agreed that she would offer an important insight into the questions my research sought to answer.

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<sup>1</sup> All the names of my interlocutors have been altered in order to protect anonymity.

Although there are some reflections upon observations of her acting in the context of refinancing her debt, for example, most of the evidence here rides on conversations she and I had. Long, open-ended interviews, together with snippets of revelations during family events, going to the bank, and grocery shopping, are some of the ways Ursula opened her life up to me.

There are many dimensions to Ursula that are not highlighted in this dissertation. I do address her complex humanity, her moments of debilitating anxiety around her debt, some conversations we had about intimate relationships and reconciling past traumas, the angry doubt voiced with the passing of a young friend who died of cancer, the questions around what being a good mother and wife means, and the never ending exertion to fully believe. Ursula and her family taught me that “utopia” in Colombia, and in Spanish, means something very different than the English conception of the word. “Utopia” in Colombia refers to a potential, a necessary possibility, an aspiration, a different future from the grim present.

Utopia in the way I interpret it, takes on Edward Galeano’s frame of teleological movement towards something better, whatever that might be, and becomes the simple motivation to continue moving forward in the face of seeming hopelessness. Utopia, in this sense, is an utterly “Latin American” frame in which to understand future and potential, indeed, that the world can be different than it is. This is why and this is how belief became a central question in my investigation of finance and Christianity. When the present is so unbelievable, when horror is the operating mode of governance, when terror is the popular discourse, as it has been in Colombia for decades, the future may seem illusory. But that is better than resigning oneself to the death space (Taussig 1986). In the case of Ursula, her employment of the concept “prosperity” follows the lines of utopic practice—towards security, well-being, and peace for her family. Prosperity in Ursula’s experience began as a struggle for survival when she was reeling from the traumas of sexual and political violence and tried to kill herself three times. Prosperity was a prayer that led her to night school and eventually finish a medical degree while working full time during the day. Now, as a doctor, prosperity for Ursula has led to purchasing a home and renovating it so that all of her family can safely live under one roof together. Doctors in Colombia earn an average of two million, five hundred thousand pesos (approximately \$1250 CAD) per month. Half of all doctors in Colombia’s flailing medical system are contract workers who depend on short-term employment and enjoy little job security (El Espectador 2014). When

I met Ursula, earning as much as she does now seemed an impossibility. The movement from desperation to relative stability is Ursula's story of prosperity, and her belief sustained the process in the way that only a committed prosperity Christianity can.

### **Fernanda and the *Misión Carismática Internacional***

Fernanda found me in the “Winning” room of the *Misión Carismática Internacional* (MCI) where I had been led after following a parade of new converts from the front of the main sanctuary on a certain Sunday morning in early 2012. I had visited numerous mega-churches in Bogotá in the preliminary research year prior, and finally decided that MCI was where I would focus my research. The first reason I decided upon the MCI is that the MCI is the largest and most notorious of all the mega-churches in Colombia. The leadership team boasts a cast of political congressmen and congresswomen, lawyers, business owners, and senators. The MCI is able to mobilize a significant electorate and has been one of the loudest public voices against a variety of issues. Through organized marches and protests in the central plaza, together with conservative factions of the Catholic church, they have protested marriage equality, abortion reforms, adoption rights for same-sex couples, in congress as well as in the streets. The scores of public school teachers who attend the church have organized against sexual education reforms for middle and high schools, and the church is renowned for its Prosperity teaching.

Public opinion holds that the church leadership dupes innocent congregants into giving money blindly in search of miracles (El Tiempo January 19, 2009; La W Radio November 9, 2010; Osorio Marín 2014; Alvarado Bedoya 2015). This conclusion emerges from almost a decade of working in evangelical circles in Colombia and hearing constant commentary on the latest shenanigans (founded or not) of the Prosperity Preachers. Taxi drivers would say something like “It’s a Ponzi scheme!”, when they would drop me off in front of the church. Newspaper opinion pieces declared that the church pays no taxes and has illegally built temples on corruptly attained land holdings in the city of Bogotá, while investigative journalism peered into the shady business dealings of the G12 Corporation, with their roughly bi-annual exposés of the church financial records, properties owned in Miami, and ex-church members who had “come forward” to reveal the true on-goings of the tithing practices of the church. In this sense, the church

represented some of the most recognizable and legible conditions of Prosperity Christianity, already explored and carefully unpacked by numerous important interventions into the Anthropology of Christianity (Coleman 2000; Mitchem 2007; Attanasi and Young 2012; Bowler 2013).

I had been intrigued yet unsatisfied by these evaluations of why and how prosperity Christianity has grown, and continues to grow, throughout the world. What better place to consider additional dimensions to the puzzle of prosperity than in a church so obviously entrenched in the non-doctrines of wealth, health, and upward social mobility in this lifetime? I refer to this thinking as “non-doctrinal” since the leadership and congregants of the MCI explicitly reject their faith as “religious” – in part responding to the sharp lines of distinction that Evangelical Christians in Colombia have historically wanted to draw between their commitment to a life-style over and against Catholic “religion.” It also attests to the conviction that the MCI instills values and practices in its adherents that will ultimately work to save the nation of Colombia from itself. Secondly, the MCI is somewhat of a maverick of mega-church growth in Colombia. When other mega-congregations were only in nascent form in the late 1980s and 1990s, the pastors of the MCI were holding miracle services that served hundreds of individuals in Bogotá (Castellanos 2006). The patenting of the G12 evangelization strategy in the 1990s solidified the surge of MCI faithful beyond Bogotá, and into the broader Colombian Republic. The MCI now boasts congregational franchises in Europe, throughout South America, and into the United States. Third, after observing for several weeks how newcomers attached themselves to cell groups, I saw an accessible route to ethnographic exploration in the form of joining a cell group. In order to do that, I needed to enter the Winning Room.

Part of the G12 strategy is the Winning Room. The Winning Room is where individuals who had just converted in the Sunday morning service, after saying the “Believer’s? Prayer” are led. Winning, as the following chapters further explain, is the first moment in the four-step program of evangelism that the MCI espouses. Winning is followed by Discipling, then Consolidating, and finally Sending. In the Winning room on this particular Sunday, roughly two hundred people received a short introduction to Evangelical faith. The new converts heard the basic rules and guidelines of the MCI brand of Christianity, and were paired up with “pastors” cell group leaders, who jotted down names, phone numbers, identification numbers, and emails

in order to follow up and invite the new believers to their first cell group meeting. In the Winning Room, Fernanda came and sat down beside me, taking out her pad of paper and cell phone at the same time. I was quick to explain that I was a sort of interloper, not a true convert, but rather a researcher beginning ethnographic fieldwork and a visiting professor at the largest public university in Bogotá, the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. She sat back, at once stunned and visibly excited. “I knew it” she said slowly. “I could tell we were meant to meet. Before I met Jesus, I was also a public university professor and a researcher. I was also a communist! We were meant to be! I am going to help you make this dissertation a Spirit-led work.” And with that, she leaned over to hug me.

My own chagrin at having taken advantage of a sacred space dissipated as we made our first plans to meet over coffee, and Fernanda told me of all the various cell group meetings, conventions, prayer groups, and services I should attend with her. Of course, our relationship would become complicated, strained even at times. After 16 months, Fernanda was exasperated at my obvious developmental delay in my spiritual journey and I, on the other hand, felt trapped by her jealous hold on my attentions. We both had agendas that were only partly fulfilled through our relationship. Every time I suggested I visit a different cell group in order to attain a broader understanding of MCI practice, she lectured me, let me know that she wasn’t comfortable with my promiscuous engagement with various groups in the church, and even, sometimes, cried. These conversations inevitably led to re-hashing her frustrations with growing her own cell group, and her disappointment that having a Canadian researcher in her cell group did not help her win more converts. Her constant anxiety with being an MCI “failure” was one that I could barely sympathize with, and if it seems as though my engagement with the MCI was somewhat uni-dimensional in that it is through Fernanda’s eyes primarily, this is one of the reasons why. I just could not bring myself to betray her trust of my fidelity to her being my central research subject. Yet on the other hand, the challenge of my relationship with Fernanda was rich and revealing in ways that an easy relationship would not have been. We had long debates about politics, the role of the church in public affairs, the public education system, Marx and guerrilla warfare, and relationships with men. I regularly forgot that I was primarily an “ethnographer” and engaged Fernanda as an equal human being whose thoughts, words, and actions bothered and engaged me as much as any other person’s would.

## **Sofia**

Sofia came into the research later in the process. She is Fernanda's sister and treated me with quiet curiosity for the first six months of fieldwork. In retrospect, I wonder if her distance had something to do with the respected boundaries among cell group leaders at the MCI. Sofia ran her own cell group, is married and has two children in their early teens. I had been introduced to Nu Skin by an acquaintance with no ties to the MCI, and had accompanied this friend to my first recruitment meeting on a Saturday afternoon. The Nu Skin recruitment meeting illustrated such an evangelical spirit of the free market, the emphasis on "becoming one's own boss" the rejection of wage labour, without saying as much, and the mystery of the multi-marketing system that relied as much on "believing in the self" as it did on selling anything. Additionally, in order to become a Nu Skin salesperson, individuals were required to purchase a starter kit, starting at two million pesos – a significant sum for the primarily unemployed and lower class audience. I noticed people taking out credit cards in order to make their first purchase of the kit, with dreams of millions of pesos in sales in the short-term future.

The sacrifice on credit was strangely reminiscent of the ways in which I had observed credit cards being utilized for covenanting in the MCI. I had recently reviewed Peter S. Cahn's book, *Direct Sales and Direct Faith in Latin America*, in which Cahn carefully traces multi-marketing strategies in neoliberal Mexico to the New Thought Movement of the late nineteenth century United States (Cahn 2011). The New Thought movement, according to Cahn, informed the subsequent developments in early twentieth century United States of pursuits of wealth and the "American Dream" through finding refuge in movements like Alcoholics Anonymous and direct sales. The central tenet of these movements was that the only obstacle to prosperity, sobriety, and health resides within the self. Positive thinking was the foundation to fulfilling the promise of "anyone can make it" the legacy of Benjamin Franklin's "Poor Richard" and arguably one of the foundations of the spirit of industrial capitalist development unique to the United States. I was extremely intrigued by the connection between the rise of New Thought and its translation into the prosperity gospels of the mid-twentieth century in the United States, as Kate Bowler (2013) carefully outlines. I considered a multi-level marketing company in Colombia—a new development to be sure—to be an important context in which to better understand the confluence between Prosperity Christianity and neoliberal markets in Latin America.



The morning after my first introduction to Nu Skin, in the church service of the MCI, I (for whatever reason) thought that Sofia's skin looked particularly luminescent (perhaps testimony to some of the real effects of Nu Skin products), and I asked her if she was familiar with Nu Skin products. She turned to me shocked and disarmingly pleased. "Yes! I use Nu Skin and I sell it!" We began a conversation about the multi-level marketing company that led me to accompany Sofia to numerous recruitment meetings, and opened the gateway to exploring the forms in which Sofia understood prosperity. For Fernanda, the line between accompanying Sofia to Nu Skin and attending her cell group meetings, was a thick one. Once I suggested visiting Sofia's cell group, and once again Fernanda expressed her discomfort and concern at my spiritual philandering. I remained strictly a Nu Skin observer with Sofia, which developed a fruitful relationship and revealing site of ethnographic engagement. Sofia conceptualized prosperity somewhat differently than Fernanda, but nonetheless within the frame of the teaching and practices of the MCI—prosperity rides on the belief that the future can be different, and that individuals have the power to believe that future into being.

## **Remedios**

After many months of visiting different banking institutions, what some refer to as "researching up" I was well aware that financial inclusion was a central part of the financialization puzzle. However, I was not getting very far with bankers and credit card companies. Frankly, the interviews were informative, but I wasn't reaching the depths of access that I considered necessary in order to fully understand what "banking" the population meant. Indeed, after a few interviews with banking executives, the directors of commercial financial institutions, or government economic development programs, my questions would be met with mounting suspicion and disengagement. I had been promised access by some institutions, for example, Asobancaria, the Colombian commercial banking association and representation to government, to attend meetings and accompany financial literacy course development programming. However, after my questions began to probe into unwelcome territory (for example, asking about mounting indebtedness among the population, or financial ties to mega-churches), I was usually shooed away or emails would remain unanswered. I decided to explore the terrain of financial inclusion from a different angle: microfinance. All of the banks and financial institutions I visited

and conducted interviews with (Davivienda, Bancolombia, Asobancaria, Bank of Opportunities, Bancoldex, and Bankers without Borders) proudly explained their embrace of microfinance as a new financial product directed at expanding their clientele to the poor majority of the Colombian populace. The degree of conviction from these bankers with regard to how much microfinance was necessary for economic growth and whether or not development required credit, was distinct. As is illustrated in Chapter 4, Juan Carlos of Davivienda was clear that microfinance was designed to expand markets. However, many of the banking staff were convinced of the positive potential that credit held for poor clients.

In part, the discourse of positive effects of microfinance was couched in language that celebrated the disciplining effects that microfinance programs had on client economic behavior. Although microfinance has been the darling of development since the 1990s, drawing in development organizations from the largest (like the World Bank) to the smallest (like local Christian NGOs). In Colombia the particularity of microfinance is that many local programs are managed by Christian NGOs. I know this because I worked with one such NGO that developed a microfinance program in joint partnership with Opportunity International, many years ago (2003-2006). I approached the current supervisor of the program at the NGO and explained my research. The program coordinators were young, aspiring social workers, whose evangelical conviction was committed yet critical at the same time. While unsure of the real, long-term impacts of microfinance projects in social development, they were convinced that the economic training they shared with clients had positive impacts on lives.

Remedios was introduced to me as one of the most “evangelical” clients, and one of the most successful. Her restaurant was turning a profit, and she had brought in her daughter and her husband to the microfinance program of the NGO. Remedios is a leader in her “solidarity bank” and was willing to share her stories and experiences with microfinance with me. Over the course of 8 months I regularly visited her in her restaurant in the southern Bogotá neighbourhood Usme. Sometimes we would have formal interviews, when she had time in the middle of busy days cooking and serving a clientele primarily made up of bus drivers and local families. Initially, Remedios would take a break from her duties, and sit down with me. But I noticed that she was anxious about sitting around, chatting with a gringa, while the chicken was being fried in not quite the right way, and the dishes were being put away in the wrong places in

her neat kitchen. Eventually, after spending a number of slow afternoons sipping on Pony Malta (a malt-based soft drink) while making small talk, I just got up and started helping with the dishes. This shifted some degree of the relationship, as Remedios and her helping staff, including her daughter, stared first in horror then broke into peals of laughter—as though seeing a North American do the dishes was the most uproariously hilarious event to ever have occurred. “Now, I’m doing the dishes – do you want to tell me about your credit cards?” I joked. Sure enough, we began to have many more candid conversations after that, and Remedios told me about her childhood, how she arrived to Bogotá, her troubles at home, her overwhelming debts, and how her reluctant belief in prosperity drives her to continue on in the thankless work of running a small restaurant.

## **Garzal**

The first time I visited the community of Garzal was 2011. I was volunteering with a Colombian NGO that specialized in human rights and non-violent action. I had volunteered with the organization during my first research trip to Colombia because I was familiar with the organization, the volunteering helped me manage my cluttered identity, mixed between human rights worker and researcher (a mixed-up-ness still in flux) and I had access to Pentecostal church communities in rural parts of the country who were enmeshed in struggles for land and the political economy of war. This was the fourth dimension I considered important for fully understanding the matrix of political economy of war within which financialization and prosperity were conflating in Colombia. The community of Garzal is a rural village up the Magdalena River in Eastern Colombia.

The community has no running water, no electricity, an elementary school, no clinic, and has been embroiled since the mid-90s in a conflict to remain on their lands, which they farm. The struggle to remain on their land, in spite of death threats and threats of displacement first from guerrilla armies, then paramilitary, and most recently, the drug baron who claims land title, is being led by a Pentecostal Four-Square church in which some fifty families congregate. In my initial visits to the community, I encountered familiar stories to many other rural experiences I had witnessed throughout my time in Colombia. The community felt abandoned by the state and confronted armed actors in their region with fierce faith, strongly rooted in the traditional Pentecostal tradition. What was unique about the community of Garzal was the political tactics

that their faith translated into, including accessing international accompaniment organizations, alerting the United Nations to their plight, and coordinating the local human rights ombudsman in making land claims through legal channels.

The pastor of the community, Pastor Miguel, is a man with grade six education and an unflappable dedication to economic development as a means of permanency. Accessing agricultural credits in order to strengthen the cacao production is part of the alternative economic strategy that, for the pastor and the community, is a key element to encouraging people to stay on their land instead of fleeing to nearby urban centers. Land is a central dimension to Colombia's political economy of war. And the land where the Garzal community is located is also rich with gold, silver, and oil, and is ideal for industrial agricultural development in African Palm and sugar cane. The community of Garzal and their experience as a Pentecostal community is emblematic of the thousands of Pentecostal communities dispersed throughout Colombia's rural regions, abandoned by the state, un-accessed by the Catholic church, and overlooked by researchers. While I was at the *Universidad Nacional*, I had the privilege of working with William Mauricio Beltran, one of Colombia's few sociologists of religion, and certainly the best known. Together we applied for a research grant to highlight the rural Pentecostal communities throughout the country that had not been considered in the literature about Pentecostalism, or Neo-Pentecostalism in Colombia. We were able to focus our efforts on researching the community of Garzal, and I led the team of field-site researchers. We visited the community four times over the course of ten months, for periods of three to five days at a time, conducting workshops, interviews, and working on a documentary film.

### **Literature and contribution**

The main object of this study is the relationship between credit and Christianity in Colombia. My ethnographic focus and theoretical insights are guided by the ways in which Colombians use credit, the manner in which they experience the debt that easy credit introduces, and the forms and media through which a commitment to utopia sustains a credit-fuelled economy within the context of financialization and its effects in a war-torn country. As such, each chapter introduces a dimension to this relationship in its lived experience in everyday Colombia. The main interlocutors and sites that I mentioned above should be considered the core of the evidence and its source. There are further, more peripheral relationships and informants that make up looser

frames of reference, and lastly, theoretical insights serve as tools to think with as the conceptual puzzle is pieced together (more on this below). These three elements (credit, Christianity, Colombia) lead the dissertation to contribute to four distinct literatures. One of the intents of the dissertation is to bring together three of these literatures which, to my knowledge, have never been brought into relief through ethnographic engagement.

The debt upon which a Gospel of prosperity rests is one central element of the relationship between credit and Christianity. In this sense, the dissertation engages the lively debate in religious studies scholarship around the Gospel of Prosperity, its origins and its effects, and the mystery of its popularity in the two-thirds world. Kate Bowler's *Blessed* offers an insightful history of Prosperity thinking and eventual adaptation to Pentecostal Christianity in the United States. Bowler's definition of the four tenets of "the Prosperity Gospel" (as opposed to a broader genealogy that might have included Weber's Puritans or an economic anthropology considering financial crisis) are proposed as: (i) faith; (ii) wealth; (iii) health; and (iv) victory (Bowler 2013, p. 8). These are helpful signposts to define just what kind of Christianity we're dealing with in the current dissertation. Insofar as all of my informants considered these four dimensions as central to their belief, and their implementation of credit, Bowler's frame for defining a Prosperity Christian allows a concise taxonomy.

However, it would be incorrect to map the development of Prosperity Christianity in the United States smoothly onto the Colombian experience, and here is where this dissertation differs significantly. First, as opposed to notable studies of Prosperity Christians, such as Simon Coleman's influential *The Globalization of Charismatic Christianity: The Spread of the Gospel of Prosperity*, Bowler's *Blessed* or Stephanie Y. Mitchem's *Name it and Claim it? Prosperity Preaching in the Black Church*, this dissertation does not contain its study of Prosperity Christianity to one church community or to only churches at all. While the MCI is a central site of research, my approach to Prosperity Christianity sits within a broader approach to thinking about Christianity across institutions, socio-economic activities, and within the homes and families of those who participate in its systems of believing to differing degrees of devotion.

Second, Bowler does make one important observation (among many), "when many people say 'prosperity', they mean survival" (Bowler 2013, p. 8). I dwell in this idea throughout the dissertation, and offer my observations and conclusions as a contribution to this important

field of research on prosperity Christianity, but also to the broader debates in the Anthropology of Christianity.

Third, while Bowler clarifies that her history of the Prosperity Gospel does not consider the “apocalyptic speculation about the effects of the recession” this dissertation does indeed enter the fray of considering structural political economy, the processes of financialization, and the entanglements that these processes have with a regime of prosperity Christianity in Colombia. In this sense, the dissertation presents a perspective on prosperity Christianity that engages ethnographically with an emerging transition from industrial capitalism to neoliberalization in Colombia, and the co-constituting realms of the economic and the Christian in this specific context. To that end, the dissertation participates in the program of an anthropology of Christianity, as well as engaging literature on financialization and the study of Colombia itself.

The first literature is related to the Anthropology of Christianity. I heed Joel Robbins’ call to consider Christianity “for itself” and a loosely shared vision of a prosperity Christianity is the central organizing characteristic of all of my interlocutors (Robbins 2003). In Colombia, the taxonomy of non-Catholic Christianity is perhaps best understood within a spectrum of identification. Here I follow the work of Colombian sociologist, William Mauricio Beltran, who follows the lead of French sociologist of Protestantism in Latin America, Jean-Pierre Bastian. Beltran (2012) and Bastian (1994) analyze what they term *Nuevos Movimientos Religiosos* (New Religious Movements) to identify processes of religious hybridization within the pentecostalization of Latin America. Beltran proposes that Pentecostal expansion in Colombia should be more aptly considered as a process of building upon already hybridized practices of the Catholic tradition with indigenous and afro-descendent religious traditions that are found throughout the country. While much of the work in the subfield of anthropology of Christianity has emphasized rupture, Beltran places the emphasis on continuity in the formation of New Religious Movements, such as Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism. These Movements also include Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Mormons.

While Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches are the most visibly expanding movements, especially in urban centers, throughout the country other non-Catholic religious movements are proliferating. The crux of this argument is that there is no, was never, a “pure” or “originating” Christian tradition that arrived to the Americas and was forcibly installed.

Christian tradition has had a tendency to layer itself with local traditions throughout the Americas, and especially in Latin America. From the arrival of the first Catholic conquistadores to the New World to the most recent missionizing forces of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Christian traditions have co-articulated with indigenous religious traditions already extant. Sharp differentiations between, for example, official Catholic practice and lived Catholic religion in the streets and households of Colombia, or popular Catholic practice and popular Pentecostal practice, are increasingly blurred when a broader genealogical view of Christian tradition is considered within the *longue durée* of the colonial legacy in the Americas (Beltran 2013).

For Beltran, Pentecostalism is Colombia's most important, and fastest growing, minority New Religious Movement. According to the Colombian sociologist, Pentecostalism and its descendants, including the so-called neo-Pentecostals, are also the most hybrid of movements, in constant "mutation and fragmentation" (Beltran 2013, p. 139). "The diverse currents of Pentecostalism [in Colombia]" says Beltran, "have not organized themselves around a homogenous body of practices and beliefs. On the contrary, they are the result of cultural exchanges that generate hybridization with other religious systems. As such, Pentecostalism articulates ancestral practices with hypermodern mechanisms." In this sense, Pentecostalism has adopted practices from popular Catholicism and indigenous traditions, for example a shared faith in "enchantments, curses, and the power of demons." Insofar as Pentecostalism, despite the urgings of many of its adherents in Colombia to distance themselves sharply from Catholic traditions, does so more in name than in practice, Pentecostalism "inscribes itself in continuity and not in rupture with popular Catholicism" (Beltran 2013, p. 139)

A recent Pew survey shows that Colombia's non-Catholic Christians were largely raised Catholic (Pew 2014). More than any other Latin American country, Colombia's non-Catholic Christians converted from Catholicism to some brand of non-Catholic Christianity in adulthood, demonstrating Elizabeth Brusco's point that in Colombia, "becoming a 'Christian' is seen not as changing one's religion, but rather as changing one's entire life" (Brusco 1995, p. 20). Non-Catholic Christians in Colombia, from historical Protestant to neo-Pentecostal, identify only as *evangélico* (Evangelicals), or more generally, *cristianos* (Christians) to distinguish themselves from *Católicos* (Catholics), or *religiosos* (the Religious). The term "prosperity Christian" is in a sense a

native category I employ for identifying Christians, Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal, who use the term “prosperity” as a central component of their faith. Fernanda, Ursula, Remedios, and Sofia would never self-identify as prosperity Christians, but rather, simply, as *evangélicas*. Yet, their discourse and practice holds “prosperity” as a driving goal for their aspirations. It is, indeed, as Bowler proposes, a “crucial arena for spiritual meaning making” (Bowler 2013, p. 8). I understand “prosperity Christianity” to be a broad taxonomic definition that includes most Protestant denominations, as well as Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal forms.

The second literature concerns the placement of Christianity in relation to political economy, which most scholarship in the anthropology of Christianity does not. Ruth Marshall, while dismissing a direct association of her work as a strict anthropology of Christianity, gives perhaps the most detailed and developed analysis of what she terms “Born-Again Christianity” in relation to political economy in her field of study, post-colonial Nigeria. Marshall’s treatment of the prosperity gospel and prosperity economics in the Nigerian context includes a consideration of debt and social obligation, occult economies and the proliferation of prosperity churches in the wake of economic and political crises of the 1990s (Marshall 2009, p. 180-85). Yet, it is important to note that Marshall complicates the idea that Born-Again Christianity and its inclinations to prosperity thinking operate as the vanguard of neoliberal, post-colonial economic re-structuring. Marshall’s project of understanding “the political” in reference to a Born Again prescriptive regime of practice is to understand the postcolonial subjectivation and the forms in which “Born Again practices of power and of the self shore up an occult economy of instant gratification and violence and at the same time provide the means for undermining and overcoming it” (Marshall 2009: 199). However, where Marshall’s Born Again Christians shy away from debt, seek the limit to the reaches of “prosperity” and re-inscribe modes of sovereignty, the prosperity Christians that inform the current dissertation engage with the future in an ambiguous embrace of debt, limitless possibility, and a full range of aspirational motivations that do not address the concept of the “sovereign.” This dissertation takes the relationship between political economy and Christianity to the realms of financialization, where credit cards and compound interest shape a different kind of subject within a Latin American frame.

The third literature engaged involves a broader theoretical consideration of “Christianity” as a “polemical concept” and the forms and media through which relations of



power manifest and are deployed in relation to and with it (Anidjar 2009). The concept of Christianity is complicated by, among other things, the fact there really is no such thing as “Christianity” as an object of study, but rather, as Marshall again affirms, following Gil Anidjar, “objectifications understood...in relational terms...as they emerge from within mobile fields of relations of power and knowledge” (Marshall 2014,p. 345; cf. Anidjar 2009). This debate harkens back to Talal Asad’s work on the anthropology of Islam which is cited as a possible model for an anthropology of Christianity (Asad 1993). Garriot and O’Neill follow Asad in suggesting that perhaps a productive way in which to construct an anthropology of Christianity is to approach it dialogically, with a recognition that Christianity, as Islam, is a contested and dialogical tradition (Garriot and O’Neill 2008).

Garriot and O’Neill propose that within Christianity, identity, place, beliefs, practices, rituals, texts, and so on, are contested by Christians themselves. The obsession of defining “what kind” of Christianity is being discussed is a complicated endeavor in Colombia. What is perhaps the more interesting question may be why informants differentiate themselves into highly complex theological and practical webs of differentiation. “You MUST differentiate between Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal” I heard my informants say repeatedly throughout fieldwork. In this work, the distinctions between the two reside primarily in the emphasis placed on deliverance from material suffering that the Neo-Pentecostal churches embrace, while the Pentecostal theologies tend towards holiness and spiritual re-birth, more than material deliverance. Of course, the distinction is in degree, not content, since both lines of Christian piety embrace holiness, born-againness, and material deliverance through spiritual warfare, however different the intensity of one or the other of those tenets may be in a particular congregation. What I think is the more intriguing question is, why the emphasis on difference in the informant’s view? What is the difference that we should be making as anthropologists? Many of my informants would lead directly to issues of political economy in response to those questions, which leads to yet another challenge: Capitalism and Christianity.

This dissertation, then, also attends to the gap in the literature on anthropology of Christianity and capitalism and the ways in which religious and economic regimes of practice co-constitute each other. In this sense, Weber’s grounding work continues to influence significantly the ways in which Protestant Christianity and “spirits” of capitalism, or finance, are considered.

It is precisely in this way that an anthropology of global Christianity must consider the ways in which newly emerging economic systems form and are informed by newly emerging religious systems. Referring again to the anthropology of Islam, Daromir Rudnyckyj has done very important work in considering the manners in which capitalism and Islam collide and re-form each other in the Indonesian Islamic workplace (Rudnyckyj 2010). Rudnyckyj gives clues as to where a similar analysis of Christian economic technologies may lead. While leaning on Weber significantly, it is worth noting that his analysis did not do much to account for consumption practices so central to prosperity Christianity, and demonstrates an oversight that in today's global, financialized, cashless markets is unthinkable (Appadurai 1986). Simon Coleman suggests that perhaps a productive manner to consider Prosperity practices of the fastest growing segments of global Christianity (while not tied to denomination, it should be noted) is through attention to the "sacrificial economy" (Coleman 2011). Further, Naomi Haynes suggests that "uneven prosperity" might be a useful tool to think with in the consideration of global networks of prosperity and Christianity (Haynes, 2012).

Here I once again follow Simon Coleman's suggestion that perhaps religion can play the role of embodying potential transformation from one mode of capitalism to another (Coleman 1995). Beginning with the Maussian idea of social totality, both capitalism and Christianity are variegated social forms within themselves. I am of the persuasion that a thick analysis of the ways in which religion, more specifically prosperity Christianity, plays the role of embodying social change is paramount, particularly in the purview of classical capitalist modes of production transforming into financialized systems of capital accumulation.

The story of debt as an embodiment of social transformation takes up much of this dissertation. Here I am influenced by David Graeber's work on value and debt (Graeber 1991; 2010) as well as the growing body of scholarship that considers debt and finance in unique ways. The work of Miranda Joseph highlights the trope of "debt to society" in the United States' prison system, with a trope that constructively informs the idea of "good credit" in relation to "good character" in a credit-based economy (Joseph 2014). David Harvey's work is significant to this study, insofar as his pioneering work in Marxist economics and neoliberalism significantly informs my own analysis of the forms of production and accumulation that are emerging in the process of financializing capitalism (Harvey 2004; 2006; 2010; 2011). Randy Martin introduces

the concept of financialization, and his work along with Costas Lapavistas influences my definition of the relations between finance credit, debt, and governmentality (Martin 2002; Lapavistas 2013). Engaging voices in economic theory aids in further understanding the manner in which capitalism, capital itself (which, without debt, ends), and the transformations therein make the local and produce the global in ways that religion plays more than a passive role in.

The fourth body of literature that this dissertation responds to and engages with is work that considers finance capital, the emergence of financialization through the prism of neoliberalism, and the relations between finance, neoliberalism, and Christianity, at the local and global scale. In part, this responds to Kevin O'Neill's call for a study of neo-Pentecostal Christianity and its connection to the "culture of free trade, privatization, and decentralization" (O'Neill 2010, p. xxiv). I parse my ethnographic evidence with the "kind of individual responsibility that structural adjustment seems to demand" (O'Neill 2010, p. xxiv) in order to participate in debates in theorization of financialization and finance capital. To this end, I am concerned with Michael Taussig's suggestion that "the truth of interpretation lies in its intellectual structure of contrasts, and its reality is inherently self-critical" (Taussig 2010, p. 3). With Taussig's suggestion in mind, this dissertation differs in its analytical frame from a sociological, exchange-theory approach to understanding religion and economy. My work especially differs from the rational choice model introduced most importantly by Roger Finke and Rodney Stark in 1992. Finke and Stark's model has been fruitful for many sociologists of religion and indeed has introduced a range of scholars of religion to one possible relationship between religion and economic thinking. My research, however, varies in scope and approach from the Finke and Stark model. There are three reasons for this.

First, over the course of two years of sustained fieldwork, I found little evidence for self-interested motives in the making of religious or economic decisions. Social relations and internalized systems of Christian discipline were the driving forces in most of exchanges I observed, and the explanations I received from informants. Indeed, mutually beneficent relations of exchange are precisely the chimera of Prosperity preaching (in church and by the state) that this dissertation intends to dismantle. Notwithstanding the intention to write against the idea of a society duped into going into debt, the work of illuminating shifting relations of exchange in financial capitalism in light of a violent context, an adherence to an ideal of prosperity, and the

commitment to believing all serve as a critique of *homo economicus* as the last conceptual man standing.

Second, the risk of engaging the idea of religion-as-economy is truly great if exchange theory is to be thought “all the way down” as it were. This idea, though compelling in some regards, belies one of the central arguments of my dissertation: that religion and economy are not separate, distinct, or mutually exclusive realms of praxis. Indeed, the arguments and evidence presented in my dissertation point to a different conclusion altogether: that religion and economy, if we can even use such closed concepts, are co-constitutive and co-creative of each other, especially in late, financial capitalism.

Third, the emphasis I place on debt as the dark shadow of credit further complicates the rational choice model. Prosperity, for the Colombian Christians I got to know over the course of fieldwork, is as much about surviving the precarious realities of a country at war, deep cuts to social security through acute austerity measures, and the constancy of insecurity. Exchange theory runs the risk of glossing the politics of belief, the political economy of finance, and the kinds of Christianity these evoke.

All of the theorists named above analyze the emergence of varying manifestations of capitalism within North American and European contexts which aid in conceptualizing what is similar, and what is different, in the Colombian context. More importantly, however, these theorists also help the North American reader consider their connectedness and naturalization of the rise of debt-driven accumulation, violent forms of disciplinary control, and a financialized capitalism that insists upon expanding the gap between rich and poor; those who have everything and those who have nothing. Lastly, my approach lends itself to a further “esoteric attempt to critically illuminate the ways by which those of us who are long accustomed to capitalist [or financial] culture have arrived at the point at which this familiarity persuades us that our cultural form is not historical, not social, not human, but natural” (Taussig 2010, p. 3).

I consider financialization as a regime of discipline, and this argument relies heavily on a Foucauldian analytical grid of relational power (Koopman and Matza 2013). Neoliberal governmentality is different in its contexts and therefore must employ the practice of “disinterring and transplantation” to follow Stuart Hall (1986). About putting Gramsci to use,

Hall says, “To make more general use of them (Gramsci’s concepts, for example, hegemony), they have to be delicately dis-interred from their concrete and specific historical embeddedness and transplanted to new soil with considerable care and patience” (Hall 1986, pp. 6-7). I rely most heavily on the late lectures of Michel Foucault at the Collège de France, from 1978-79. In this series of lectures, Foucault warns that “power can in no way be considered either as a principle in itself, or having explanatory value which functions from the outset. The term itself, power, does no more than designate a domain of relations which are entirely still to be analyzed, and what I have proposed to call governmentality” (2007, p. 186). Foucault’s deployment of the concepts neoliberalism, biopolitics, power, and discipline rest within a condition of governmentality, what he terms, “no more than a proposed analytical grid for these relations of power” (2007, p. 186). And so, within this loosely defined analytical grid of governmentality, this dissertation seeks out the domains of relations in Colombia that operate in the emergent shift in Christian practices and financializing capitalism.

To that end, I follow Jean and John Comaroff, who state, “as Gramsci’s notion of hegemony was so unsystematically stated that it has made it good to think with; as a relatively empty sign, it has been able to serve diverse analytical purposes and positions” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, p. 19). I approach Foucault similarly, as outlined also by Koopman and Matza, as having offered loosely defined operational concepts to think with in a self-reflexive manner. The move to understand how power operates in a given field (an emerging financialized economy in a war-torn country) leads to “conceptualize the conditioning limits that simultaneously enable and constrain the practices under investigation” as Collin Koopman and Tomas Matza helpfully articulate, (Koopman and Matza 2013, p. 826). Let me explain the empirical difference, and how I understand discipline, power, and biopolitics in Colombia

The war panopticon—the always, ever-present sensation of being watched, subject to constant and invisible surveillance, feeling like the phone is tapped, obsessing over the strange click during your skype calls, never using real names, dates, or places in emails, and the unnerving suspicion that the person walking towards you might have a weapon—is a foundational way in which disciplinary power in the context of a war operates. The normalization of this relation of power at the level of the everyday is the form in which violent power has manifest in Colombia for most of the twentieth, and so far, twenty-first centuries.

Every few days an example is made—a journalist who spoke too much is found brutally disassembled. A few prominent community leaders are quartered and scattered in a town square. Drive-by assassinations of people as prominent as presidential candidates were common place in Colombia during the 1980s and 1990s. The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a shift in this violent disciplinary control to full-fledged massacres of entire communities that were accused of supporting the guerrilla. These massacres would be carried out by paramilitary groups, often aligned with official state military, and possibly drug cartels.

A particularly salient and brutal example of public and political violence put into practice in order to dominate political allegiance was the systematic annihilation of the Patriotic Union, the political platform of Colombia's oldest and largest left-wing guerrilla force, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The establishment in 1982 of the FARC General Secretariat's political branch was envisioned, in part, as a move towards retreating from guerrilla warfare in rural Colombia towards becoming a legitimate oppositional party in the political and civilian sphere. Within the broader, national context in Colombia, the drug economy at this time was emerging and flourishing, the drug cartels were gaining greater political control, and there still existed historical hostility to political inclusivity from Colombia's political elite (more on this history in Chapter 1).

Regionally, the Cold War contagion fears of the United States were supporting military coups and right-wing militias throughout the region of Latin America to quell any political and social movements that smacked of socialist or communist economic doctrines. In 1973, only ten years prior, Chile had served as neoliberalism's first great experiment through the U.S.-backed ousting of liberal-socialist President Salvador Allende, and through the iron-fist of military dictatorship, structural adjustment programs (including privatizing Chile's public sectors, rolling back import tariffs, and sweeping tax reform) served, as Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy have suggested, not only to smoke out left-leaning political reformers, but more importantly to re-establish class power and formation (Duménil and Lévy 2011).

In Colombia, the Patriotic Union represented a threat to dominant political and economic class structures, and also a threat to the United States program of experimenting with enforced austerity programs (under the tutelage of a Reagan administration) and stamping out any perceived "communist" threat. Between 1982 and 2002, estimates suggest that almost five

thousand UP members were assassinated (Centro de Memoria Historica 2013). This is almost two thousand people more than disappeared during the entire Pinochet dictatorship in Chile. The message to the population (and the guerrilla) was clear: there is no space in Colombia for political opposition. There is only a violent, and public, display of disciplinary power that will enforce the maintenance of a highly stratified class system, economic disparity, and a conservative politics. This is the way in which I employ the concept “disciplinary power” and the ways in which governmentality is structured in the spaces of the everyday in Colombia. A few in power use the threat of grotesque violence to manage the masses and this is the disciplinary regime within which financialization in Colombia occurs. Violence is a primary operational design of power in Colombia, and so much of the terror is the unknowingness of who is watching. Where are these that watch? Is it the car parked outside the house for a little too long? Is it the stranger following? Or are they not?

These unseen operatives of a not-quite-state structure emerge violently through neighbours and drive-by shooters. Perpetrators hide in vague memories and the rumours of a group that passed through the night and made the dogs bark (though it may have just been the wind). This is the discipline that reminds the subject of its constancy through the dull ache of anxiety and the normalization of fear that makes every relationship a test, and every conversation a possible task of surveillance. Believing, for many, is a way out of fear—and much more. To invoke Michael Taussig once again, it is clear that “the torturer’s [or possible torturer’s] desire is prosaic: to acquire information, to act in concert with large-scale economic strategies elaborated by the masters of finance and exigencies of production. Yet there is also the need to control massive populations, entire social classes, and even nations through the cultural elaboration of fear” (Taussig 1986, p. 8). The means and media of the war machine in Colombia, at the level of internalized programs of discipline and control, follows the “cultural elaboration of fear” as a central force of power. Fear disciplines the actions and words of most Colombians.

Koopman and Matza differentiate carefully between concepts and analytical grids in their assessment of the “uses of Foucault.” “To employ a concept, or set of concepts (discipline), is not by itself determinative of any given analytic (genealogy). To say a few things about discipline and offer a few words about the importance of history is not yet to do genealogical inquiry even if it may be a step in that direction” (Koopman and Matza 2013, p. 829) That the concepts are non-

codeterminative means that one can legitimately pick up Foucault's analytics or his concepts and put them to work in ways that Foucault would never have anticipated. I think with Foucault, as I think with Gilles Deleuze, Karl Marx, David Harvey, Hannah Arendt, Catherine Bell, Ruth Marshall, Randy Martin, Cesar Castellanos, Michael Taussig, Jean Comaroff, Maurizio Lazzarato, Kate Bowler, and the many other thinkers who moonlight in this dissertation. I make no pretension of developing a theory of power, or finance, or governmentality, or capitalism, or religion. I think with concepts and varying grids of analysis in order to interpret empirical evidence. For, those with whom I think the most are named Ursula, Fernanda, Sofia, and Remedios.



## *Taxi Cab Confessions, Part 1*

*We weaved through traffic at what seemed like eighty miles an hour. “Ha! You bet! I have my CODENSA credit card! I just bought myself THREE new pairs of shoes!” He turned around to look at me, hanging on in the back seat. “THREE! They make it so easy now. I just had to show them my last electricity bill and my cedula.” I wished he would put his eyes back on the road. “Won’t you go into debt if you keep spending?” I asked, taking my mind off the rain and the slick roads, and the driving that I knew would most likely land me safely at my destination. In ten years I had never been in a car accident in Bogotá, and very rarely did I see accidents in the mess of roads and freeways that connect the South American metropolis. I never lost my anxiety about driving at night, in the rain, however. Traffic lights at most suggestions, and loud honking as the cab approached intersections, in some cases speeding up, had me close my eyes most of the time. And sometimes, pray. “THREE new pairs of shoes. Tres pares de nuevos zapatos. And new pants.” He shook his head at his good fortune. “I just have to keep working hard to pay it off. But I love pulling out that card, and just swiping. Done!” He slung his right arm across the front passenger seat. “I think I’ll go shopping after I finish this shift. Maybe I’ll take out my lady. Muñeca, what was the address again?”*

# Introduction

*Crederet*: Believing and Debt in Colombia

*Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all creatures of that unbridled reality, we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude.*

Gabriel García Márquez

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“I am in so much debt” Ursula pulled on her cigarette, head down, while she kicked at the coals of the New Year’s bonfire we had made. It was the dawning of 2014, and we stood on the side of the street, along with most of the neighbours in the *barrio* (“neighbourhood”), either burning make-shift bonfires or burning the *Año Viejo* (the “Old Year”) represented by a life-sized straw figure, filled with fire crackers that pop and boom while burned at the stroke of midnight on the Eve of a New Year. Ursula nodded to herself, “I have a lot of debt” she mumbled one more time. She then turned her face to me, and looked into my eyes, pleading, “they don’t know. Please don’t tell them. I did it all for them, for my family. I wanted prosperity. I know God wants that for us. I believe that. I must.”

Ursula is a doctor and devout Evangelical; and her debt is a central part of Colombia’s emerging story. Her story, akin to so many in Bogotá, narrates the emergence of Colombia’s growing middle class. Perhaps better defined as the “aspirational class” this set of Colombians remains within the lower percentiles of wage-earnings in Colombia. Financial deregulation has

served to break open the credit market to these new consumers and loosen the restrictions on commercial and consumer loans. The demographic of aspiration rests on a socio-economic spectrum, yet importantly for this study, evangelical churches in the capital are flooding with these aspiring Colombians who see themselves as upwardly mobile, both socially and spiritually, despite remaining in the bottom socio-economic sectors of Colombian society. Prosperity Christianity in Colombia, as this dissertation will further explicate, is as much about piety as it is about surviving severe precarity in times of austerity. By precarity, here I refer to the emerging literature on the new “precarious classes” or more aptly, the “Precariat” invoking Marx’s class definition of the working classes as the “proletariat.”

These classes are the masses of individuals around the world who are working, but without any stability or social or labour security. These individuals work contract work, wage labour, no benefits, no security for contract renewal after the six months or year or even two-year contract is up. From the most highly qualified (i.e., PhDs in the adjunct professor cycle) to the lower spectra of wage labour (i.e., Shift workers making minimum wage who are scheduled on a week by week basis), or the direst, those who operate in the informal economies, instable political contexts, and are the most vulnerable to economic shifts, natural disasters, political unrest, and structural violence of poverty, exclusion, and discrimination. The precariat is the emerging class whose future is increasingly uncertain, whose tomorrow is unknown, and those who enjoy no form of representation, cannot represent themselves, and have no say in how they are represented. These unrepresented individuals make up the precariat, whose precarious lives capitulate to the overwhelming “common sense” of advancing capitalism (Butler 2004; Ross 2009; della Porta, et al. 2015; Schierup, et al. 2015; Schram 2015; Lewis, et al. 2015).

Ursula, like so many recent migrants to the Capital, grew up in the hard knocks of rural life, in poverty and in the cross hairs of Colombia's on-going armed conflict. Ursula had her first child before she was twenty, and migrated to the city in search of a better life. Ursula ultimately succeeded, finishing a medical degree in her forties, and for the first time has found herself independently earning enough money through shift wage labour, to provide for her extended family. This economic emergence has also qualified Ursula for numerous credit cards and loans, albeit her capacity for paying them off is the brunt of her debtor's anxiety. This is Ursula's story of emergence, and the debt that has accompanied her prosperity is the crux of this study. So too is Ursula's belief that God will prevail with the promise of prosperity if only debts are managed correctly. By managing her debts, Ursula puts to work an interior discipline that animates the Christian morality, I argue, underwriting finance capitalism.

I conceptualize finance capitalism as a "regime of accumulation" in a post-Fordist era that relies on the immaterial production of profit through speculation and the self-valuation of money, as opposed to material, industrial production. Finance capitalism represents an epochal shift in capitalist forms of production and accumulation, wherein money self-valorizes through a collection of highly technical processes of betting on risk (hypothesizing on return values of debts to be paid in future), trading of capital in stock markets, redistribution of surplus capital into liberalizing global markets, and the virtual valorization of fictitious capital, or capital without liquidity based on future return—what is also known as derivatives trading.

Finance capitalism emerges at the interstice between industrial capitalist modes of production and neoliberal social, political, and economic reform. Central to finance capitalism is a re-configuration of the financial subject, the indebted consumer. This shift can be traced to the crisis of the early 1970s, during which time industrialized nations found themselves in a state of

“stagflation” which can simply be defined as a combination of high inflation (costs of goods and services steadily increase) while at the same time economic growth slows, and unemployment increases. The Keynesian economics of the New Deal established after the Second World War seemed to be failing, and the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates tied to the gold standard were abandoned in 1971 (Harvey 2011, p. 11-13). Floating exchange rates replaced the fixed rates of Bretton Woods, and under the leadership of Paul Volcker, the Federal Reserve increased interest rates. This monetarist policy-making in the United States of the 1970s led the way for structural adjustment reforms throughout the Americas.

By the time Ronald Reagan came to power in 1981, the United States was already leading the region towards the epochal shift of Washington Consensus economics of the early 1990s. The effects of this decade of reform on Latin America is further outlined in Chapter 4. However, important for the time being, is the explanation that Colombia, along with most other Latin American countries, received huge foreign loans from the United States, as well as international financing institutions, like the IMF and the Inter-American Development Bank. The monetary reforms coupled with the oil boom of the late 1970s, meant that the US banks were flush with petro-dollars that needed somewhere to be reinvested. Much of the investment went towards bank-rolling Latin American infrastructure, development, and the purchasing of privatized service and social sector goods.

The debt that was accrued by Latin American countries resulted for most of the region in defaults on loans during the 1980s. Colombia never did default on its foreign loans, in part because of the lucrative drug trade that was artificially keeping the economy afloat, as well as the spectacular increase in the global market price of coffee (Pere-Reyna and Osorio-Rodriguez 2016). However, in the 1990s, after the deregulation of the financial sector and a liberalization of

its markets, the Colombian economy hit a recession that was responded to in part by shifting public debt to domestic debt. Between 2002 and 2012, public debt dramatically decreased, while domestic debt in Colombia continued to increase (Perez-Reyna and Osorio-Rodriguez 2016). Indeed, in real terms, in the first years of the twenty-first century, domestic debt increased so much as to make up 50% of the GDP. Colombia's program of financial deregulation and market liberalization of the early 1990s saw the privatization of key industries along with the decision to finance its primary deficits through the use of private debt securities in the domestic financial markets. This created a market for debt, as the government cashed in on the speculative return on debt payments with interest, on debts from mortgages to agriculture, to housing loans, to increasingly available credit card debts. This is the monetary side of financialization.

In outlining how the credit system tends towards the institutionalization of finance and the conformation of finance capitalism, David Harvey offers an exploration of what, precisely, finance capital is in accordance to a Marxist frame. Harvey helpfully outlines how to understand the role of finance capitalism in crisis formation, but also the central place finance capital holds in the modern capitalist world economy. Vladimir Lenin defines finance capital as “the bank capital of a few very big monopolistic banks, merged with the capital of the monopolist associations of industrialists” (Harvey 2006, p. 289). Beginning with Lenin's definition, Harvey illustrates the first of the two dominant theories of finance capital in order to dialectically deconstruct the idea that finance capital is an epochal shift, arguing instead that it is a continuation of capitalist accumulation.

Finance capital functions as the central pivot point towards the emergence of finance as the primary regulatory mechanism of capital accumulation. This transition to “late stage capitalism” establishes a new world order insofar as capitalism becomes through this process a

truly globalizing, and, according to Lenin, an imperialist endeavour to establish the “global market.” Finance capital, then, according to Lenin, offers a lightning rod for understanding the convergence of the proliferation of emergent capitalist manifestations of the twentieth century, the political project of neoliberalism, and the wars and inter-state rivalries that have accompanied it. Yet, as Harvey notes, Lenin nowhere elaborates on the theoretical framing of “finance capital.” Thus, he turns to Hilferding, and we turn as well to Lapavitsas, for their contribution to that end.

Rudolf Hilferding defines finance capital more clearly as the unification of capital. He states that the “abolition of free competition of individual capitalists by the big monopolistic associations” results in the “change in the relationship of the capitalist class to state power” (Hilferding 1981, p. 21). Perhaps most notable, according to Hilferding, is the development of state policies that respond to the “requirements of finance capital [to] make the export of capital rather than commodities a primary concern” (Ibid: 268). This shift, from commodity production to fictitious capital, may be one of the most legible expressions of neoliberalism. As a political project, the neoliberal project has sought to alter the relationship of a global capitalist class to state structures and the legal scaffolding that orders the world economy as we know it.

The turn of commercial banks towards personal incomes as a source of profit and financing for government, as well as the adoption of investment-banking strategies are what, according to Lapavitsas, led to the significant distancing between industrial and commercial capital and the crisis which ensued from the sub-prime housing bubble in the United States (Lapavitsas 2009, p. 4). The use of private income and savings in investment-banking tactics, such as large-scale loans, high-risk trading, and speculative trading, encompass what Lapavitsas proposes as “financialization.” These banking procedures have not only financialized U.S.

financial relations, but indeed have reconfigured strategies of imperialism on a global level, including in Colombia (Lapavitsas 2009, p. 4).

National economies, both developed and underdeveloped in this era (1990s), were saddled with significant trade-surpluses. This bubble led to the “accumulation of foreign-exchange reserves” most of which were channeled back through U.S. state securities as, what Harvey would refer to, “high quality money” (Harvey 2006, p. 14). When the first shocks hit, and faith in the markets began to waver, the demand for liquidity, which of course the banks had wagered in the high-risk trading and lending during the bubble, eventually led to the domino effect of tumbling financial institutions and the contradiction of markets being flush with fictitious capital, without the liquid assets to produce and fulfill obligations. This “crash” reconfigured the relationship of the state to the markets, as well as the engineering of market-democracy, or what can also be understood as the “market-state.” This process is what might be understood as “neoliberalization.” What will be further considered is how this process of financialization has become entangled, or always was, with a certain Christian morality in Colombia.

The expectation of God’s intervention through and because of debt is a refrain I heard repeatedly during extended fieldwork in urban and rural Colombia. These two prongs, debt and belief, are the hinges upon which Ursula’s prosperous aspirations hang. These aspirations frame the practices of Prosperity Christianity in Bogotá’s mega-churches, financial education rubrics in Christian-run micro-credit programs, and personal development models proposed by multi-level marketing multinationals. Entrepreneurial energies are poured into new churches, new businesses, new markets, and new selves. The conflation of the religious and economic in these processes are what this dissertation intends to tease out. And Colombia is a prime site to ask what



the distinctions and connections are between these two ostensibly distinct realms of human action.

In the last two decades, Evangelical Christianity has grown by 230% in Colombia while credit card use has spiked by 500% (Pew 2014; Beltran 2013; Bidegain Griesing and Demera Vargas 2005; Superintendencia Financiera 2013). These two statistics are held together by the varied disciplinary machinations of an Evangelical morality that disciplines efforts at prosperity through debt. I am placing debt, and indeed finance itself, within the scaffolding of a regime of governance. This construction of governance, for the purposes of this study, will be referred to as “financialization.” Through considering the believing practices that build the foundations of financialization, this dissertation reveals that seemingly secular practices (such as double-entry bookkeeping, punctual debt payments, constantly giving accounts of the self, and the affective toll of debts) work to render Colombians like Ursula “Prosperity Christians.” Easy credit, sparse financial education, abundantly accessible credit cards, sub-prime lending, a stable investment-grade credit rating, relative political stability, and limited financial regulation have been the secret to Colombia’s economic success story of a rising aspirational class that enjoys unprecedented levels of prosperity.<sup>2</sup> But at the level of the everyday, the underside of prosperity, as Ursula shared with me, is the crushing debt that accompanies credit.

Based on two years of fieldwork and over a decade of work and study in Colombia, this dissertation details the believing practices that shape indebtedness in Colombia. The study contends that, through foregrounding the practices of Prosperity Christians in Colombia, a unique narrative of financialized capitalism emerges. The narrative is different from previous

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<sup>2</sup> For the first time in a decade, Colombia’s credit rating was given an investment-grade rating in 2011, marking the country as an increasingly stable and newly desirable destination for foreign investment (see Jaramillo 2013).

studies on all three realms of research that inform the work at hand, namely prosperity Christianity, financial capitalism, and Colombia. The narrative introduced in this dissertation illustrates how practices of believing bend internalized practices of debt-management towards the design of financialized subjects.

Ursula's secretiveness, her shame, at the debt she had accumulated folds into her faith that debt is necessary in order for prosperity to be enjoyed. This shame, or guilt, cultivates an interiority of indebtedness as a central component of the process of becoming prosperous. Secretly, Ursula asked me to accompany her to meetings with the bank, we considered her credit card statements together over cups of coffee and *panela*, and she embarked on a financial education course.

Ursula told me in one of our evening conversations about her credit card debt, "yes, of course it is shameful, *vergonzoso*, but it is necessary. This is the sacrifice I make in order to buy groceries for my parents or a surprise bag of clothes for my grandchildren. I just need to manage the debt better." She worked more hours in order to pay off the debts, bought less for herself, and attended church more regularly.

Ursula recognized her debt as a necessary burden to attain prosperity, however shameful she might have understood it to be. Importantly, her debt was also a vehicle of social relation, with her family, with herself, and with God. Ursula's debt worked on her interior self as much as it managed her work schedule, her prayer life, and her financial planning. She juggled responsibilities in the home with on-line courses on financial education, and regularly taking on extra shifts for the home-care medical company she worked for. Ursula, already a grandmother, was paid by the hour, and her wage labour dictated her management of debt, and her soul. One

morning after only a few hours of sleep, she was rushing past my questions on her way to work: “When I work more, I make more, and I feel better about my debts. I can take on more!”

In Colombia’s emerging financial landscape, Ursula’s life is made legible only through the harsh grammar of market competition. And the stubborn belief that she is becoming prosperous.

### **--- Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and Catholicism ---**

According to recent surveys, Colombia overwhelmingly remains a “believing” society. Colombian sociologist, William Mauricio Beltran reports that ninety-five percent of Colombians define themselves as “believers” (*creyentes*) and eighty-five percent consider religion to be “important” (Beltran 2013). Beltran does not define what he means by “believer” but given that his study is focused on religious pluralization, one can glean that by believer he refers to persons of all faiths, religious traditions, and sects. Beltran’s statistical research shows that seventy percent of the population surveyed identified as Catholic (70%), seventeen percent identified as some variation of Protestant (including Charismatic Evangelical, Christian Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Protestant; 17%), five percent as agnostic or atheist (5%), three point five percent as “believing in God but not a religion” (3.5%), two percent as Jehovah’s Witness (2.3%), point zero two percent (0.2%) as other, and a small representation of “non-secular, non-religious). It should be noted that Beltran’s study was limited to urban districts and had a sample size of 3, 853 individuals surveyed. The survey did not reach rural Colombia where Pentecostalism in Colombia has its roots. According to a 2014 Pew Center Survey, seventy-nine percent of Colombians identify as Catholic and thirteen percent identify as Protestant or some variation, and six percent are unaffiliated while two percent identify as “other” (Pew 2014).

Catholicism in Colombia is down from ninety-five percent in 1970 to between seventy to seventy-nine percent in 2014. Given that the increase in credit card use takes into account the entire Colombian population, one can only assume that this increase has also affected the Catholic population. That said, this dissertation does not focus on Catholic adherents, nor the ways in which credit is considered and utilized by Catholics in Colombia. This is not a comparative project in that sense (for a full history of Pentecostalism see Chapter 1).

However, it is worth noting that of the Evangelical Christian population, ninety-two percent were raised Catholic. It is also worth noting that, according to Mauricio Beltran, popular Catholicism (the majority self-identifying Catholics who incorporate a hybrid of indigenous and African traditions with “formal” Catholicism) in Colombia have had a long-standing relation to a miracle-based economy, what Beltran defines as a “magical” character, “a pantheon of diverse Christs, virgins, saints, and souls of the dead” (Beltran 2013, p. 129). Additionally, Beltran explains that popular Catholicism frequently involves the use of “magical objects” such as amulets, scapulars, and holy water. I hesitate to endorse the term “magical” and rather turn to Robert Orsi’s consideration of lived religion as “the sensuous, graphic, and complicated piety” of Catholic devotion in Colombia. Indeed, a full-length study of Catholicism and financialization would be an important contribution to the arena of research into religion and economy in the Americas (see Chapter 1 for a further history of Protestantism and Pentecostalism in Colombia).

### **--- Prosperity and the New Colombia ---**

Throughout my extended fieldwork in Colombia, prosperity was the word on everybody’s lips. And it was almost always tied to new forms of credit. The government declared prosperity a matter of democratic governance with its National Development plans. From 2010-2014, the

plan was entitled “Prosperity for All” and boasted the optimistic language of prosperity. The plan begins with the enthusiastic affirmation of Colombia’s “newness”: “We are on the forefront of authentic optimism in our future, an incomparable confidence in the potential of our country, and an international image that is clearly positive. From being perceived as a failed state we have converted into an emerging economy, ripe for foreign investment and tourism” (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2010).

This is noteworthy, because during most of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Colombia has been depicted, in media and news channels throughout the Americas, as well as within its own borders, as a country overrun with drug lords, militia armies, and the chaos of the longest on-going civil war in the Americas. That is, if it was considered at all. The Development Plan goes on to state: “The path towards prosperity, although difficult, is clearer than ever in the historical moment that our country is living” (PND 2010). Colombia’s “newness” is heralded in the on-going peace talks between the world’s oldest guerrilla army, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government. In a speech given in 2015, at the signing of the last points for a peace accord, President Santos encouraged: “Today we are taking an enormous step towards a new Colombia and I invite you [Colombians] all to build together. Because this positive horizon calls us to create, not to destroy; it calls us to unite, not to divide” (El Tiempo 2015).

The “new Colombia” is also promoted as a prosperous Colombia. President Juan Manuel Santos regularly refers to the “financial dividends of peace” as one of the most important consequences for the country upon the signing of a peace accord. In a 2015 speech to the United Nations General Assembly, the President exclaimed, “My country celebrates and embraces these objectives [for peace], because we are aware that these are also the necessary conditions for

building peace, and at the same time, peace in Colombia will have very high dividends, precisely in the economic” (Santos 2015).<sup>3</sup>

The *Financial Times*, already in 2013, proclaimed in their special issue entitled, “The New Colombia” that “the New Colombia is undeniably a better country than the old one, in the sense of being more secure, more prosperous, and better known” (Rathbone 2013). The “born-againness” of the nation is not lost on investors and corporate clients. With Colombia’s peace negotiations, increasing political stability has led to a soaring investment grade rating. And Colombia has been named part of the CIVETS, the second wave of most favoured emerging economies in the world.<sup>4</sup> In part, this is due to the numerous free trade agreements Colombia has ratified in under a decade, and the credit markets have enjoyed the surge as much as Colombian financiers have.<sup>5</sup> Credit cards are proliferating in the country, now counting nearly nine million in hand, up a million from the year before (Portafolio 2015). Credit cards are becoming easier to access and Colombians are following suit with citizens in other major emerging economies, such as Brazil and South Korea, becoming rapidly and significantly indebted.<sup>6</sup> The newness is also not

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<sup>3</sup> The speech was given on September 25, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> The other CIVETS countries are Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey, and South Africa. It should be noted that recently, however, Colombia’s dependence on petroleum products has affected its investment grade standing, and Colombia was recently named one of the “fragile five” (along with Mexico, South Africa, Turkey, and Indonesia). It would seem there is not stability in emergence.

<sup>5</sup> Since 2008, Colombia has ratified free trade agreements with Canada, the European Union, the European Free Trade Association, the United States of America, Chile, China, Peru, and Singapore. See *Foreign Trade Information System*, Organization of American States.

<sup>6</sup> Both Brazil and South Korea are regarded as the quintessential emerging economies in a strict economic sense of growing gross domestic product, financial stability, credit rating, and increased purchasing power. However, consumer debt (that is, debt accumulated primarily through credit cards and payday loans) is crippling consumer capacity and the credit bubbles are beginning to burst in both countries. This demonstrates an alarming trend in terms of injecting consumer credit into an emerging economy without adequate regulation and foresight. Indeed, Dell’Ariccia et al. (2012) find that about one in three booms have been followed by a period of sub-par growth or a banking crisis. According to a 2013 International Monetary Fund report, consumer credit in Brazil represented 46% of the national Gross Domestic Product, compared to 23% in 2002. Consumer indebtedness in Brazil exceeded 40% of household income in 2013, and debt service (payments made on consumer credits) hung at around 23%. In South Korea, the other emerging economy par excellence, the Economist reports that in 2012, consumer debt was at 1.6 times Korean’s annual disposable income, compared to an average of 1.3 in other OECD (Organization for

lost on the spiritual entrepreneurs leading Colombia's evangelical resurgence. The regular sermons of the dozens of mega-churches dotting Bogotá's sky-line announce that financial resurrection and prosperity are part of God's Divine plan for all believers while micro-credit programs, many run by Christian NGOs and some churches, are becoming the most successful trend in the development industry, putting millions of micro-credit recipients into millions of micro-debts. Credit cards, lines of credits, and micro-credits are the fastest growing financial products in Colombia, increasing at an average of nine percent per annum, and the most significant portion of credits are for commerce and consumption (Superintendencia 2014). All of these statistics and factors are contributing to Colombia's emergence.

Yet while the official numbers and presidential addresses proclaim Colombia's newness, the backstory of the economic resurgence is the everyday lived experience of the millions of Colombians who are putting to work the belief that each individual is contributing to the new, through becoming new themselves, even in the face of uncertainty. It is in this sense that Ursula's drive to "become prosperous" reveals a specific set of actions that revolve around possibility, potential, and promise. To become new, to become prosperous, to become recognized, these are the desires of the emerging discourse and what differentiates this study of Colombia from the many that have been written before. Rather than foreground the tired tropes of a country mired in conflict and violence, the present study seeks to pinpoint the regimes of practice that deliver a future.<sup>7</sup> For in the study of finance, the categories of analysis put to work are speculation on the

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Economic Cooperation and Development) countries (OECD countries are the roughly 20 most developed countries in the world).

<sup>7</sup> Many of the anthropological studies on Colombia have made very important contributions to the history, politics, and anthropological understanding of the country. Most prominent are Michael Taussig's various contributions to understanding the magical realism of Colombia, its history, and its violence. A number of these studies are engaged with directly in the following pages. Important also in this collection of anthropology of Colombia is the work of Alisse Watterston (2009); Oscar Jansson (2008); Jimena Perry (2006); Winifred Tate (2007, 2015); and Arturo Escobar (2008, 2012).

possibility of future return and interest-bearing debt. The ethnographic evidence, demonstrated by individual Prosperity Christians, details the exhortation to focus on what is yet to be. Prosperity studies must be as much a recognition of the present as a consideration of the ideals for the future that inspire practice. Herein lies the distinction, as well as the complexity, of a study on credit and believing in an emerging nation.

Financialization is becoming a regime of governmentality, a relation of power, that operates through an imagined future; an always “yet to be.” Commodities are not the primary vehicle of trade in financial capitalism, as they were in Marx’s industrial capitalism. This is not the straightforward production of wage earnings and time management of Weber’s Protestants. Finance trades in futures and speculations. At the level of the individual, finance trains present action through an aspiration for the future. Credit is fictitious capital, as Marx foretold, and operates as such.<sup>8</sup> Finance works, to a significant degree, as a fiction, as an imagining, as a possibility, or as a belief. Another example from the field illustrates this point.

In a different field site, just ten blocks from Ursula’s *barrio*, the *Misión Carismática Internacional* (MCI) sits squarely on the corner of one of Bogotá’s busiest intersections.<sup>9</sup> The MCI is Colombia’s fastest growing Evangelical mega-church and Prosperity Christianity is its currency of salvation. Fernanda, a principle informant at the church, explained salvation to me on one of

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<sup>8</sup> Marx never completed his thoughts on fictitious capital, credit, interest, or investing and speculating. Engels retrieved the notes that Marx had begun on the themes, and these became most of volume three of *Das Kapital*. Fictitious capital is explained thusly (from the *Encyclopedia of Marxism*, [www.marxists.org/glossary/terms](http://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms)): “Fictitious capital is value that exceeds the value possibly produced from the exchange of commodities. If a capitalist forces people to work without pay, yet succeeds in selling their labour, s/he has secured capital. However, if the capitalist then does not re-invest the capital in commodities but rather *invests* the money into the bank, the capitalist now has a *claim* to capital. This claim, however, can only bear profit for the capitalist if it is in circulation, receiving interest. In order for the capital to be put back into circulation, the bank must then *loan* the capital. The industrialist who borrowed the money then must pay *service on the loan* in the form of interest. Fictitious capital comes about when the bank receives, for example, one million in investment, yet loans out ten million in order to keep that ten million in circulation and the interest on each loan goes not to the one financier, but back to the bank. This is also how banks become “commercial” entities.

<sup>9</sup> For those interested in Google mapping the mega-church, the intersection is *Americas* with *Carrera 30*.



our first conversations over potato soup in the church's cafeteria after a Sunday morning service. "You are born again through the spirit coming into you. Then you open yourself to perfection through your intimate relationship with Jesus." I asked if perfection is immediate and if her Christian life was mostly an exercise in maintenance. Fernanda laughed and cut a potato with the plastic spoon. "Of course not. You never are fully perfect. You are always in a process of becoming perfect. You always work on what you can become. You need to believe that you can be what God wants you to be." This belief in the future, in the possibility of becoming, of the return on salvific investment, is what I refer to throughout the dissertation as "free market spirituality."

Free market spiritualities are informed by, but break from the long line of Holiness traditions that have influenced Protestant evangelizing in the Americas. The Methodist-based Holiness tradition emphasized a "Second Blessing" or a personal salvific experience that delivers the believer from committing sin, after the first blessing of salvation by way of conversion (Jones 2002). The first Methodist missionaries arrived to Colombia in 1941, some years after the first Evangelical Alliance Missions (1918), the World Evangelism Crusade (1933), the Pentecostals (1938), the Southern Baptist mission boards (1941), and the Foursquare Gospel Church (1942). All of these missions established themselves first in small cities, many along the Caribbean Coast, and then moved into the more challenging terrain of rural Colombia's mountains and jungles, where the Catholic church had a looser hold. These would be the Pentecostal traditions that gave way to a more robustly Prosperity-focused gospel in urban centers of Colombia in the 1980s and 1990s, when religious freedom allowed for public recognition of alternate traditions to Roman Catholicism (Bidegain Griesing and Demera Vargas 2005). According to Kathryn Lofton, the influence of the Holiness-Pentecostal tradition in the formation of a personage like

Oprah, with a distinct spiritual consumerism as new dogma and enveloping gesture towards Prosperity, cannot be over-stated (Lofton 2011, p. 120).

From the Wesleyan affirmation to “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48) to “live your best life” the divergence from living life blessed by the signs of the Holy Spirit to one in which prosperity *is* a sign of spiritual giftedness, free market spirituality recognizes the gifts of the spirit within the private enterprise of the church together with the public demonstration of the financial returns of spiritual obedience. This is the set of practices that puts to work a regime of finance, not as an institution of enclosure, but rather as the “modulating principle” of continuous control that debt evokes in its subjects. This is a central element in what makes Colombia both a disciplinary regime as well as an emerging society of control. Indeed, the confluence of private and public realms of control are what constructs the emergence. Both of these concepts, of enclosed discipline and diffused virtual control, are at play in the domain of power relations at the level of individual and society.

For Michel Foucault, “spirituality” is a way of knowing, different from “philosophy.” In his late lectures at the Collège de France, on “The Hermeneutics of the Subject” 1981-1982, Foucault develops the concept of “spirituality” according to a number of characteristics. Foucault defines the concept as the “set of researches, practices, and experiences...which are not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject’s very being, the price to be paid for access to truth” (Foucault 2005, p. 15). Foucault then organizes “Western Spirituality” into three main characteristics. The first is that for the subject to have *right* access to truth, she must be “changed, transformed, shifted, and become...other than [her]self” (Foucault 2005, p. 15).

Free market spiritualities follow this program of reform, insofar as the free market acts upon the very selfhood of the prosperity Christian, reforming, changing, and training the soul towards becoming more, becoming better, becoming prosperous. The conversion necessary for truth in the frame of free market spiritualities, is the very idea that the market operates according to rational, benevolent, equalizing force. Deregulation of the market in finance capitalism has come to have an effect on the very interiority of the self; the soul has become a site for deregulation and then, consequently, re-regulation. Herein lies one of the great contradictions of finance, which was explained above. The soul here refers to the site for the exercise of power within the person, the very “effect of political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body” We might add, the soul is the site for the effects of economic anatomy, the site for the process of deregulation and structural adjustment at the level of the individual (Foucault 1995: 30). The soul will be more fully explained in Chapter 2.

The second characteristic of “spirituality” according to Foucault, resides in the consequence of this conversion experience, and the resultant requirement for a very particular “work of self on the self” (Foucault 2005, p. 16). Foucault names the two conceptualizing modalities through which the subject becomes capable of truth as “love” and “asceticism” or the regimes of practices and regulations that must be followed in order to access truth. In free market spiritualities, we enter the realm of “love” insofar as the subject is delivered from the immediacy of her situation through seemingly divine intervention vis-à-vis credit. The work that must be done on the self, the asceticism, reforms the self in a program of internalized regulation according to the demands of the free market. Responsibility for material and spiritual well-being is a relational program of deliverance and subsequent work on the self. In free market spiritualities,

asceticism begins to shadow love, and the relationality of the process becomes lost as deliverance itself becomes entirely the responsibility of the individual.

The last characteristic of spirituality is tranquility of the soul; the comfort of knowing truth. Truth somehow “saves” the subject. This definitional outline of how Foucault understands “spirituality” is set within a specific historical and genealogical context. Foucault, however, suggests that in the current epoch there has been a shift, in knowledge and in the pursuit of truth. This relatively ancient construction of spirituality in opposition to philosophy has become transfigured through modernity, and today, in the modern age, “the subject is capable of truth, but that, such as it is, the truth cannot save the subject” (Foucault 2005, p. 19). Knowing, capitulating to, reforming in accordance to, and practicing within the frame of free market spiritualities does not deliver prosperity Christians in Colombia from their context of precarity. Nevertheless, these spiritualities, sets of practices and regulations, do the endless work of training and retraining the soul, through practices of accounting, prayer, confession, and reform, as the following chapters will further illuminate.

As Gilles Deleuze astutely noted, “the operation of markets is now the instrument of social control...control is short term and of rapid rates of turn-over, but also continuous and without limit, while discipline was of long duration, infinite and discontinuous. Man is no longer man enclosed but man in debt” (Deleuze 1992, p. 6). The emergence of a society of control, in which control is exercised by the decentralized and shadowy forces of the state, the bank, and God, the tangled webs of lingering disciplinary regimes is newly legible through a study of the believing practices of Prosperity Christians, spurred by belief, and controlled by continuous debt. Believing has become central to prosperity.

### --- Believing in the New Colombia ---

Accompanying Colombia's prosperous emergence is the exhortation to believe. Also a ubiquitous trope, believing harnesses the unknown and its very ambiguity calms the concerns of an increasingly uncertain population. Already when I began my fieldwork in 2011, faith in the free market bumped up against the effects that economic liberalization was having on the social and political landscape. Indeed, my lead to the MCI occurred on a busy Bogotá bus, a *colectivo*, on a rainy night on the way home from a field-site that turned out to be a dead end. Friends were discussing the phenomenon of the incumbent President, Alvaro Uribe, and his support from evangelical Christians in the Capital. The young woman seated in front of us turned around and announced, "I go to the *Misión Carismática Internacional*. Have you heard of it? We are all *Uribistas* there. He is our president! We believe in him!" Alvaro Uribe's administration (2002-2010) brought in some of the most bellicose and heavy-handed military maneuvers to secure territory and institutions for foreign direct investment.

Plan Colombia (2001-present) was a counter-insurgency policy of U.S. military and social intervention that served to strengthen Colombia's military and effectively depleted the military might of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). It also secured Colombia's main travel routes and natural resource extraction sector through greater military presence. Under the Uribe regime and the years of most significant U.S. military aid, human rights violations increased significantly, rates of forced displacement spiked, and extrajudicial executions became common-place (Chaves 2008). These years also saw the unfurling of the "para-politics" scandal, in which nearly half of Colombian Congress was investigated for ties to paramilitary groups that were notoriously growing in strength and presence throughout the country during the years of Plan Colombia.

The contradiction of believing in the future, believing in the Colombia that could be, and the disastrous human toll of securing the country for greater foreign direct investment and financial stability are the contradictions that are held together through the faith practices of a population whose debt is conflated with their prosperity. “Why write about the economy” I was asked by informants and friends alike, “when the real problem is the war?” The political economy of the war is what holds believing and debt together in the form of *credere*, the Latin root of both believing and credit. Free market spirituality is rooted in the idea that neoliberal restructuring at the level of the state and, importantly, the individual will bring about the prosperity key to transforming lives, families, and the nation through greater economic leverage. Acts of believing come to the fore as the political structures necessary for the proliferation of financialization deepen levels of inequality and structural violence that have prolonged an armed conflict for over fifty years. Believing in spite of the evidence that greater market liberalization, an unfettered financial sector, and the violence necessary to stay the course of the march of financialization is precisely the frame of practice that free market Christianity requires.

Indeed, believing in spite of, has been a strategy that historian David Bushnell articulates as central to the formation of the Colombian nation-state after the numerous wars of Independence from the Spanish monarchy. *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (1993) is Bushnell’s important work on the formation of the Colombian state, in which he argues that in spite of the contradictions, in spite of its geography, and in spite of its history, Colombians believe, and have believed, in Colombia. Bushnell begins his book with the following reflection: “No one geographic feature has so molded the history of Colombia as the Andes” (Bushnell 1993, p. 4). Bogotá itself rests at the zenith of the Central Cordillera of the Andes at 2,600 meters, a city of icy evening winds, regular rainfall throughout the year, and cloudy drizzly days

more often than not. Gabriel García Márquez, a man from the Atlantic Coast of Colombia, articulated often the intense sense of regionalization in the country, and his personal aversion to the capital city. Márquez mentions the name of the city only once in his beautiful work, *The General in his Labyrinth* (1989), a remarkable narration of Simon Bolívar's final journey from Bogotá down the Magdalena River, to his death in Santa Martha: "For they were in Santa Fe de Bogotá, city of the Holy Faith, two thousand and six hundred meters above the level of the distant sea...exposed to the icy winds that filtered through the ill-fitting windows, was not the most favourable for anyone's health" (Marquez 1989, p. 13).

The dying Bolívar realized in despair, as the feuding governors waged war against each other, that his dream of a united America was never going to materialize and even Colombia, the center of the Gran Colombia, was a divided territory. Colombia is not, has never been, one country, but many small fiefdoms. The warm, rolling, green coffee growing region of Antioquia, Caldas, Quindío, and Valle; the Pacific Coastal jungles populated primarily with descendants of escaped slaves and littered with rivers and wetlands; the Amazon basin shrouded in mystery and the green canopy of the jungle; the deserts of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Martha and southern Huila; the sugar cane fields of Valle de Cauca and the rolling plains of Los Llanos, literally, "the plains" known for ranching and wonderful roasted meat. Every region has its own dress, its own culinary specialty, its own music, and its own traditional dance. Every region prides itself on its uniqueness, its difference, and importantly, its distance from Bogotá. The civil wars of the era of independence revolved primarily around the struggle to determine whether or not Colombia would be a Centralist or Federalist state. Although governments have shuffled between the two poles to varying degrees, essentially Colombia retains a Centralist government. As former President of the Republic (1892-1898), and contributor to the Constitution of 1886, Miguel

Antonio Caro, succinctly expressed: “Here in Bogotá, is civilization. All the rest is tierra caliente (hot lands).” However, believing in Colombia is much more than simply a project of nation-building.

Believing, according to advertisements by the major breweries in the country, was the (failed) key to Colombia winning the World Cup. Advertisers bombarded television screens and billboards with slogans such as, “I believe!” accompanied with photos of the Colombian national team. Believing, according to all of Colombia’s political leaders, is the key to Colombia’s strained peace process (an effort three decades in the making). The Colombian government’s efforts to involve the population in participating in the peace process have been managed by the Presidential Agency for International Cooperation (APC) and the campaign “*Todos por un país nuevo*” (All for a New Country). The Agency began a campaign that involved famous Colombians speaking on television in suave black and white infomercials, stating nothing more than, “My contribution is to believe. I believe in peace. Do you?” Indeed, even a collaborative effort from Colombia’s largest corporations got involved, beginning an organization named “*Yo Creo en Colombia*” (I believe in Colombia). Companies as diverse as Mary Kay and Avis have bought into the project of belief. With the slogan, “believing creates realities” (“*creer crea realidades*”) it is no coincidence, I argue, that corporate Colombia, together with the government, have anted up behind the shared call for Colombians to believe.

Believing is, ultimately, the key to prosperity, when it is defined as a regime of practice and within a network of social acts that are manifest as signs of sanctification. Believing, not belief, is in short, *credere*. *Credere* is a verb and as such, must also be understood as an action; a regime of practice. The etymological significance of the Latin root is important because it signals a connection between two concepts that have often been treated as independent from each other.



The connection between forms of economic engagement and social forms have a long and entangled history. This is important insofar as their related beginnings have become alienated from each other through the naturalization of “economics” and “religion” as concepts hemmed off from each other and naturally occurring.

However, credit is a constructed category. It is not a thing. Credit is movement and credit is the lubricating force of the capitalist system. As Karl Marx first demonstrated, and Marxist geographer David Harvey elaborated, capital itself is not a “thing.” It is a process. It is movement and change, shifting and morphing along the waves of history. Credit itself is what keeps the economy moving, and keeps capital in circulation. In today’s financializing world, credit is the strategy par excellence of accumulation by dispossession. By “accumulation by dispossession” I refer to Marxist geographer, David Harvey’s extrapolation of Marx’s idea of “primitive accumulation.” Marx’s concept of “primitive accumulation” was based in Adam Smith’s idea of “previous accumulation” wherein accumulation of stock must come previous to division of labour (Smith 1910). For Marx, primitive accumulation is the beginning point of production. According to Marx, ‘primitive accumulation plays approximately the same role in political economy as original sin does in theology’ (Marx 1976, p. 873). Primitive accumulation is the very means by which producers are divorced from the means of production, and begins, for Marx, with land ownership concentrated in the feudal system, and then tilled by the hands of the “great masses of men [who are] suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled onto the labour market as free, unprotected, and rightless proletarians” (Marx 1976, p. 876). In other words, when land is appropriated either through violence, robbery, or enslavement, the capitalists who then employ the newly available labour force have effectively accumulated their capital primitively.

Accumulation by dispossession, Harvey's concept, is a further extrapolation of this idea of amassing original capital. For Harvey, accumulation by dispossession echoes Rosa Luxemburg's comments in *Accumulation of Capital* that "Force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stern laws of the economic process" (Luxemburg 1968, p. 452-3). Harvey suggests that both Marx and Luxemburg assume that primitive accumulation happens once, and then is nothing more than an historical fact in capitalism's advance. Harvey proposes a consideration of accumulation through dispossession as the *ongoing* process of accumulation through fraud, predation, and thievery in the credit system and finance capital, as well as International Monetary Fund schemes for intellectual property rights and indeed the privatization of environmental commons (land, air, water) (Harvey 2004). In times of finance capitalism, accumulation by dispossession can be understood as "debt." Credit has become the answer to economic woes the world over, as the emerging economies of the global south are managed by the students of the great neoliberal prophets of an era in which credit, first at a national scale, and then at the scale of the individual, has become the operative agent in liquidating the world's assets.

In Colombia, this process of neoliberalization, together with the influx of finance capital, has been accompanied by incitement of belief. However, instead of reading this exhortation to believe as a false neoliberal consciousness or a trap for the financially naïve, I suggest that believing forms a set of social actions, "habits of thought and expression." Relating practices of believing with practices of debt reveal to the scholar interesting and critical spaces in understanding the social and cultural relations between economic and religious practice. For, if "believing is about contradictions maintained, not truths affirmed" as Catherine Bell first

suggested, the inherent contradictions in the capitalist system, and the ways in which that system have been implemented into the Colombian context through violence and corruption, believing becomes a powerful process of holding contradicting realities in tension (O'Neill 2012).

The Colombia that Colombians believe in is the Colombia that is becoming. It is the Colombia that is emerging. It is the “New Colombia” that shimmers as a mirage in the dry, bloody desert of a history of war; a horrific story of violence and pain that so many want to believe out of their minds. It is a “new” country that seeks to change the world’s perception of it as a shoddy Latin American *telenovela*, drug lords and silicone breasts, machetes and chainsaws, the brilliance of Pablo Escobar and a pawn of U.S. military interventions. Believing in Colombia is a fragile campaign bringing a precarious emergence flickering into view—the Colombia that can be, the emerging nation.

### **--- Multiply Me: Women, the Emerging Entrepreneurs ---**

Believing in the self, however, is as important, if not more important, than believing in the nation. Prosperity thinking is rooted in believing in the self, and Bogotá’s streets and airwaves offer an endless barrage of books, DVDs, manuals, advertisements, billboards, commercials, and self-help guides to becoming prosperous through believing in the self. Robert Kiyosaki’s *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*, the quintessential self-help book for the multi-level marketing novice and self-made entrepreneur, is on sale in grocery stores. Countless pastors sell their own tomes entitled *Steps to Excellence* or *The Ladder to Success* while female entrepreneurs hawk copies of Kiyosaki’s wife, Kim Kiyosaki’s *Rich Woman*, to their Avon and Amway clients. Believing opens up the believer to a direct relation with their destiny, a sense of agency and the practices that enact said agency over entirely uncertain futures. After three months of fieldwork at the MCI, I was able to have a

conversation with Fernanda's sister, Sofia, who usually carried a copy of Kiyosaki's *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* along with her pink leather-bound "Woman's Bible."

Upon first meeting me, after I had asked her about her work with Nu Skin, she leaned in and confessed that her workplace and her church-place were entirely connected. "Have you read Kiyosaki? Well, he's not *officially* a man of God, but what he writes is so similar to what we hear the Pastor say. Prosperity! We have to secure it ourselves. So much that I learn at church helps me in my business." Her business is a franchise of the multi-level marketing company Nu Skin. The company sells skin products and weight loss pills. The multi-level marketing company, of course, is the model to which Kiyosaki's "new millionaires" adhere. Sofia continued, "it [prosperity] is of course a matter of believing in God, and letting the Spirit in, but it is also a matter of believing in yourself." Fernanda later confided that Sofia regularly used her credit card to make pacts with God, in hopes of growing her business (more on this in Chapter 2 and 5).

Becoming your own boss, having the possibility of making financial decisions as an individual and owning the responsibility for your own prosperity is the soul of neoliberalism. Credit, so the prophets of neoliberalism propose, is what allows for this agency. Being "debt-worthy" is the key to accessing credit. Going into debt, coupled with believing in the self, animates the great contradiction in the neoliberal project: if you succeed, it's thanks to the economy and liberated markets. If you fail, it is it is for lack of belief and proper financial practice. Any and all structures and institutions are emptied of responsibility for limitations or discrimination within the financializing system of control. Believing in the self puts the onus on the self.

Believing is animated through practice. In the case of this particular study, I focus on the economic dimensions of the transformative potential that economic practices have for a precarious class. The practice of going into debt, the practice of consumption, the practice of making a pact with God, the practice of “believing in spite of” are elements of the social exercise which in the end, trespass the divide between the “real” and the “possible.” As Bell stated in a public lecture at Oxford University in 2006, “I [simply] suggest that, for starters, choice, commitment, and rejection is not at all what Christian believing is about. That is what Christians like to think they are doing, and while not irrelevant by any means, it is only half the story.” Believing becomes the capacity for dwelling in an intermediary existence between what is and what can be. It is not, as Bell aptly elaborates, a closed and coherent system, nor does believing fit within a strictly “religious” context, as Colombia’s government and advertisers demonstrate. Believing does not belong to one manifestation of Christianity or another, rather it is a shared construction that offers a great potentiality in crossing the divide between the “seen” and the “unseen”, the “real” and the “imagined”, the “material” and the “spiritual.”

To further the consideration of a reformed interiority, throughout this study, a central impression, or shadow, of financialization’s mark is pursued: The underlying current of a disciplined gender as a central element in Christianity’s understanding of primordial debt. The gendering of debt, and finance, is a particular manifestation of discipline, sacrifice, and inclusion. The discipline and regulation of gender through debt is an effect of both the discourse and practice of patriarchal financial and religious structures, or what Judith Butler describes as “phallogocentric economies” (Butler 1990, p. 41).<sup>10</sup> Colombia is a country with astonishingly

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<sup>10</sup> The idea of a phallogocentric economy is introduced by Judith Butler, following the work of Luce Irigaray, who defines it as: “[an economy] wherein the passive woman is something acted upon, subjected to, or determined by an external, masculine force” (Irigaray and Marder 2015: 183). Irigaray’s use of Marxist economic

high rates of violence against women and the on-going armed conflict routinely uses women's bodies as targets of war. The role played by microfinance programs in "empowering" women through granting them special access to credit, such as through micro-credit and government subsidiary programs, is an important element of what "emerging" has come to mean, in the sense that emergence plays in the interstice between a purely phallogocentric economic structure and more inclusive economic structures. For example, women in Colombia could not be land owners until 1988, and then usually were only viable property owners insofar as they co-owned with their husbands, or in more recent years in rural Colombia, organized agrarian collectives through which the collective could access credits (Food and Agricultural Organization 1994). Yet, the work of especially putting women into debt, as the underside of this prosperous emergence, forms a new working class, a new form of labour, a new precariat, an exploitable population that has not yet been fully enough exploited. Debt as a method of accumulation has found a new demographic: women.

The undercurrent of gender and its discipline also necessarily brings the study towards considering the embodiment of debt, and the embodiment of believing. How the body believes, and how debt is practiced, become important dimensions in the light of how women's bodies are interpreted and performed. One point here is that the body believes through a performance of utter surrender. Debt to God, as debt to man, as debt to the bank, is paid off through bodily practice. In an oft-repeated conversation with my primary relationship at the MCI, Fernanda, I was being encouraged to fully 'surrender' to the Holy Spirit during a women's convention

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theory considers, in a crude summary, women as commodified beings that are exchanged between men, as the basis of capitalist economy. While a full analysis of Irigaray's work is not possible in the space here, the point made, in addition to Butler's use of the phrase, is the problematic of women being simply an *object* of the economy, rather than *subjects*. Microfinance programs claim to do just this, and perhaps in many cases are successful. However, debt reinscribes a form of disciplinary power upon the female subject, imprinting a gendered and racialized essence upon the "Third World Woman" as tied to family, embedded in her community, and sacrificial. Her subjectivity is limited in this sense; in a disciplinary sense.

entitled “*Multiplicame*” (Multiply Me).<sup>11</sup> “What does that [multiplying yourself] look like to you?” I asked Fernanda. We were browsing the jewelry at one of the three jewelry kiosks at the church. Fernanda was fondling a cubic zirconia pendant, and without looking up smiled and said, “Think of the Holy Spirit like your boyfriend.” She put down the necklace and looked me, “At first, you get to know each other, and then you begin to fall more and more in love.” I pushed, “But how do you begin that relationship?” Fernanda smiled, “I want you to try something. I want you to raise your hands into the air when we are worshipping. Do that, and give your self completely to Jesus. You need to feel vulnerable and open.” We continued browsing, I bought a pair of earrings, and we entered the service again.

As the worship song began, the erotics of the lyrics and swaying tempos were exciting the room full of women. “*I wait for you, Touch me God, Oh consoler, Give me your love*” the band leader crooned. The women around me in the women’s convention (one of 3 I would attend over the 16 months of fieldwork) raised their arms, threw back their heads with eyes closed, and made themselves vulnerable and open. They swayed with the music, and sang along ardently, “*I burn for you, oh my love, I run into your arms.*”<sup>12</sup> This was the opening song for the special service for single women entitled, “Who has the key to my heart?” As the song came to an end, an Argentinian

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<sup>11</sup> The MCI runs conventions throughout the year in Colombia, and around the world. The conventions serve as a primary vehicle for conversion and draw hundreds of thousands of people. They are usually four to five days in length, and consist of back to back worship services and break-out workshop sessions during the day, and blow-out worship services in the evenings headlined by well known Christian pop artists and rock groups.

<sup>12</sup> Brazilian theologian, Rubem Alves, laments the de-sexualization of women in Protestant traditions. In an interview with Elsa Tamez, he states, “The situation of the church and the situation of women look ugly to me. In the case of Protestant churches, especially Reformed churches, it’s terrible to see how women were led to lose their sensuality in the broadest sense of the term by virtue of a religious ideology” (Tamez 1987, p. 457). The erotics of Pentecostal praise and worship songs and movement might be understood as a reaction against this Reformed Protestant de-sensualization. Colombian scholar of religion, Ana María Bidegain also remarks that the European colonial mission was as much about dominating lands and riches, as it was about “domesticating sexuality” – feminine sexuality, that is. In part, according to Bidegain, this desexing has been a product of particular Marian Catholicism that infiltrated the Americas with the Spanish conquest. “Mary has been simplified. She has become the model of self-denial, passivity, and submission as the essential (or worse still, the only) attributes of woman” (Bidgeain 1989, p. 34). Again, the eros of worship at the MCI might be understood as subversion of an un-sexed feminine in ecstatic form.

pastor walked on stage to give the first sermon in the service. She declared, “You must believe that God will bless you, God wants you to prosper, and God wants you to never be alone. You must say, ‘I don’t know how You will do it, but I believe that You will fulfill your promises to me, because nothing is impossible for You, Lord.’ Repeat after me, women: I believe, I believe, I believe. Now, you must make your offering with this purpose. You will receive that economic miracle. That fridge is going to be full, the rent will be paid, the mortgage will be paid off, and your work will be better and you will receive better pay. Say it! I believe! Now, make a sacrifice with your offering, and you will see that nothing is impossible for God.” Until husbands were found, the debt was paid to God.

From “giving your self” to God to “giving your offering” to God, the discipline of the body is tied to the disciplinary power of debt. Micro-credit banks that service only women, the process of “banking” women through government subsidy programs, and the proliferation of “credit cards for Her” all demonstrate the particularly focused work of indebting women through access to credit. The gendered tenor of this study, then, comes through in my analysis and the stories and the struggles of my interlocutors, all of whom were women in debt and women who believed God had given them a promise.

### **--- Societies of Control and the governance of finance ---**

The claim here is that at both an individual and a collective level, control societies are emerging in the interstices between the systems of domination between industrial capitalism and neoliberalism. By “emerging” here I refer, first, to the term coined by World Bank economist Antoine Van Agtmael in the 1980s to describe countries in the transition phase from



“developing” to “developed” status.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, “emergence” is an economic phenomenon as well as a social and political event.<sup>14</sup> Second, I lean on Michel Foucault’s definition of “emergence” as the shift between dominations, as sets of practices that arise in the interstices. Practices emerge in a “web of multiple forces” (Marshall 2009) and this new articulation of practice actualizes new possibilities (Veyne 1978; cited in Marshall 2009, p. 36). Third, emergence in the late capitalist system is tied to financialized practices that form media and methods of internalized practices of control.

The overlapping of disciplinary societies with societies of control, developed by Gilles Deleuze, sees the corporation replacing the factory; perpetual training replacing schooling; continuous control replacing examination.<sup>15</sup> The control society, also understood in this dissertation as “societies of debt” operates according to a condition of perpetual indebtedness.<sup>16</sup> For credit provides the promise of prosperity through immediate material gain despite that gain being acquired on borrowed money. Believing puts into motion the wheels of capital’s renewal through the future promise of prosperity. Time is compressed and, indeed, purchased through payment quotas that, in the case of some credit cards in Colombia, can be extended over periods of up to 48 months. Debt societies rely on believing as much as on credit and one example from the field in particular demonstrates this point.

It was the second day of a five-day convention at the *Misión Carismática Internacional* (MCI, “International Charismatic Mission”), the mega-church where I spent 16 months carrying out

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<sup>13</sup> See Macesich 1996; Kolodko 2003; Sharma 2013; Looney 2014.

<sup>14</sup> A “developed” nation, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development is a country that “has a level of industrialization, a high general standard of living, and widespread infrastructure...levels of education, security, political stability, literacy rates, and health.” (United Nations 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Gilles Deleuze expands this idea in his work on societies of control found first in *Antioedipus: Schizophrenia and Capitalism*, and then again in the subsequent *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. The concept of “control societies” are most carefully laid out in “Postscript on Societies of Control” in the journal *October*, in 1992.

<sup>16</sup> See Han 2011.

fieldwork. The MCI is Colombia's largest church, boasting over 200,000 members and touted to be one of the fastest growing churches in the world with its patented "G12" evangelism strategy (Christianity Today 2010). This system has been designed, developed, and patented by the church's leader, Rev. Cesar Castellanos, and is patterned after the twelve disciples of Jesus "in whom He reproduced His character, and they became His representatives in the world" (Castellanos 2002). Through the formation of twelve-member cell groups that grow and split through a strategy of "Winning, Consolidating, Discipling, and Sending" (Castellanos 2001), it is a system that promises to ultimately save "not only individuals, but [also] nations" (Castellanos 2009, p. 12). With 50,000 cell groups in Bogotá, over 300,000 satellite groups across Colombia and hundreds of franchises around the world, this burgeoning spiritual following and religious industry is growing at such a rate "a Wharton business school couldn't have designed a better growth strategy" (Becerra 2007; Tunarosa 2006).

Central to the MCI evangelizing strategy are national and international conventions. Throughout the year, Cesar and Claudia Castellanos hold almost twenty conventions in Colombia and throughout the world. From South Africa to South Korea, Miami to Paris, the Pastors Castellanos hold an evangelizing convention every month, sometimes two in one month. These conventions are usually between 3 and 5 days long, and generally consist of what are called "conferences" framed within long periods of praise, worship, and prayer time. In Colombia, a conference easily draws 20,000 people from the roughly 50 satellite MCI churches from across the country, and the dozens of satellite churches around the world. At this particular annual convention I attended in Bogotá, pastors specifically from MCI congregations around the world were present. These were men and women planting the seeds of the G-12 Vision gathered from as far away as Russia and France. The main temple of the G-12 complex was at full

capacity, hosting close to 20,000 delegates and pastors during the convention. With flags waving wildly, the excited music anticipated the arrival of head pastor, local celebrity, and political influence, Cesar Castellanos. Walking out from backstage, Castellanos, suave and assured as always, flipped open his tablet, and quieted the chanting multitude with a wave of his hand. He began his keynote sermon by asking the question:

If the honour and glory are in Jesus, why are so many of us here struggling in the area of our finances? How many pastors here haven't been able to purchase their own land for their church? How many of you have not been able to buy your own house? How many haven't even been able to lease a car? Do you know why you haven't been able to? Because Satan doesn't want you to believe it's possible. To have prosperity, it doesn't depend on your employment, or your inheritance: It depends on your faith!

Thousands of believers erupted into relieved cheering and choruses of "amen" and "hallelujah!" The ushers with bags ready for tithes, pacts, and seeds of financial faith took their positions at the edges of the rows of chairs, the data-phones began circulating in plain sight, held up high in the air by the specialized data-phone ushers, for those who forgot or didn't have cash and wished to tithe with their credit cards.

In many neo-Pentecostal mega-churches, a difference is marked between these three forms of exchange with God. The "pact", or covenant, refers to committing money with a specific promise made to God, and a particular expectation of return upon investment. For example, one might pact for growth of one's cell group. The pact is usually a larger sum of money, and it is spoken of in terms of a contract with God. The offering is often a smaller sum of money, and is usually made in thanks to God for a particular blessing or good fortune that the devout have benefited from. The tithe is specifically 10% of one's income given monthly or yearly.

The other form of exchange is that of the primicia, which has its roots in feudal economic structures in which the feudal lord would demand the first crops of a new harvest. The primicia would imply handing over the first paycheck of a new job, or first rental payment on a purchased property, or first incomes of the like. “When we began to grow our ministry” Castellanos continued, “the financial area was difficult for us to conquer.” The five giant screens focused on his face, and Pastor Cesar looked knowingly into the eyes of the congregation. “We weren’t able to save enough to buy a bigger lot for our growing church.” The devout sitting around me nodded appreciatively, fully understanding the difficulty of saving. Castellanos became animated, “One day, God gave me an inspiration. He said to me, go look into three lots of land in the center of the city – where we are today – and buy that land. We didn’t have the money. A lot of you think that in order to buy you need money. You don’t need money!”

Castellanos began pacing back and forth on the stage. Gesticulating with his arms, waving his finger at those taking notes in the front row, taking in gulps of air through his clenched teeth and scrunching up his face as he did so, Castellanos gave the cues that he was clearly preaching under the influence of the Holy Spirit. “As the Bible tells us, all we need is faith. We, God’s chosen, buy with faith. Not with money. We bought this land without money. We didn’t have money, but we had an essence that is far more important: we had faith.” Ending with a shout, Castellanos now turned his face to the ceiling, face pinched, arms uplifted. “Thank you, Father” he hissed. The crowd was on its feet, “Praise God!” and the cheering and whistling became deafening. “Give God a shout of Jubilee!” Castellanos ordered, and the 20,000 voices screamed their agreement.

Castellanos then went into detail about the vision he had experienced when he knelt and prayed in the empty lots that God had destined to become the mega-complex that was now the

G-12 Convention Center, a complex that stretched for 4 square city blocks and boasted a gym, a commercial center, a food court, administrative buildings, overflow buildings, and the educational center that consisted of four floors of classrooms and a recording studio. The MCI is Colombia's fastest growing church. Castellanos recalled seeing Jesus standing before him, head, hands, feet, and side bleeding as he reached for Pastor Cesar kneeling in front of him. "Jesus' bleeding head made me realize that God would provide. I knew the power of this blood, and I applied the blood of Christ on this place." He continued the graphic tale of a bloody Jesus, his drops of blood sanctifying the land on which Castellanos kneeled, and the miracle occurred. Two weeks later, they bought the land. On faith. On credit.

"If you are having any problems in the financial area, remember you have the blood of Christ, the life offered by Jesus, you can beat this financial problem. Repeat after me: I declare that ruin is defeated by the blood of Jesus. I declare that all spirits working against the blessing of Jesus' blood are conquered in the name of Jesus!" The music softly started up in the background, and the cue for prayer time was by now acutely tuned in the actions of the believers. Hands lifted and eyes closed. "Make your offering count today. Show your faith to God. Make your offering a sacrifice to demonstrate your faith." The data-phones darted around the floor of the convention center, as the music became louder and drowned out the rustle of thousands of hands reaching into thousands of wallets to make their sacrifice to God and on faith alone, perform their prosperity and perform their belief. Once cards had been swiped, and cash had been dedicated to the cause of church growth, or a down-payment on a house, receipts were held up in the air alongside envelopes stuffed with faith-based investment. "Repeat after me" Castellanos extolled, and receipts and envelopes clouded the air in the convention center. "I am prosperous! In the name of Jesus, I am prosperous!" The crowd enthusiastically echoed Pastor Castellanos. "Now

say to the person beside you, “Wow! You look prosperous!” The multitudes obediently crowed to each other and the band picked up the rhythm and the volume.

Making the sacrifice of tithing on credit demonstrates an economy of faith, one that relies on exchanges of financial commitment—such as going into debt as a covenant with God in order to receive a particular blessing. The covenant—*pacto*—is a premeditated investment, a sacrificial contract with God for a job, a house, healing, or growth of individual ministry. As the ushers at the MCI pass by with the credit card machines and baskets to collect receipts of electronic payment, they murmur, “May God recompense you one hundred fold.” The loudest logic is a primordial obligation to God and an eternal debt that must perpetually be righted and corrected through giving money. The practice of tithing is a practice of believing in a highly legible Christian animation, and a most observable social act. The sacrifice implied by the morality of tithing is a virtuous debt, correcting an always-already sinful nature (Foucault 1975). As Ursula’s story reminds us, as well as other interlocutors that speak through these pages, the discipline of debt works in sites of “articulation of practice” (Foucault 1969), in the pews on Sunday, and on the streets in the everyday lived practices of prosperity.

Ursula and Fernanda and Sofia are all examples of Colombia’s emergent middle class. Yet Ursula perhaps best illustrates the formation of the financialized soul, with so much access to unencumbered credit, including five credit cards, a major loan from a commercial bank, an emergency line of credit, and a refinanced mortgage, she has become the ideally indebted subject of emergence. But as Ursula believed in the banks and her financial advisors, in the short course of two years, she found herself with an insurmountable mountain of debt and compound interest rates as high as 28%. Believing got her into the mess, and believing was going to get her out of it, she confessed. Ursula’s prosperity rode on her capacity for going into debt. Her believing puts

into operation the constellation of practices that I name “free market spiritualities” and accompanies the economic emergence that Colombia is experiencing today.

With an anthropological curiosity firmly in place, tracing practices of believing in the context of an emerging economy reveals financialization’s disciplinary work. Throughout the dissertation, the work of defining this nebulous regime of control will be done through the voices and experiences of the women already introduced: Ursula, Fernanda, Sofia, and Remedios.

The first chapter introduces the context of Colombia’s war economy, the history of armed conflict, and the stage upon which this ethnography is played out. The context of armed conflict also establishes the religious and political landscapes that have shaped Colombia, in history and in the present day. The chapter details the relationships between the Catholic Church and Colombian economic history more broadly, as well as animates the role that the drug trade has played in the formation of a certain economic culture throughout the country.

The second chapter considers the ways in which prosperity and austerity are tied together in relations managed by Christian-run microfinance programs. This chapter focuses on Remedios as an emblematic example of the process of financialization and faith at the level of the everyday. The chapter illustrates how Christian micro-credit programs, financial literacy policies, and the effects of neoliberal restructuring amidst a wartime economy. All of these work to cultivate a soul requiring subsidizing, and they all hold in common the conviction that credit is key to changing not only lives, but also Colombia. Ultimately, this chapter introduces microfinance and financial inclusion as central to the process of financializing the soul.

The third chapter develops the relationship between credit and believing, as practices of becoming in financialized capitalism, through a re-consideration of the gift. The chapter outlines

challenges to enclosing pre-capitalist, capitalist, and financial capitalist formations of social (in)cohesion in gift relations. The focus of the chapter is the gift at Christmas, because at no other time did gift exchange, the force of credit and debt, and the push to “believe” become more animated in Colombia. The consideration of gift, then, demonstrates that the relationship between finance capitalism and Christianity reshapes the gift—from a gift based on social debt to a gift based on financial debt.

The fourth chapter explores the very nature of social relationships, cohesions, and ties that are formed and fabricated through financializing markets. The chapter delves into the murky depths of financial inclusion, financial education, financial citizenship, and finance as human right. The chapter aims to unravel ways in which the financialized market, practices of indebtedness, and social ties produce a new formation of “financialized kinship”, based on relations of trust and obligation mediated through state financial institutions and commercial banks. The emphasis is as much on spatializing the market, as it is on spatializing inclusion into the ever-compelling “Kingdom of God.” This chapter presents ethnographic and theoretical evidence that the practice and discourse of debt relations are legible (cultural) animations of inclusion into the global economy. Through mechanics of financialization, in particular the forced (in)visible hand of the market, debt has become central to the nervous system of financialized capitalism. Analyzing debt relations also aids the project of unveiling the religious dimensions of a spatialized market and its projected goals of encompassment.

The fifth chapter considers embodied believing as central to financial capitalism, and especially in forms of disciplining gender. The chapter develops the argument that debt disciplines the soul in a way specific to finance, and women have become an object of financial desire as much as a desired financial subjects. The chapter suggests that consumption and



religion in financializing Colombia shape the gendered limits of a performed prosperity. In other words, the chapter illustrates the connectedness between a financializing form of discipline alongside the regulation of the feminine. This chapter argues that critically laboring in the realm of embodied practice as believing practice, and the relation of consumption to financialized systems of believing, leads to an analysis of the way gender is disciplined through consumption, the emancipatory promises of credit, and the female selves that are multiplied and reproduced by it.

The last chapter develops the relation between believing practice and the politics of becoming as they play out in financial capitalism. With a close analysis of the multi-level marketing company, Nu Skin, and a microfinance development program, this chapter details the belief in the self, and the reformation of the soul that financializing capitalism relies upon. The chapter also challenges an apolitical approach to considering prosperity Christianity as a phenomenon that exists outside of webs of colonial relations, colonialized power dynamics, and introduces an analytical frame through which to understand prosperity practices in critical perspective.

## *San Ralito*

*The delegation of North American pastors bumped in their tour van along the dirt roads in the Colombian department of Córdoba, not far from where the paramilitary demobilization negotiations had taken place in 2004, in Santa Fe de Ralito. Dust swirled in the van's wake, and the sun bore down on the sugar cane fields that spanned for kilometers around. "Ralito is just up that road" the guide of the tour pointed towards a long road that led through the sugar cane into the far horizon. The pastors scrambled to take photographs of the iconic site of a performed peace agreement that all the Colombian critics had already named as no better than a hoax of publicity and distraction. "The paramilitary never fully demobilized in 2004; they simply decentralized" the guide explained. The van continued on. Coming up to another road, the guide explained, "we were going to go see a Pentecostal church in that town, but there was a massacre there yesterday. The community has been displaced." The pastors, men and women from North Carolina and Washington State, murmured shock and horror, and some fear, as the van carried on to the capital of the Department, to Montería. I translated the words of the guide carefully but still the pastors were worried. "We'll be OK. It is in nobody's interest for a bunch of North American pastors to be hurt" I tried to explain. Just outside the city, the van stopped at an outcropping of thatch roof huts organized around some dirt paths—this was the displacement camp where the members of the Pentecostal community had arrived late the evening before, fleeing the violence of the armed conflict. We pulled over and the pastors of the North American churches met the pastors of the displaced churches. They shook hands and hugged. The pastors all sat down together in the shade of banana trees. The North American pastors listened while the Colombian pastors explained their ordeals, the death, the fear, and the faith that they stated would protect them. "This is war. And God fights for us. But you must tell your government to stop sending money to finance the war. The money goes to weapons for the paramilitary."*

# Chapter 1

## Setting the Stage

*Much has been written about the violence, but there is really no agreement as to what it means.*

Eduardo Luna, Germán Campos, Orlando Fals Borda (1962)

### 1.1 The Colombian Armed Conflict

“Colombia” historian Gonzalo Sánchez explains, “has been a country of *permanent and endemic warfare*” (Sánchez 1985, p. 789, emphasis added). Hundreds of books have been written about the Colombian armed conflict. An entire sub-discipline combining political science, sociology, anthropology, and history has been developed in the Colombian academy, dedicated to understanding the roots and the causes for the prolongation of the violence—*la violentología* (violentology). Psychologists, shamanic healers, and spiritual leaders have attempted to explain what makes Colombians unique compared to the rest of Latin America, and why there has been so much bloodshed.

The political distinctions, historical variations, and root causes of violence have been the focus of study for the *violentólogos* explaining the prolongation of the war, perhaps more aptly, the wars of Colombia. Sánchez divides the seemingly endemic violence in Colombia into three historical moments, or “stages” as he calls them: Civil wars of the nineteenth century, *La Violencia*

of the twentieth century, and the move into full-fledged guerrilla warfare after the 1960s. To construct this sort of linear history is to commit history, to historicize a narrative that ebbs and flows, and repeats and renews, that layers and combines, and this is therefore only a partial narration. It is a cold telling of a fervid story that is ongoing and not linear at all. Michael Taussig enjoins the reader of histories of terror to consider how capitalist modes of production have alienated workers from their labour and perverted social relations, twisting them into commodified relations, wherein humans become *desechable* (disposable) and commodities take on monstrous agency and power. “Things become agents of terror, conspiring with the president’s need to sense the innermost thoughts of his subject, who, once sensed, become not just objects but disjointed parts of objects” (Taussig 1986, p. 6). However, in order to orient the reader of this dissertation to the task at hand, this chapter offers a brief history of Colombia. The chapter provides the context for Christianity, finance capital, and ongoing violence. It also provides a broader historical context for such terms as “disciplinary power” and “believing in a new Colombia.”

## 1.2 The Worst Kind of Capitalism

“The worst kind of capitalism came to Colombia. The capitalism that came here was armed” a colleague at the National University of Colombia breathlessly explained to me, as we covered our noses and mouths with handkerchiefs to dampen the effects of tear gas. We were hustling out of the campus gates as Bogotá police began spraying gas into the mob of *encapuchados*.<sup>17</sup> They were lobbing Molotov cocktails at the special forces police officers, the

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<sup>17</sup> Literally, this translates as “masked ones.” However, the word broadly encompasses a political student movement that regularly protests of the state of affairs in the country. The *encapuchados* are organized in the largest public universities in the country, in particular the National University of Colombia, the Pedagogical University of Colombia, the District University, and the University of Antioquia (*Universidad Nacional, Universidad Pedagógica, Universidad Distrital, Universidad de Antioquia*). The first three have their largest campuses in Bogotá. The student movement has been accused of having ties with one or more of the guerrilla factions in the country, most notably the

ESMAD (Mobile Anti-Disturbance Squadron), and the tanks that had gathered on *la Carrera Treinta*. The students and police engaged in a violent dance of power and symbolic messaging. The police, armed with bobby sticks and bullet-proof shields, stood in a line. Their faces were covered by barred helmets and bullet-proof armor that protected them from the rocks and flaming beer bottles that flew their way. The students also organized in lines. The front lines playing the offensive and doing most of the throwing, while back lines prepared more cocktails, handed out political paraphernalia to students passing by, and yelled political chants.

The police formed an impressive front of militaristic intimidation. The students led a more disorganized, yet effective, offensive. Every few minutes, the police mobilized and scurried forward in a line, tossing cans of tear gas into the student group, while the tank shot a stream of tear gas and water cannons over the university walls into the general university public that was trying to leave the campus without further problem. “This ritual of protest and suppression is one of the results of the terrible form of capitalism that came here” my colleague José yelled to me as we made our past the thick knot of protesting *encapuchados* and curious student observers. José was another professor in the sociology department where I taught during my fieldwork. The moment of protest was only the first of what became almost weekly disturbances that would continue throughout the 18 months I was at the National University, from 2013-2014. We rubbed our eyes and blew our noses, together with hundreds of faculty and students streaming out of the largest University in the country, on to the busy Bogotá avenue.

In the rest of the city, radio and television news reported on the traffic jam on the *Treinta* and drivers sought alternative routes. The regular business of a Bogotá day carried on, with

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FARC and the ELN. For further reading, see Sánchez, Acevedo, and Gutiérrez 2014; Urbanczyk and Hernández 2012.

explosions and honking joining the hum of nine million people living their lives. José and I looked for a place for lunch, resuming calm walking and allowing the momentary hysteria fade into the memory of a fairly routine Tuesday morning. As he tucked his handkerchief back into his backpack, my colleague explained, “this kind of protest happens because the students are frustrated with the economic and political situation in the country.” Because the police respond the way they do, with repression, the protests continue—or so goes the sociological analysis of my colleague. “The students are protesting their debt and the agricultural crisis.” And then, without skipping a beat, he asked, “What should we have for lunch today? Peruvian?” José was seemingly unfazed by the violence happening only a few blocks away. We slipped into a small restaurant on the *Calle 45*, and ordered lemonade. “Hopefully no one dies today” he said quietly while perusing the menu.

The comment reflected a context beyond the immediacy of the confrontation between disgruntled students and a militarized police force. In early 2013, *campesinos* (peasant farmers) protested the effects of recently signed free trade agreements with Canada, the United States, and the European Union. During what became known as the *Paro Agrario* (agricultural strike) of 2013, *campesinos* dissented through withholding their agricultural labour, blocking highways and transportation routes, and filling town plazas throughout the country in a demand for agrarian reform and greater governmental support for local agricultural production, including debt forgiveness. This form of protest has a long history in Colombia, known as *marchas campesinas* (peasant marches), which have been organized in Colombia since the 1960s. Indeed, Luis van Isschot argues that it was the *marchas campesinas* of the 1960s and 70s that led the way for broader human rights protests and movements of the 1980s and beyond (Isschot 2015). The protests also regularly lead to military intervention, or more clandestine violence orchestrated by right-wing

paramilitary groups who simply exterminate those considered instigators of political unrest or sympathizing with guerrilla faction. My colleague's comment about hoping no one would die on that day was far from hyperbolic.

In the weeks leading up to the student protests in Bogotá, military, police, and protesters had clashed throughout the country. Twelve people had been killed in the confrontations (Salcedo, Rincón, and Duarte 2013; La Mesa Nacional Agropecuario de Interlocución y Incidencia 2013). José's comments reflected the paradox of Colombian life; the constancy of structural and armed violence amid, and as, the normalcy of quotidian life.

Indeed, the routine of Colombia's violence, as system and structure, is a constant background to everyday life. The regularity of the violence is such that in Colombia, as in so many places that live through the everydayness of protracted, low-intensity armed conflict, the war has become a permanent back drop to the political, social, and religious landscape. Regular flare-ups, frustrating traffic jams, and the devastating tragedies of lost lives, remind the population there is a war going on. But at the level of the everyday, people live their lives, go grocery shopping, make love, raise families, and go into debt. People also go to church, make offerings to God and the Saints, and practice their personal economy in accordance with a believing structure, belief in what could be and what could have been. A brief introduction to the Colombian armed conflict is necessary in order to understand the context in which concepts such as prosperity, discipline, and power are developed in this specific time and place of an emerging Colombia.

### 1.3 *La Violencia*: 1948-1958

In the years leading up to the outbreak of undeclared civil war in the twentieth century, known as *La Violencia*, historian Marco Palacios describes the relationship between the rural poor and the state-economic elite complex as “always negative” (Palacios 2006, p. 106; Posada-Carbo 2001). Historians Michael J. LaRosa and Germán Mejía state more succinctly, “During the nineteenth century, political conflict was the norm rather than the exception” (LaRosa and Mejía 2012, p. 75; Velásquez Martínez 1999). While a post-Independence period of internal conflict was the norm in most Latin American countries during the nineteenth century, the proliferation of violence in Colombia throughout the twentieth century outlasted the dictatorships and civil wars of all other Latin American countries, and continues to this day.

Palacios further explains, quoting a governmental report from the 1930s, “For the tenant the government is (a) the mayor who throws him in jail for violating a law he didn’t know about; (b) the authority who throws him in jail for making or drinking contraband liquor; (c) the authority that charges road and bridge tolls; and (d) who authority who is quick to evict him whenever the landowner requests it” (Palacios 2006, p. 106). Distinctions between class and power were, and continue to be, some of the most salient causes named by Colombian historians and analysts for the outbreak of violence in the mid-twentieth century.

While it is impossible to define a “start date” for the violence that has swept throughout the country in waves since the turn of the twentieth century, the moment of rupture in the history of Colombia’s wars is 1948. Tensions between liberals and conservatives had been simmering for the first decades of the century, carried over from conflicts of Independence and control over the definition of what kind of Republic the country was to be. “In a country of regions, a nation that geographically defies unification, *La Violencia* was a phenomenon that clearly demonstrated the weakness of the Colombian state” (LaRosa and Mejía, p. 85). This quote illustrates the fragile



project of nation-building and the very fractured idea of “sovereignty” in post-Independence Colombia, but also a characteristic of the make-up of the republic that furthers the notion that geography and deep regional divides have also served in prolonging the conflict into the twentieth century. Although Civil war was never officially declared and according to the history books, democracy has reigned in Colombia since Independence.

Colombia’s complex geography of mountains and valleys is one of the first divisions that historians and analysts of Colombia point to in explaining the messy history of violence—the stark divides between Highlands and Lowlands, *tierrafria* (cool lands) and *tierracaliente* (hotlands) they explain, has shaped the making of this South American nation, and continues to shape its culture, languages, and systems of governance (Romoli 1941). For example, mountain ranges and deep valleys separate Colombia’s four main cities—Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, and Barranquilla. Prior to the industrialization and infrastructural development of the twentieth century, it took less time to travel from Barranquilla (on the Atlantic Coast) to Paris by sea than to Bogotá by land (Leech 2011; Safford and Palacios 2002).

In 1948, the liberal presidential candidate, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, was assassinated and Bogotá, the capital, burned. This historical moment is known as *El Bogotazo*, now a shared historical moment in Colombia, but especially in Bogotá’s historical narrative. Gaitán’s assassination and the *Bogotazo* were the sparks that set already smoldering frictions between Liberals and Conservatives aflame, and ignited the first phase of a still-undeclared civil war throughout the country. Gaitán was killed in downtown Bogotá, on a crowded sidewalk lined with cafes and street front stores. He was most likely shot by Juan Roa Sierra. The reasons and motivations for the murder will forever be a source of speculation, since after Sierra fired the shots, he was immediately identified by the crowd and brutally beaten then lynched in the public square. His body was dragged throughout the city center, and left on the steps of the presidential

palace, while Liberals set fire to buildings, streetcars, and business, as well as killing suspected Conservatives through gang-beatings, gunshot, and rips of machete blades (*machetazos*). Thousands of people were left dead on April 9, 1948, and thus a new uprising of violence began and has not ceased since (Martín Medem 2009; Kline 1995).

*La Violencia*, according to historians Marco Palacios (1995, 2008), Javier Giraldo (2003), and Orlando Fals Borda (1960; 1962), more properly should be understood as the twenty years of violence and impunity that political sectarianism and elitism promoted after the assassination of Gaitán. To quell the violence that was quickly spreading through the country sparked by the *Bogotázo*—or to better manage it—then President, Mariano Ospina Pérez, closed Congress, and declared a state of siege. The police and military in rural areas began hunting Liberals and belligerents, while most of the actual killing happened among civilians, one of the more tragic foreshadowings of the violence that would evolve later in the century (Palacios 1995). In the 1950 election, the Liberals refused to present a candidate, and hardline Conservative, Laureano Gómez, took over the *Casa de Nariño* (the Presidential Palace), maintaining the state of siege and revoking constitutional rights. Palacios refers to this moment in Colombia’s history as “the crisis of representational democracy at its climax” (Palacios 1995, p. 204-205).

*La Violencia* bore the first subversive guerrilla armies of the twentieth century (Botero 2011). These were Liberal fighters who fought against the Conservative *de facto* dictatorship in an undeclared civil war. The war also bore the first paramilitary groups, known as *pájaros*, with the aid and training of the United States.<sup>18</sup> The violence of the following twenty years after the

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<sup>18</sup> It would be remiss to narrate the history of violence in Colombia—or any Latin American country for that matter—without recognizing the role that the United States has played in prolonging, modifying, regulating, catalyzing and aggravating the armed conflict. The intervention of the United States in Colombia began already in the nineteenth century, with the establishment of the Monroe Doctrine. The Monroe Doctrine, established in 1823, was a statement of U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America which was designed to secure the region from

installation of Gómez, has coloured the national imagined community (or enemy), and the collective narrative of violence and fragmentation in Colombia's history. *La Violencia* also spurred a new language of terror, through killing practices meant to traumatize and horrify, to displace and to regulate political and social action. The language of “*aplanchamientos*” and “*picadas*” (“beating to death of individuals with the flat side of a machete” and “cutting a person to pieces with a machete” respectively), created a grammar of terror that sent a public message to the other inhabitants of the town that now Conservatives or Liberals, depending on who did the killing and who was assassinated, were in charge. Sympathizers on the wrong side of the fight were to leave town (Hurtado 2009; Roldán 2002).

The myth and murk of death and terror have become part of common lore in reciting the acts of violence in Colombian history. Although rough estimates suggest that close to 300,000 people have been killed over the last fifty years, “we will probably never know the true count of the dead” Palacios sadly projects (Palacios 1995, p. 10). *The Violencia* and the violence have worked its way into Colombian literature, poetry, music, and art. Violence has become a cultural

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European colonial expansion and potentially harm the political and economic monopoly of the United States throughout the Western Hemisphere (Hershberg and Rosen 2006). United States interventionism has continued in Colombia throughout the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first with the multibillion dollar military aid program of Plan Colombia. Plan Colombia was designed by United States Congress under Bill Clinton after President Andrés Pastrana's failed peace negotiations with the FARC had ceded forty-two thousand kilometers of demilitarized land in El Caguan to the guerrilla group, known as the *zona de distensión* (Zone of Distension). The FARC had built up forces, and taken advantage of large swath of land for drug running and trafficking that was untouchable by the Colombian military. The threat, according to the official government records in both Colombia and the United States, was that the FARC had grown so strong they presented, for the first time, a real threat to hold on government in Bogotá. The United States responded by signing off on a counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency plan in 2000 that saw almost ten billion dollars (USD) pumped into the Colombian military over the course of 2000-2015. The result has been a militarization of the country such as had never before been seen in Colombia, an effective military strategy that backed the FARC back into the mountains and dramatically diminished their forces, as well as some of the most horrific violations of human rights and civilian casualties ever recorded. Some analysts will credit the current peace process to the effectiveness of Plan Colombia, however, the Plan also introduced the country to the corrupt reality that paramilitary forces were intimately connected to official political power. Plan Colombia has evolved into an on-going program of softer security, with less money directed at military development, and more funneled towards social and economic development. This last phase of the Plan has also witnessed the United States opening seven new military bases throughout Colombia—to much negative reaction from South American neighbours, Ecuador, Venezuela, Brazil, and Peru. For more, see, among others, Tate 2015; Otero Prada 2010; Bouvier 2009; Nieto and Stoller 2007; Romero 2007; Estrada Alvarez 2001; Navarro Jiménez 2000)

fact as real as it is mystifying in its seeming hyperbole. Shrouded in symbolic and religious tones *La Violencia* was marked less by “acts of war” than by “atrocities and vengeance” (Palacios 1995, p. 290).

## 1.4 The National Front and guerrilla warfare: 1958-1974

The violence between 1948 and 1958 was carried out primarily in the rural areas, where a quarter of a million people were killed during this period (Martín 2010; Montenegro and Posada 2001). A lack of intervention from Bogotá led the rural population to take up arms themselves in modes of aggressive offense and self-defense. The political and economic elite who lived in urban centers were removed from the violence to the degree that a decade went by without any plan of action to quell the violence raging in the countryside.

Liberals and Conservatives in Bogotá were awakened to the extremity of the violence through the publication of an essay by three of Colombia’s most prominent public intellectuals, a jurist, a prelate and a sociologist (Eduardo Umaña Luna, Monsignor Germán Guzmán Campos, and Orlando Fals Borda). The essay, *La Violencia en Colombia: Estudio de un Proceso Social* (1962), awakened the elite and the literati in Bogotá and Medellín to the reality in the countryside, which sparked political action on the part of the acting political regime (Gutiérrez 2012; Acevedo Carmona 1995). Public opinion shifted, and eventually Bogotá decided upon a mode of shared governance in the form of the National Front (Sáenz Rovner 1992).

This political agreement saw the Conservatives and Liberals swap power every four years. While elections continued throughout this period of the National Front (1958-1974), the party in power was predetermined and the candidates were selected by the party leadership itself. There was no room for political opposition within this structure, no other parties were eligible to run candidates, and the political system remained starkly exclusionary (Arregi 1998).

The result of the National Front was indeed a degree of dampening in the regional violence that had taken over the country. However, the closed political structure generated further unrest, now directed at the political leadership more generally, rather than partisan alliance. The year after the establishment of the National Front, the Cuban Revolution succeeded in overthrowing the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship, and Latin American conservative monopolies shuddered at the possibility of communist contagion (Holmes, Gutierrez de Piñeres, and Curtin 2008; Alarcón 1999).

In Colombia, the two guerrilla armies that are still in operation today emerged. Disgruntled university students organized in urban centers in 1960, forming the National Liberation Army (ELN). This group organized around European theories of class struggle and revolution. The guerrilla movement emphasized the need for social mobility for the poor, and based their arguments in the works of Karl Marx and Liberation Theology. In 1964, in a rural township of a historically liberal strong-hold, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) were born. The FARC came into being out of “frustration with the failed agrarian struggles of the 1930s and 1940s, struggles that elicited little more than repression from the Colombian state” (LaRosa and Mejia: 88). Other guerrilla groups entered and exited the fray throughout the 1970s and 1980s, but only the ELN and FARC remain today. Efforts at quashing guerrilla movements throughout the 1970s and 1980s involved varying tactics of state coordination with local strong-men, in the form of large landowners and political elite who resisted the demands of the guerrilla struggles, most important their emphasis on land reform.

As the Chinese revolutionary, Mao Tse-tung, had described guerrilla warfare as a matter of guerrilla armies moving through communities as “fish through water” the response of the Colombian government and those in control of the land that the guerrilla sought to redistribute, was to remove the water from the fish (Tse-tung 1978). In other words, the primary tactic to

smoke out the guerrilla became the brutal strategy of repressing civilian populations who were suspected of supporting the groups. When the government and large landowners began to arm peasant self-defense groups to fend off the guerrilla insurgency, so began an institutionalized practice of decentralized power in the late 1970s and 1980s, (Ladrón de Guevara 2002; Peña Gutiérrez 1982).

These would become the paramilitary groups, armed and financed by the political and economic privileged classes, who developed very particular methods of fostering terror in local populations as a mode of control (Taussig 2003; Medina Gallego 1990). The roots of the paramilitary are hazy at best, but historians generally agree that between the establishment of conservative militias of the era of *La Violencia* to the full-on institutionalization of civilian armies to fight irregular guerrilla warfare with irregular warfare against the civilian population, by the 1990s, the Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (the AUC) had grown to as many as thirty thousand combatants (Romero 2003).

## 1.5 Drugs and the degeneration of the conflict: 1978-1991

When the National Front dismantled in the early 1970s, the incoming Conservative President of 1978, Julio César Turbay, introduced some of the most draconian tactics to remove the water from the fish. Turbay's presidency was characterized by "extrajudicial killings, illegal imprisonments, torture, and a "state-of-siege" mentality and reality" (LaRosa and Mejía, p. 89). The repression of the civilian population, gross violations of human rights by state forces, and a blind-eye to extrajudicial assassinations sent a message that the government was either unwilling or incapable of holding assassins and organized militia groups accountable to any kind of criminal prosecution or legal process. Within this context of extreme repression and

governmental obsession with stamping out the threat of the guerrilla, a new dynamic was added to the violence: the proliferation of the most lucrative drug industry the world had ever seen.

In what was known as the era of “*marimberos*” the business in marijuana production began in the early 1970s, primarily run by a small collection of prominent families who had specialized in contraband during the 1950s and 60s, and shipped their product to the United States through Miami and New York (Sáenz Rovner 2014; Atehortua Cruz and Rojas Rivera 2008;). These early traffickers influenced and inspired the young dealers who would develop drug trafficking to the dimensions of a successful transnational corporation, and create some of the richest men South America had ever produced (Fernández Andrade 2002). The Medellin and Cali Cartels, under the leadership of Pablo Escobar and the Ochoa Family, and the Orejuela Brothers respectively, expanded their business into cocaine and heroin production, in addition to marijuana, throughout the late 1970s and 80s. During the 1980s and early 1990s the drug industry financed nearly 7% of the nation’s GDP, created nearly 60,000 jobs, and kept Colombia out of the mire of foreign debt defaults that the rest of Latin America suffered (Rocha García 2011; Rocha García 2000; Salazar and Jaramillo 1992). Colombian cartels controlled 80% of the world’s cocaine production in their heyday of the early 1990s, and brought both guerrilla groups and paramilitaries into the web of economic relations of the lucrative drug industry (Tokatlien 2000). Guerrillas, primarily the FARC, and the distinct paramilitary groups levied taxes on harvesting, processing, and transport of coca and coca paste in territories under their control. The cartels themselves employed private armies for protection of lands and leadership, as well as enforcement of control over local populations (Salazar 2001).

In 1985, the Medellin cartel and Colombian rebels, the M-19, took over the legislature in the center of Bogotá. The army responded by opening fire, and over 100 judges, lawyers and

staff, and M-19 fighters perished in one of the most public and still controversial acts of violence in Colombian history. After this, the Colombian state declared drug trafficking to be of the highest order of offenses, and announced that the drug traffickers, if caught, would be extradited to the United States. This set off a new wave of violence, as the Medellin drug cartel re-organized itself, and renamed the group, “The Extraditables.” This group declared war on the state when their demands to remove the clause of extradition were ignored; their motto, “we prefer a grave in Colombia to a cell in the United States” (Bedoya Lima 2013). The leader of the group and of the most successful drug cartel, Pablo Escobar, was known colloquially as the “man who brought the nation to its knees” and made the Forbes “World’s Richest Billionaires” list seven years in a row, beginning in 1987. Escobar became the most infamous drug baron the world has known, and the deadliest.

While celebrated as one of the most successful business men in Latin America, Escobar offered compensation for the assassination of police officers, coordinated one of the deadliest airline bombings ever seen in Colombian history (the Avianca Airlines flight 203 that was designed to kill presidential hopeful, César Gaviria Trujillo in 1998. At the last minute Trujillo decided not to fly, but all 107 people on board were killed) and was directly responsible for the assassination of thousands of individuals (Palacio Castañeda 1998). It was during this era (the mid 1980s) that violence hit the urban centers of Bogotá, Cali, and Medellin, and the general population, including the elite, were affected. An increase in kidnapping, now no longer reserved for extortion but for reasons of political pressure, alongside random car bombings and increased violence in the countryside as well, characterized the “dirty war” era of Colombian history. All of it, the violence and the vengeance, was related to a political economy of war that saw market



prices for narcotics skyrocket as the basics laws of supply and demand created a niche for the products the Colombian drug cartels were exporting.

Bombings in urban centers, massacres leading to massive displacements, and the further entanglements between the drug economy, the war economy, and the official political parties, became commonplace. Estimates assert that violence specifically attributable to the drug wars of the 1980s and 1990s left over twenty-thousand dead, and over ten billion dollars wasted in attempts at eradicating the “plague of Colombia” (Bedoya Lima 2013). In 2000, when the peace negotiations with the FARC launched in 1998 by President Andrés Pastrana began to falter, approximately 169,000 hectares of Colombian territory was dedicated to the cultivation of coca, the base ingredient in the production of cocaine (Echandía Castillo 2006; Vargas Meza 2003).

The degeneration of the armed conflict, from a politically motivated war to an economically driven orchestration of violence occurred in the 1990s. The process is most vividly understood through recognizing the havoc that the decentralization of the drug trade, and the emergence of a coordinated paramilitary syndicate wreaked on the civilian population. Aldo Cívico suggests that paramilitarism, or para-state militias, have been a permanent fixture of Colombian history since Independence (Cívico 2016). In Cívico’s incredible ethnography of paramilitaries in Antioquia, he states that between 1980 and 2012, of the almost 2,000 massacres that had been carried out throughout Colombia, over 60% had been perpetrated by paramilitary groups (Cívico 2016, p. 2). “Violence” says Cívico, “rather than an irrational force that needs to be tamed, represents a force inherent to the modern experience and to both authoritarian regimes and neoliberal democracies” (Cívico 2016, p. 10). Michael Taussig says something similar when he explains that political violence has a very particular rationality all its own; not only is it an underlying condition of the modern state, but it is intimately tied to a particular

reason, the rule and not the exception (Taussig 1991). The religions that have emerged alongside modernity in the last century, and coincided with neoliberalism more recently, tell the same story.

## 1.6 The political economy of war: 1991-present

It would be a mistake to charge the prolongation of the Colombian armed conflict entirely to economic motives. Yet, over the last decade the business of war has become an increasingly profitable enterprise (Kilcullen and Mills 2015). In the 1970s and early 1980s, the strategy of displacement and repression of the rural, civilian population was one of “draining the pond” and weakening the insurgency. Over the last two decades, massive forced displacement has resulted in the emptying of over six million hectares of land and generating the six million displaced that have flooded urban centers throughout the country (Gómez, Sánchez-Ayala, and Vargas 2015; Ocampo 2004).

Despite this draining of small-scale agricultural producers, agricultural production in Colombia has maintained steady growth. This is, in part, because displacement of communities and individual farmers off of their land has become a *modus operandi* of development in Colombia (Magi 2004; Vargas Meza 1999). While Michael Taussig’s sugar cane growers in Cauca valley were being forced into wage labour and a process of proletarianization in the late 1970s, the decades between the late 1990s to the current moment of Colombia economic growth has been supported by industrial agriculture and natural resource extraction that has followed a logic of violent land accumulation through dispossessing peasant farmers off their land and into the growing precariat of urban peripheries. Armed groups, from the guerrilla to paramilitary to drug cartels (sometimes working in collusion, sometimes fighting each other) have profited off of the massive displacements and taken over the “emptied” hectares for cultivating coca, poppy, and

marijuana, as well as “licit” activities such as palm oil production or resource extraction. As Frances Thomson states, after extended study of the political economy of agrarian conflict in Colombia, “displacement is often an incidental consequence of conflict, but in Colombia it is frequently the cause of violence” (Thomson 2011).

Another important contribution to the proliferation of the drug economy that has sustained a political economy of war, along with the extortion of large land-owners, the war taxes levied by the guerrilla and the enterprising paramilitary on local business owners throughout the country, and strategies of kidnapping for ransom, was the economic opening of 1991. Colombia’s move towards full trade liberalization was officialized when the National Council for Political and Social Economy (Conpes) drafted the, “Program for the modernization of the Colombian economy” (Lopez Restrepo 1994). This plan worked as did most neoliberal trade programs in the region that imposed structural adjustment programs. These programs clawed back social spending, privatized public commons, deregulated finance, decreased agricultural subsidies, and lowered import tariffs. Import tariffs in Colombia were lowered from 16.5% in 1991 to 7.0% in 1994 (Lopez Restrepo 1994) Subsidies to the agricultural sector were steadily cut, leaving the under-developed industry to compete with international agricultural imports. Between 1991 and 1993, over 230,000 people were left unemployed and migrated to urban centers, joined the armed groups, or moved towards coca production (Londoño Rendón 1998).

The effect of neoliberalization was a further weakening of an already impoverished small-scale agricultural industry. Small-scale farmers saw the price of the licit products, such as fruit, manioc, corn, and potatoes decrease in value, while the costs of production increased (Salamarca and Castillo Brieva 2005; Martínez 2001). In the wake of the reforms of 1991, it became far more lucrative and feasible to cultivate a hectare of coca and make it into coca paste and sell to

the local drug cartel. A kilo of paste would render roughly one million pesos profit, while twenty kilos of manioc cost much more to produce, transport, and sell for a fraction of the price (Molano 2016). The neoliberalization of the Colombian economy worked in favour of illicit economies as well as legal crops, and served to prolong the violence in a new way. The economy of war also muddled the lines that kept armed actors in specific political and geographic camps. Insofar as the monopoly on the drug trade decentralized after the assassination of Pablo Escobar (1993) and the extradition of the Orejuela Brothers (1995), new and smaller drug organizations sprung up throughout the country. Meanwhile, the paramilitary groups organized under one umbrella organization, the Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).

By the late 1990s, say LaRosa and Mejía, “the FARC and the ELN were fighting the military, the AUC were fighting the leftist guerrillas, the military was supposedly fighting the AUC, the FARC, and the ELN, and the drug barons were fighting the government while simultaneously collaborating with both the guerrilla and the paramilitary” (LaRosa and Mejía 2012, p. 91). As already stated, it would be erroneous to dismiss the political and social grievances which gave birth to the guerrilla movements in the 1960s and the driving right-wing political agenda of the *Convivir* and *Auto-Defensas de Colombia* (AUC) in the 1990s (Bergquist, Peñaranda, and Sánchez 1992). However, today almost all of the illegal armed groups are participating in the drug trade and the war economy in some way or another, and the lines between political struggle and economic struggle have become increasingly blurred. Now, the ELN in *Arauca* coordinate with the re-emergent paramilitary and local drug-traffickers, the FARC in *El Choco* collaborate with the paramilitary group *Los Urabeños*, and sell their cocaine to the Mexican crime syndicates with bases in Central America. If a peace agreement is ratified in Havana in 2016, it remains to be seen how the economics of the violence will be addressed.

## 1.7 Christianity, Christianities, and Christians in Colombia

In the midst of all of these shifts in the nature of the violence in Colombia, and in relation to it, religious affiliations and practices have also morphed and shifted. The relations of power at work at the level of the everydayness of the violence affect and are affected by emergent Christianities. Within the story of Colombian violence and fragmented sovereignty, the state takes on a characteristic unique to the Colombian context. Only in the last decade has the Colombian state worked to centralize its power, and establish a monopoly on the rule of force that it has never had. The populations throughout the country have followed a regime of practice that uniquely (to Colombia) brings practices of believing into broader analytical grids in which Christianity and economic power bump up against and shape each other.

An example from the field illustrates this confluence of violence and Christianity. The region of Magdalena Medio, where these Pentecostal farmers in the community of Garzal have developed strategies of survival, both religious and economic, has been named a “laboratory of war” (Vargas Velásquez 1992). All the waves and stages of violence, from the first arrival of the Spanish Conquistadores, have proliferated in this region as it is one of the richest and most geopolitically strategic.<sup>19</sup> The region borders the longest river in Colombia, the Magdalena, and leads from Bogotá to the Caribbean coast. All of the armed actors have organized and attempted to control different sub-regions and territories throughout the river basin (Molano 1990). The community of Garzal has repeatedly found themselves in the cross-hairs. In other words, the

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<sup>19</sup> The Magdalena River served as the entry-way for the first Spanish conquistadores to enter what would become “Colombian” territory. In 1536, Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada led a military expedition into the flatlands of the central Colombian plateau, by way of the river that runs from Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast, to Onda, only a few kilometers from what is today the Capital of the country, Bogotá. The journey introduced the Spanish conquistadores to the advanced civilization of the Muisca people, the “dense population, rich agricultural lands, pleasant climate, splendid public architecture, and, perhaps most important, evidence of nearby sources of gold and emeralds...” (Francis 2007, p. xiv). This journey led to the establishment of the first interior cities of Santa Fe (de Bogotá), Tunja, and Vélez.

political economy of war has developed in the Magdalena, and as such the Magdalena Medio has been a hotbed of political uprising, and the community of Garzal has lived through the various waves of violence. The region of Magdalena, and the emblematic case of the Pentecostal community of Garzal, is an appropriate place to begin unpacking the social dimensions to accumulation through dispossession by way of political economy. And, importantly, to consider the spiritualities that accompany the opening of markets.

We rode on horseback, slowly, through thick mud paths in the middle of cane fields. Santiago, a *campesino* and community leader in the community of Garzal, was also a member of the rural Pentecostal church where I had been carrying out research over the course of four years. Our conversation had begun at the edge of the river where my research partner from the *Universidad Nacional* and I had been dropped off by the *chalupa*.<sup>20</sup> Santiago greeted us with an embrace. “*Que Dios les bendiga! Llegaron bien!*” (“God bless you! You’ve arrived safely!”). We mounted the horses and began our two-hour journey to the community of Garzal. The air was thick and damp, the sun beat down. Everywhere, tropical bugs, grasshoppers, mosquitos, and all manner of other insect leapt in between the cane and papaya trees. I picked up a conversation Santiago and I had begun during my last visit. I had heard from numerous members of the community about the collective impression that some wealthy land-owners, and especially those with ties to the paramilitary or the drug cartels that had threatened the community over the previous decade, sacrificed human lives to the devil in order to retain their wealth. We rode side by side, rocking with the careful steps of our horses. It had rained the night before, and the mud was thick. I asked him to tell me his interpretation of the threats the community had received.

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<sup>20</sup> *Chalupas* are river taxis that carry roughly fifteen to twenty people at a time. These are the primary modes of civilian transportation up and down the Magdalena River. See preamble for context on the research done in Garzal.

Santiago looked around us, at the vast green of sugarcane, manioc and plantain, and papaya trees bordered by the tropical forest of the Magdalena. Without answering my question, he responded: “Have I told you about the time the army of angels protected us from the paramilitary?” Santiago began to tell the story.

“We heard that the paramilitaries were going to come. *El Señor*, had threatened the Pastor. It was 1994.” The moniker, *El Señor*, referred to the drug baron whose air landing strip bordered the land of the Garzal community.<sup>21</sup> The drug lord had threatened Pastor Miguel in the township just days earlier. He wanted the land that the community of Garzal had settled over generations. For drug running, for African Palm plantation, for mining; it was unclear what the drug lord wanted the land for.<sup>22</sup> What was clear was that the community was under threat. The drug lord wanted the community to leave. The regimes of power that manage the deployment of force in much of rural Colombia translated this desire for land into a potential massacre as had been occurring throughout the countryside for generations.<sup>23</sup> “We knew that there were paramilitary in the area. They had machetes and chainsaws. They were staying on *El Señor’s* land.”

The story weaved together Santiago’s recollection of the events that transpired on one quiet evening in El Garzal, chronologies and clear narratives abandoned as traumatic events are often recalled outside boundaries of exactness. Our horses waded through the thickness of jungle

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<sup>21</sup> As a point of interest, it should also be noted the *El Señor* is also a frequently used term to reference God.

<sup>22</sup> The land in Magdalena is renowned for its fertility, due to the proximity to the river bed and wetlands bordering the river basin, as well as deposits of gold, silver, and thick crude petroleum. The capital of the region, Barrancabermeja, is home to the first oil refinery in the country and the largest union of public employees, *Union Sindical Obrero* (USO). The wealth of natural resources has been a cause of great violence, already in the 1920s when the first public strike was organized by refinery workers and the beginning of para-state violence to suppress unionized work and social movements (Vargas Velásquez 1992). The region became an important site for coca cultivation and transport of coca paste (the base material for making cocaine), drug running, and transportation of weapons, along with licit commodities like petroleum and more recently, palm oil. See also van Isschot2015.

<sup>23</sup> According to the National Center for Historical Memory, between 1958 and 2012, almost two thousand massacres have taken place throughout the country. See Bello, et al. 2013.

growth and into the next plantation of banana and manioc. On that night, only a few years prior, a paramilitary convoy had arrived to the river's edge, close to where my research partner and I had been dropped off. The paramilitaries arrived in the darkness of night, and began to move towards the community.

That same evening, the Pentecostals of Garzal had been up late, praying and singing in the wooden-slat church that sits in the middle of the hamlet. Individuals had petitioned the angels to protect the community, to hold off the armies of paramilitary with armies of heaven. The spiritual warfare that these Pentecostal Christians waged had effects, according to them, in the material realm of the all-too-real world of forced displacements and death threats. The collective conviction that spiritual practice, such as summoning angels for protection against violence, reveals a particular form of acting in the world that is specific to Pentecostal Christians in Colombia. The particularity lies in the very real warfare reflected in the spiritual realm, and vice versa. Understanding both Christianity and capitalism as systems of relations, as analytical grids as such, that produce particular forms of difference in the specificity of Colombia is necessary in order to further understand financial capitalism in relation to the broader Colombian context.

## 1.8 Protestant, Pentecostal, Evangelical

The first Protestant missionaries arrived to Colombia in 1825. The Scottish Baptist, James Thompson, arrived with the British Biblical Society with the intention of founding a Biblical Society in Colombia. The society was accepted by the liberals, the masons, and a small group of Catholic priests insofar as the Protestants, Franco masons, and liberals valued economic opening and freedom of expression and religion (Beltran 2013; Restrepo Uribe 1943). These protestant missionaries had been invited by the Liberal party, with the support of some Catholic clergy,



demonstrating first, the non-homogenous approach to religious diversity, as well as the moves by the Liberal party to work at dismantling the Catholic hegemony that held the constitution and political system in the grasp of the Conservative elite (Beltran 2013: 37; CINEP 1976). The next wave of missionaries arrived in 1856, with the Presbyterian Missions Board.

The first Presbyterian church was inaugurated in 1862 in Bogotá. Churches were planted in Medellin in 1888 and the coastal city of Barranquilla in 1892. The liberals seeking support in their crusade to weaken Catholic and conservative power encouraged the Protestant missions to establish churches, along with schools clinics, and social clubs. This resulted in the establishment of the Presbyterian run “American Schools” that continued operating even after the new constitution of 1887 handed complete responsibility for primary school training back to the administration of the Catholic Church. Even as Protestant missions entered into the country, conflict raged. The conflicts that surrounded the political direction of the country in the late nineteenth century, and into the twentieth, culminating with *La Violencia*, have been understood as conflicts residing between the Conservative and Liberal parties. However, as Michael Taussig explains, Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (a Presbyterian himself, alumnus of the American school in Barranquilla) summarized a large body of Colombian scholarly opinion when he stated, “The internal conflicts after 1853 that were fought ostensibly for the control of the budget, or for changing the Constitution, were really fought on religious grounds” ([Fals Borda 1969] in Taussig 2010, p. 61). According to Taussig, the religiously charged conflicts had more to do with political economy than any challenge to a monopolized religious passion, in opposition to Beltran writing some thirty years later. Taussig declares that the issue at hand was the “romantic socialism” that the Liberals, and by default, Protestants were understood to espouse (Taussig 2010, p. 62).

As early as 1850, the periodical of the Archdiocese warned that “anarchists had misused the gospels to persuade people that ‘*communism* is the fundamental principle of Jesus Christ,’” (Taussig 2010, p. 62). In this early context, Taussig identifies the binaries as Manichean. “Good against Evil, Liberal against Conservative, Equity against Equality. It is a natural law that things divide into two” (Taussig 2010, p. 69). The Catholic versus the Protestant became a trope of political competition. Christianity, an analytical grid of power relations, was the stage upon which violence played itself out. Yet, according to Beltran, Catholic hegemony was not truly cracked until the Constitution of 1991 re-drew political lines and Protestant and Pentecostal movements that had been operating semi-covertly for decades were able to flourish in the newly liberalized “religious marketplace” (Beltran 2013).

There is a saying in circles of religious scholars, observers, and theologians in Latin America. It goes something along the lines of: “the Catholic Church opted for the poor, and the poor opted for Pentecostalism.” This saying is attributed to various individuals, including Richard Shaull, a Presbyterian missionary who was deployed in Colombia from 1942-50 (Shaull 1996). Shaull was also a professor of Theology at Princeton Theological seminary for over forty years, and recognized as an early liberation theologian by some (Santiago-Vendrell 2010). It seems this might be a fitting citation. However, in various different documents, the text is also attributed to an anonymous Guatemalan nun (González 1994); a Brazilian Presbyterian pastor, Caio Fabio d'Araujo (Moreno 2011); and vaguely cited as a “theory repeatedly mentioned by pastors and Pentecostal intellectuals [during field work in Mexico]” (Masferrer Kan 2004, 62). Latin American liberation theologians introduced a notion of material salvation in a theological exegesis that understood God to have a “preferential option for the poor” (Gutierrez 1971). Yet, as Colombian philosopher and theologian, Arturo Orrego laments, “the liberation theologians

attempted to develop a theology of the subject without recognizing their subject” (Orrego 2016). The combination of violent repression of liberation theology in Colombia, accompanied by violent repression of what were understood by the Catholic officialdom as threats to Conservative social and cultural values, in addition to a largely rural, illiterate, and already hybridized popular religiosity in the Colombian provinces, saw the proposal of liberation theology fall flat in Colombia, while masses were drawn to the Pentecostal fold.

Pentecostalism in Colombia can be understood as a diverse collection of churches who hold central to their faith a commitment to evangelism, the free movement of the Spirit as manifest through glossolalia, miracle work, and the centrality of spiritual warfare against demons, hexes, and enchantments (Bedegain Griesing and Demera Vargas 2005). As aforementioned, William Beltran considers Pentecostalism to have developed within the cradle of an already hybrid popular Catholicism that had adopted indigenous spiritual traditions, together with the conviction of miracles from Saints, and a sensual, affective phenomenology that translated across cultures and languages in Colombia. Pentecostalism arose in Colombia as fourth wave of evangelistic waves to hit Latin America according to historian Jorge Rivagli (Rivagli 2010). Given the plasticity of Pentecostalism, many of the formations of what I refer to as “prosperity Christianity” find their roots in Pentecostalism already modulated for locally-specific contexts. For example, Beltran considers the *Mision Carismatica Internacional* to have adopted a model of expansion from the South Korean *Yoido Full Gospel Church* and its lead pastor, David Yonggi Cho, who according to Beltran, incorporated elements of Buddhist tradition, like “anticipated visualization of miracles” into the prosperity message. This message was picked up by Cesar Castellanos (more on this church in chapter 3) in his calls for the congregation of the MCI to

“visualize their blessing” (Beltran 2013, p. 139; Castellanos 2013; 2008; 2006). The “indigenization” of Pentecostalism is one its few most defining features.

The first and second waves of Protestant evangelism in Colombia are understood as the two initial arrivals of Protestant missionaries as mentioned above. The third wave is recognized as an influx of fundamentalist missionaries from the United States in the mid-twentieth century that remained closely tied to denominational hubs in North America (Ravagli 2010). The arrival of Pentecostalism is traced to the Santander province, very close to where the Garzal community is now located, with Canadian missionaries sent by the Canadian Pentecostal Assemblies in 1937 (Ravagli 2010, p. 43). Pentecostalism in Colombia quickly shook itself from its denominational doctrines, and adopted forms of practice that operated specific to the local context in which it sought roots.

According to Cornelia Butler Flora, “as of the 1960s, Pentecostal congregations began to appear in different parts of the country with the expansion of missionary work” (Butler Flora 1976, p. 57). These Pentecostal missions differentiated themselves from prior Protestant missions. They did so with their emphasis on evangelizing and even developed a certain martyr complex, given the harsh conditions of violent resistance the missionaries encountered in the midst of bipartisan violence throughout the country in which anything non-Catholic was understood as an affront to Catholic and conservative values (Rivagli 2010). In 1953, the Colombian Evangelical Confederation published a report, documenting the persecution the Protestant church had suffered: “42 churches have been destroyed by fire or dynamite; 110 evangelical schools have been closed, 54 by decree of the government; 51 evangelicals have been assassinated because of their faith, 28 by the hands of the national police and governmental officials; approximately \$370,000 in damages” (Damboriena 1962, p. 72). The character of martyr did not, however,

diminish the evangelizing efforts. If anything, according to Beltran (2009) and Clemencia Tejeiro Sarmiento (2010), the persecution of missionaries before and throughout *La Violencia* worked to their favour insofar as the Pentecostal preachers presented themselves as martyrs in the name of freeing the country from the hold of the Catholic Church (Rivagli 2010). In 1974, according to Butler Flora, the International United Pentecostal Church (IPUC) counted an estimated 60,000 members. In 2007, that number had risen to an estimated 400,000 members (Rivagli 2010, p. 45).

## 1.9 Regimes of practice in Colombian Rural Pentecostalism

“I know this [angels protecting the community from paramilitary] happened, because I know someone who knew one of the paramilitary. They say they arrived and began moving towards the community. They were going to kill us. Or at least some of us.” Santiago waved his hands, agitated, his voice was raised. “They were stopped just about here, they say.” We stopped our horses. “They say they heard a tremendously loud noise, I don’t know what they saw, what they heard, but they were scared, and turned away.” Santiago looked at me, pointed his finger with all severity, “It was the angels. What else could it have been?” He then laughed, joyously, almost surprised. We moved on. He called back over his shoulder, “we’re safe here. *No te preocupes*. Don’t worry. We’re protected by angels.”

What the Pentecostals in the community of Garzal articulate in their Christian practice is a political spirituality unique to their context. When the threats began, the church initiated a series of practices that worked to construct a sense, or at the very least the illusion, of control over a situation entirely out of control. “We would meet every night, and hold prayer vigils, we would sleep around the Pastor’s house, we fasted. The women met separately, and took turns fasting for weeks at a time” Santiago continued to explain. In another interview, the pastor of the

community, the one who received the threat directly, told us: “We would drink some water in the morning, but no food. No food. For twenty days we fasted. We would sing together, pray together, read the Bible, and talk about what to do if the paramilitary did come into the community. I was never left alone. But we also fasted for the development of our community. The cacao project has changed many lives. It has also kept people from fleeing when the threats come.” The recognizable Pentecostal habitus, of prayer, fasting, and Bible study, works on the soul of these devout, yet precarious, Christians.

Importantly, however, this community relies not *only* on heavenly intervention. They also participate in an economic practice inspired by the internal self-governance that the absence of a state, and the precarious position of on-going death threats, evoke. To say that another way, individual farmers were chosen by the church leadership to participate in an alternative development project that began in the mid-2000s. Each one of those chosen to participate were members of the Garzal Four-Square community, and each participant was charged with a few hundred cacao plants, and had a cacao drying structure built on their property. This was a communal project, directed at a few individuals. The agricultural project of cacao production has placed this remote Pentecostal community in the crosshairs of not only drug lords seeking to take over their land, but also the industrial agricultural conglomerates seeking to drain the region of oil or use the land for African Palm development or massive banana plantations. The Pentecostal piety at work in Garzal ties an internal set of practices, of fasting and reading the Bible, of consuming nothing but water for twenty days and night-long vigils, as well as applying for development grants from international NGOs and loans for cocoa seeds from local banks. Tied together in this knot of “free market spirituality” is a piety that trains souls through brutal competition and an absent state.

The community of Garzal has had little choice but to engage with the competition of the savage market that pits paramilitary against guerrilla against drug lords against licit corporate orders in Colombia's race to appropriate land for exploitation and profit. The community has not capitulated to the threats of displacement because of this order of miracles and market competition. Garzal's cacao is sold to a Spanish company that transports the raw chocolate paste to Madrid, where it is sold on the fair trade markets of ethically conscious consumers in Europe. The morality that accompanies security through economic development is an important component of Colombia's emergence; a component uniquely Christian because the prosperity that the community has set its sights on holds to individual capacities for development and in this sense is especially capitalist.

Believing in angels, harnessing the performative power of prayer, and bending collective will towards an openness to miracles is a specific regime of Pentecostal, and Colombian, practice that operates in relation to a political economy of war, and a conviction that spiritual deliverance will be "on earth as it is in heaven." Far from the causal relation afforded to religious tenacity as a *response to* or *reasoning of* or *contamination of* the political and the social, the Pentecostal regime of practice in Garzal does different work. I refer here to arguments that build on assumptions of difference, such as the following from Jean Comaroff: "Commerce, government, education, the media, and popular arts—nothing seems too trivial or debased to offer grist to the spiritual mill. The task...is to put "God-in-everything" so "anything-can-be-holy"" (Comaroff 2009, p. 20). The central assumption here is that, first, that anything is "holy" or "unholy". And second, that there always already exists a distinction between these sites of religion, on the one hand, and commerce, education, etc., on the other. The work of the current study is to take one step back, and consider instead of closed categories of "holy" and "commerce" how these two realms operate and deploy power in forms far less detached. Indeed, to question whether distinct

“realms” indeed exist, and rather focus on the practice of power through shared regimes of practice.

Waves of Christianity in Colombia have produced a particular kind of subject in rapprochement with waves of globalizing markets, freer trade, and the ever-present context of violence. Tracing the regimes of Pentecostal practice in the midst of the violent precarity that the Colombian armed conflict reveals opens the edges to a Prosperity Christianity that bases itself in a spectrum of free market spiritualities. While the cacao project is a collective project, at least so it is talked about and written about in grant applications for further funding, the project also relies on the individual farmers to responsibly and efficiently cultivate their crops as they cultivate their souls and marketing strategies. The market forces that have regulated violence in Colombia operate according to the truth of liberalization and free market competition. From the drug trade to processes of opening up the financial regime of credit, Colombia’s steady march towards greater freedom of the market has coincided with spiritualities that seek to survive the violence that market competition has brought with it.

## 1.10 Good business, God’s business

“We have an alternative kind of development here in Garzal. We have an integral business model. We are not participating in the drug industry or industrial agriculture. That’s why we received threats, and that’s why we need to be even more responsible in our management of the cacao project. Good business is God’s business. The government doesn’t help us, but we trust God will provide.” Pastor Miguel spoke under the shade of one his cacao plants while trekking through the terrain in the pastures of Garzal. “Things have really changed with the cacao project” he turned and kept on trudging over thick underbrush, ducking under branches. “People have built proper zinc roofs on their houses, filled dirt floors with concrete. Prosperity



here is what we strive for. This is the vision. Electricity, a school, safety. Prosperity is something we pray for.” The cacao plants were close to harvest, and the pods hung low and heavy with seed on the trees. The faint smell of chocolate wafted from the plastic covered huts where seeds were laid out to dry before being roasted and mashed into chocolate paste. Prosperity for these Pentecostal Christians was not an issue of excess, but rather survival.

The economy of war in Colombia evokes a Pentecostal personhood that seeks legitimation and protection not from the idea of the state, but rather a collage of powers competing for recognition from the corporate guarantor. Pastor Miguel’s commitment to responsible bookkeeping, regular debt payments, and developed business plans are a central component for seeking out further development grants and securing good business models that can be replicated. Management of funds works through the management of souls, and good business, for Pastor Miguel, is also “God’s business.” Developing, economically and spiritually, is the weapon with which to wage peace in a context of war. A Deleuzian consideration of control societies within the Colombian context is helpful here, since sites of control are not even sites, per se (Deleuze 1992). They are not enclosed spaces. The power of civil war is put into operation as the power of the corporation is, without delineated form and shadowed interest, through formlessness and the force of speculation. Power is exercised through internally motivated moralities and the mere threat of external action. Indeed, it can be said, that these sites of control operate at an internal level, as well as an external level, on the edges of the seen and unseen.

Santiago is one of the first members of Garzal to have successfully brokered an individual agricultural loan from the *Banco Agrario*, the state-supported agrarian bank, since the community has worked their way out of collective debts to the bank. A few days prior to riding horses into the rural outback of Garzal, the research team from the *Universidad Nacional* had travelled from

Bogotá to Barrancabermeja, three hours up-river from Garzal, to meet with the community leaders, including Santiago, and with members of international accompaniment teams, the local United Nations attaché for human rights, and a local human rights defense group who led a workshop on best practices for collective security. Early warning systems with air horns and radios, regular visits from the international accompaniment teams, and financial security were all components of the self-defense strategies the community began developing in the workshop.

“If we can secure loans from the bank to improve our crops, we’re more secure because we’re less likely to leave our land. As soon as one of us leaves, we become weaker” Santiago stood up to declare. “We’re already moving out of the red with the bank, and they are considering collective loans for us again, after the last few years of ineligibility.” Political security and financial security were conflated in a construction of debt-worthiness as a means of defense. After defaulting on collective loans for a number of years, the agrarian collective that had organized with farmers from the community had responsibly been paying off loans. Angels and interest rates, it would seem, collude in the production of a secure community. The paradox and contestation within this knot of governmentality draws not only from aforementioned interventions, but also from Colombia’s paradoxical process of governance itself.

The political economy of war financialized and became increasingly individualized through the economic opening of 1991, characterized by the decentralization of financial control from the Central Bank (*Banco de la República*) to foreign banking institutions and the loosening of controls over foreign investments of Colombian money, as well as greater foreign direct investment moving into the country. This economic opening was accompanied by constitutional reform that re-wrote the economic policies of the country in line with the free market rationality of the post-Cold War machinations of the global economy and allowed drug money to be

laundered in ways that had been complicated in the previous decade through tight protectionist financial policy. The constitutional reform also formally recognized religious freedoms, de-linking the Colombian government from explicit ties to the Vatican. With Catholicism no longer the official, or only, religion of the state, a veritable deluge of non-Catholic Christian churches applied for charitable status and recognition by state institutions of their validity as places of religion. The economic and religious landscapes burst open to new forms of financing, new forms of economic growth, and naturally, new forms of violence.

The war has become the market as well as producer of markets in Colombia's political economy. What the following chapters offer is a detailed ethnographic account of the entrance of financialization into the Colombian market through a markedly Christian narrative of "becoming." Emergence is not simply the displacement of one structure of power by another. Financial emergence builds atop decades of neoliberalization in Colombia and the entrenchment of religious practice with political economy as a social fact, an ethnographically legible regime of practice at the level of the everyday. The layering of dominations in Colombia's financializing economy and simultaneously emerging nationhood, produces personhoods founded in a financialized subjectivity possible in the particular historical present that Colombia's war market secures. Financial security overlaps with political security, and the Christian imaginarium of new life, rebirth, and salvific functionality operates in a deployment of hope-narratives and aspirational practices of becoming.

Credit cards mobilize an accessible entrance into greater consumptive practices, while economic growth is touted as the foundation of Colombia's new beginning. As the economy grows, credit cards usher in a new dimension of power through disciplining the debt of an overzealous aspirational class of consumers in the form of predatory lending. Illusions of

prosperity coalesce with illusions of peace, and the nation buoyed by the optimism promised by greater individual purchasing power grasps tightly on to imaginings of the future. The current epoch of the Colombian war has been amplified by a political economy of violence, fuelled by the injection of narco-trafficking and war taxation, a growing industry of natural resource extraction, and ongoing struggles of land reform. The political economy of the Colombian armed conflict has been studied extensively (Richani 1997; Holmes, Gutierrez, and Curtin 2008; Rocha García 2000; Rettburg 2007). However, the entanglements between political economy and religious practice in Colombia have not been explored ethnographically, particularly ideas of credit and debt in the increasingly financialized context of an emerging Colombia.

## 1.11 The devil is still at work

To end this chapter and move on to the further animations of the entanglements between finance and Christianity, I end with this vignette in Pastor Miguel's house, in Garzal. Just days after the first *enfrentamiento* (confrontation) in the National University between the *encapuchados* and the police, myself and the research team travelled to Garzal. On the way, heading down the lazy Magdalena River where Pastor Miguel had explained that at one particularly terrible moment of violence, body parts were regularly seen floating in the thick brown water. Once again, I wondered to myself, "why am I writing about the economy?" This conversation with Arcadio served to reinforce the commitment to parsing out the relationship between the religious and political economy.

"You know that Shakira made a pact with the Devil, right?" Arcadio looked sidelong towards me. It was an unsurprisingly steamy night in Garzal, and the Pentecostal Christian community had just finished a three-hour long miracle service. Cavities had been inexplicably filled and cancers wondrously vomited onto the floor, all guided by the machinations of the

traveling evangelist preacher/miracle healer. The fan hanging from the high ceiling of Pastor Miguel's wood frame house—a common architectural form in Colombia's rural towns—lazily stirred the heavy air. Arcadio's eyes, struggling to support his heavy eyebrows, gazed intently and uncomfortably into mine when I didn't answer immediately.

“She made a pact with the Devil, and that's a fact.” A little surprised at the random comment, I asked, “How can you tell?” Arcadio was eager to explain, “Look at her” he pointed to the cracked television screen where Shakira was dancing in a Colgate advertisement, “you can tell from the way she dances and the lyrics to her songs. She even looks different than she did before. But mostly because of how rich she became. She moved to Miami. She's not Colombian anymore. She sold her soul.” I was intrigued. “Does everyone who becomes rich make a pact with the Devil?” Arcadio leaned forward, his eyebrows dripping sweat, his eyes intense. “Not everyone, but a lot of them. Probably most of them.” He smiled, satisfied, and leaned back. “Who else?” I prodded. “Well” he thought for a moment, “they say the guerrilla commanders also did. The guerrilla kidnapped a pastor once, and he said that every night witches would come to dance with the commanders disguised as beautiful women. They say Coca-Cola has also made a pact with the devil – they sacrifice a child every year. That's how they keep their profits so high.” Another community member, Aureliano, who had been distracted by Shakira's world-renowned hips, chimed in, “It's true. It's almost impossible to become a successful company without making a pact with the Devil.” I couldn't help but share with them the legend of Doctor Faustus, from my own childhood. “But that's just a story, right? I'm talking about real things that have really happened.” Arcadio crossed his arms high on his chest, and gave me a half-smile, pleased with his revelation to me. The Colgate advertisement was over, the electrical generator

had just run out of gas and we were plunged into hot darkness. Gentle wailing wafted into the house from the church next door where women were still being exorcised and healed.

While the idea of selling one's soul to the Devil in order to achieve fame and fortune or dancing the night away with witches are decidedly supernatural events, the violence and perversion that has accompanied wealth accumulation in Colombia is terrifyingly "real." Believing in witches or miraculously filled cavities or the Devil eating children that Coca-Cola sacrifices every year, exist on a continuum of believing. Michael Taussig suggests that the very concept of "devil" was an idea introduced in South America through the arrival of European colonizers, and has become a symbol of the proletariat spirit. "The Devil" Taussig says" is a mainstay of production or of increasing production, but this production is believed to be ultimately destructive of life" (Taussig 2010, p. 14). For these rural Colombians, whom I met many years after proletarianization of the Colombian peasantry was well established, the devil is now found in the detail of accumulation by dispossession, and not in the reception of wages for their labour. The problem for these Colombians is not the transition to wage labour and the accompanying shift to forms of capitalist labour relations. The problem for the Colombians of this small evangelical community in the Magdalena Medio region is the unjust accumulation of wealth through the violence that has accompanied Colombia's economic liberalization since the 1990s. The issue that Shakira, the guerrilla, Coca-Cola, and the many other wealthy land-owners and corporations named or unnamed by Aureliano and Arcadio, and the millions of Colombians who have been labeled the "victims" of the political violence present, is the corruption and violence associated with rapid wealth-accumulation. The uneven movement of capital, the extreme dimensions of class difference, and the concentration of land and, ergo, wealth in Colombia has been marked by the terror of named violences. Colombia's wars have been fought

along lines of political and social inequity, but in the last three decades the violence has taken on a markedly distinct economic tenor.

So, why write about economics, when the real problem in Colombia is the war? Because economics is what drives the war, and that is where the relevance of this dissertation comes to the fore. Colombia is one of the world's fastest growing emerging economies, an increasingly important site for foreign investment and over the last fifteen years, the phoenix of Latin America (according to the world's economists), rising from the ashes left after decades (some would argue centuries) of civil war. But just as Jose Buendía founded the dreamy city of mirrors, Macondo, a city doomed to repeat history and revel in the magical yet almost real, nothing is as it seems in Colombia. For in Colombia, "reality [consistently] surpasses fiction" as Arcadio with the heavy eyebrows clarified for me.

## *Taxi Cab Confessions, Part 2*

*“I’ve been feeling really low lately. Just...I don’t know. It’s just that I work so hard, and I never have enough money. My mom says I’m economically depressed.” The young taxi driver had been telling me about his family, his children who he wants to sacar adelante, or help succeed. It seemed, however, that he was never able to make ends fully meet. “I work, I work and I work some more. But I just can never save enough. You know what I mean, Profe?” He was dropping me off at the Universidad Nacional where I was running to teach a class on Marx and religion – the class system was on my mind. “I know what you mean” I responded. “The class system here in Colombia is hard to break out of.” He looked back at me, big, sad eyes. “Yah. Maybe my mom is right. Maybe I’m economically depressed. Economicamente deprimido. Have a nice day. God bless.” “Thank you” I responded, as I gently closed the taxi’s door on the Carrera 30.*



## Chapter 2

### Financializing the Soul

*On top of suffering from his destitution, the poor man suffers from having to make the debasing plea to the rich man for credit. With this completely ideal existence of money, man must counterfeit his own person - Karl Marx*

#### 2.1 Finance and the Soul

“Well, credit cards are for poor people, right?” Remedios commented as we went over her various credit card debts and bills. Less a question than a realization, Remedios looked to her list of payments. “Rich people don’t need credit cards” she huffed. “Or they use them because they want to, not because they have to.” We stood in the kitchen of her diner, at the southern edge of Bogotá. This small business made Remedios an entrepreneur, and as such eligible for various forms of private and public lines of credit: micro-credits, credit cards from commercial banks, loans from the *Women’s Bank*, and business credits from state-financing institutions. For months I had been regularly making the two-hour trip to visit Remedios, enjoy a heavy lunch, and spend the afternoon interviewing different women who passed through Remedios’ restaurant, her daughters, friends and neighbours. I would also usually peel potatoes, wash some dishes, and occasionally serve plates of food to busy bus drivers. One day, Remedios looked up from salting beef tongue, and made a sweeping motion with her arm. “Everything we’ve done, the restaurant, replacing the floor with tile, we’ve done everything with credit. Without credit, *no se hace nada*.

You can't do anything. *Y pues, claro. Con la ayuda de Dios.* Of course, with the help of God." She proudly placed a hand on her hip.

I asked why nothing is possible without credit and Remedios stated as a matter of fact, going back to the tongue: "Well, because saving is impossible. Saving money is for privileged people. The poor need credit. Instead of saving, you get a credit. With the credit you can do things, like fix your house, put a floor in, an indoor bathroom, plumbing." She then tied her reliance on credit to her belief in God: "Every time we take out a [new line of] credit, I say, we need to believe that God will accompany us. We need to trust in God that we'll be able to pay it off. *Mejor dicho*, rather, God helps me manage my debt." She paused, before adding: "You know it's impossible to live without debt." Remedios is a micro-entrepreneur who practices her Christianity through a financial economy. She is one of so many Colombian Christians I have met over the decade of research and experience in Colombia who laughed at the idea of saving. Saving, this act of privileged money management, is intimately tied to salvation as has been well documented since the time of Max Weber.<sup>24</sup> Saving money and saving the soul are central dimensions to the economy of souls, as will be further discussed in Chapter 6, but saving also

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<sup>24</sup> The model of Weber's Calvinist Protestants served to illustrate this play on words and concepts, of saving [money] and salvation [of the soul.] "When the limitation of consumption is combined with this release of acquisitive activity, the inevitable practical result is obvious: accumulation of capital through ascetic compulsion to save. The restraints which were imposed upon the consumption of wealth naturally served to increase it by making possible the productive investment of capital" Weber explains the manner in which saving money, through inventing capital, was a central dynamic of the ascetic Spirit of capitalism that he presents (Weber 1930, p. 116). This idea has been taken up by sociologists (Dodd 1994), anthropologists (Maurer 2015), and economists (Sheldon 2014) since Weber. Notably, the idea of salvation was picked up by Foucault who links the concept of salvation directly to the Christian religion, "The Church is a religion that thus lays claim to the daily government of men in their real life on the grounds of their salvation" (2007, p. 148). Saving money collectively, in banks, for example, was already discussed in Chapter 3, however, it is important to note that saving money has maintained its salvific character as a mode of exercising pastoral power, now deployed by the Central Bank.

holds a critical logic that is central to the salvific mission of microfinance. Borrowing and saving capacity, credit and its requirements, code morality onto the financial subject.<sup>25</sup>

Financial literacy programs hold this idea together. Many microfinance programs are brokered by Christian Non-Governmental Organizations, and indeed Christian NGOs were some of the first organizations to offer microfinance programs in Colombia. These faith-based NGOs are major players in what has become known throughout the Americas as “financial inclusion” and “financial education.” Opportunity International, for example, is based in Chicago and has been operating in Colombia since the 1970s, one of the very first microfinance operators. The multinational also funds Remedios’s “solidarity bank” micro-credit program. “Our mission” the company extols, “is to empower our clients to become self-sufficient through their God-given talents” (Opportunity International).

The ultimate aim for both Opportunity International, the Christian NGO, and the clients, is prosperity. For Remedios, she wants to open another restaurant after she replaces her dirt floor with ceramic tile, and see her children through school. For the NGOs, prosperity takes place at a different scale. “We provide” Opportunity International explains, “stable financial systems as a way to reduce unemployment, social unrest, and violence in [Colombia].” Opportunity International is not alone in this microfinance industry, as the vanguard of Christian development. According to Ananya Roy, some of the most important and large

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<sup>25</sup> Here I am making reference to Marx’s discussion of the creditor/borrower relationship in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, as well as referenced in the *Grundrisse*, the foregrounding of what would become *Capital*. Marx says: “The contrast between the capitalist and the laborer—the big and small capitalist—becomes even greater as credit is given only to the one who already has and is a new chance for accumulation of the wealthy, or as the poor person sees his entire existence confirmed or denied, and completely dependent upon the accidental caprice and judgment of the wealthy man” (Marx 1994, p. 45). While it would seem that the entire microfinance enterprise would agree with this statement, and promotes its efforts as making credit accessible to those who were previously excluded, it remains to be seen if microcredit really does alleviate poverty in the overwhelming way that it is purported to. Also, It would seem that credit still determines the “entre existence” of the poor.

microfinance programs in the world are run by Christian organizations (Roy 2011, p. 41).<sup>26</sup> These organizations work in the crosshairs of Christian ethics and finance, and reconcile the structural causes of poverty with the spiritual lack that finance can resolve. As one Christian microfinance champion Brian Fikkert writes: “Both the scriptures and the empirical evidence indicate that oppression of the poor is often a factor in their poverty. It takes the power of Jesus Christ over sin...to remove the oppressor. His power is the answer, and the poor need to cling to this hope” (Fikkert 2003, p. 9). While Roy emphasizes the moral caution with which the Christians she met with approached microfinance, organizations like Opportunity International proudly advertise their Christian values as central to an alternative microfinance program that charges lower rates of interest, and instills values in clients that “transform lives” through helping them achieve prosperity.

“Prosperity” Remedios waxed, “I’m working towards that. That’s what all the solidarity bank meetings tell us we can achieve. And the credits are necessary for prosperity! How would I do any of this without credit?” The prosperity that Remedios aspires to is similar, but distinct, from the more visible Prosperity Gospels that loudly proclaim grandiose material abundance as a sign of God’s favour. This is not the “Name it and Claim it purpose driven life” preached by the Osteen’s (Bielo 2007; Mitchem 2007) or Tammy Faye Bakker’s “Praise the Lord” Club (Barhart 1988). It’s not even the prosperity carefully detailed in such seminal studies as Kate Bowler’s *Blessed*, already discussed in the previous chapter, or the close relation between American consumerism and religion found in Kathryn Lofton’s *Oprah*. Nor is Remedios’ prosperity exactly the same as how Marla Frederick carefully outlines the prosperity thinking, rooted in Benny Hinn and Creflo Dollar, of her subjects in *Between Sundays* (Friedrich 2003). The prosperity to

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<sup>26</sup> These organizations include Food for the Hungry International, World Concern, World Relief, World Vision International, KIVA, and MEDA.

which Remedios aspires does not reside in the ostentatious but rather in the cold, hard fact of survival. Remedios's prosperity relies on credit and it is disciplined by debt.

This chapter centers on debt and the Christianity it evokes. Of particular interest in this chapter is how financial inclusion and financial education, mediated through Christian micro-credit organizations, financialize the soul. By financialize the soul, I refer to all those ostensibly secular techniques of debt management that draw on evangelical assumptions and imperatives, such as punctuality, double entry-bookkeeping, and moral accountability, to render men and women, like Remedios, prosperous Christians. I am particularly interested in the relation between accounting and redemption that Arjun Appadurai, among others, proposed already in 2011, and again in his most recent book, *Banking on Words* (Appadurai 2016). Calculation and, more importantly, accounting are central in Weber's development of the concept of "Spirit of Capitalism."

Already in 1902, Werner Sombart had established that double-entry bookkeeping is a central component to the development of capitalism. Sombart wrote, "capitalism and double-entry bookkeeping are absolutely indissociable; their relationship to each other is that of form to content" (Sombart 1992, p. 30). It was, however, Max Weber who furthered the idea that it is the Calvinist entrepreneur whose methodicality (rather than risk-taking) provides the grounds upon which capitalist profit-making is secured (Appadurai 2016). What is central to the current discussion, however, is the accounting for risk, through accounting for the self, that Christian microfinance, and indeed, prosperity as survival promotes. Remedios, a card-carrying Christian par excellence whose soul is the target of finance, illustrates this well.

To explore this terrain is to move past the ideals of prosperity animated by flamboyant US Evangelists, or essentializations of African and Latino charismatic Christianities. An attention to the financialization of the soul, in fact, frames prosperity hemispherically, connecting Citibank to Bogotá's poor *barrios*, the Master Card Foundation to Medellín's *comunas*, and even the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to the empanadas that Remedios sells for 75 cents. All three of these transnational corporations are deep into the microfinance business.<sup>27</sup> At the edges of Bogotá's sprawling metropolis credit ties Remedios' endurance to the transnational promise of financial education, to the possibility of precarious prosperity in a time of violent austerity.<sup>28</sup> According to Elizabeth Povinelli, Foucault's ethical subject is one that is "in a state of constant ethical reflection and practice in relation to her own ethical becoming" (Povinelli 2012: 456). This is central to the disciplinary, and ethical, work that microfinance does on Remedios' soul.

## 2.2 Finance and Colombia's Becoming

Most analysts of the Colombian armed conflict, and the subsequent impairment of Colombia's economic development, agree that the prolongation of the war has been the confluence of a multifaceted entanglement of drugs, U.S. military intervention, political exclusion, territorial disputes for control over land, and deep-seated socio-economic inequality (more on this in

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<sup>27</sup> CitiBank Foundation runs an "Inclusive Finance" branch that funds the Center for Financial Inclusion, Accion International, and is centrally involved in the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor, house at the World Bank. MasterCard Foundation is one of the leading funders of financial inclusion and microfinance around the world. The MasterCard Foundation has a microfinance scholarship program that funds high-school and university education in microfinance for "academically talented young people" who are committed to giving back to their community. These scholars are funded in their training at programs in Canada, the United States, Germany, and Kenya. MasterCard Foundation also dedicates millions of dollars to microfinance organizations around the world every year. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is one of the biggest supporters of microfinance, and advertise that it is possible to "Figh Poverty, profitably." The Gates Foundation dedicates \$700,000 to *research* the impact of microfinance, on top of the almost thirty million dollars it already has dedicated to microfinance, together with UNCDF (UNCDF 2013).

<sup>28</sup> I consciously employ the idea of "endurance" here, following the work of Elizabeth A. Povinelli who seeks to understand what happens, "After Foucault"? (Povinelli 2012). For Povinelli, who engages with Foucault's lectures at the College de France, but instead of *Birth of Biopolitics*, and *Security, Territory, Population*, these lectures emphasized in the current study, Povinelli finds endurance in late liberalism.

Chapter 1). Many of those same analysts also agree that economic salvation is *the* best response to it all.<sup>29</sup>

The context for this claim begins in the 1990s, when Colombia's public debt was re-financed, under tutelage of US economic advisors and multilateral banks—many of which are now shareholders in micro-credit institutions like Opportunity International.<sup>30</sup> Colombia's public debt had relied on foreign loans for financing from the post-Second World War establishment of Bretton Woods, the International Monetary Fund, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (what would later become the World Bank). In the 1990s, refinancing worked through the deregulation of banks and crediting agencies, trade liberalization, and the privatization of state-run institutions (e.g., healthcare and education; see Chapter 3).

This economic opening set the stage for the influx of both micro and macro credit that is now flooding the economy. Refinancing transferred public debt to the shoulders of individual debtors, with greater access to credit cards, micro-credits, and new forms of financial inclusion. The result has been an increase of nearly 400% in consumer debt (Superintendencia Financiera 2012). In the booming micro-credit industry, more than a third of micro-credit recipients find themselves “under water” and a quarter of micro-credit users access more than three different micro-credit products (Portafolio 2015).

The prosperity preached by the microcredit industry, and the promise of self-sufficiency through self-employment, rides alongside the exhortation to become “banked.” Forty-seven

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<sup>29</sup> For more on this body of scholarship, see Milanovic 2000; Piazza 2006; Poveda 2011; Richani 2013.

<sup>30</sup> The corporate sponsors of Opportunity International include LazBoy, Credit Suisse, John Deere, Caterpillar, MasterCard Foundation, MetLife Foundation, Visa, Bancoldex, Citi Foundation, Google Inc., Microsoft, USAID among others.

percent of Colombians still do not have active bank accounts, which is read by many investors not so much as a problem but rather as an opportunity (Asobancaria 2014). More bank accounts mean more accounting, which mean more clients accessing credit, which translates into more profit.

The first credit card arrived to Colombia in 1968, when the Bank of America entered negotiations with Colombian *Banco de Bogotá*. This was four years after the establishment of the FARC, and in the midst of one of the more undemocratic moments of Colombia's history, under the rule of the National Front. It was only in 1984, however, in the heyday of Pablo Escobar's Cocaine Empire, that the first credit card manual imprinter was introduced. Visa installed its first machine in an upper-scale restaurant in the north end of Bogotá. These first credit card payments were phoned in to a 30-person team of operators who would write out the authorization request by hand, send it to the bank, and then the bank would send the request to the United States where the payment would be authorized. This process usually took an average of 5 days. Today, this same process takes about five seconds (Credibanco 2015).

### 2.3 Clients not charity cases

Opportunity International, the NGO that floats Remedios' micro-credit, brokers this transition to bankedness with financial education. "Our clients are partners, not charity cases" explains Opportunity International on their website. The organization's advisory board is an impressive collection of CEOs and scholars, including Luella Chavez D'Angelo, president of the Western Union Foundation that finances programs in microfinance and financial inclusion. Opportunity continues: "We walk and work with the world's marginalized women and men. They can build a business. They can provide for their family. They can lead. And we empower them by investing in the God-given talents of each of our clients. In fact, we see many of our clients like the



Proverbs 31 woman.” The Proverbs 31 woman, or the “virtuous woman” is the same woman promoted in Fernanda’s MCI cell group meetings, and championed by the Christian NGO that manages the Opportunity International program in southern Bogotá (See Chapter 4 for a full transcription of this text).

Opportunity International offers 400 different modules for financial education. Its local “loan officers” use “trust groups” in ways that make this enterprise as much a moral intervention as an economic practice. These efforts teach individuals about bank accounts, business planning, and practices of saving. They also emphasize good hygiene, food sanitation, self-esteem, and leadership skills. The trust groups meet once a week, after roll call there is a workshop on one of the aforementioned themes. In the case of Remedios, her trust group met every week at a 7AM meeting. In some trust groups, absentee members must pay a fine for missing a meeting. What is noteworthy here is the work on the self that necessarily accompanies the financial education and business training. This assemblage of interior (re)formation and proper bodily comportment is tied to finance. And this is why, and how, I understand this entire effort at financial literacy, education, and even (for some brazen microfinance institutions) financial citizenship an exercise in financializing the soul. There is a Christian morality to Colombia’s financialized economy, one that rests on several leaps of faith. Not the least of them is going into debt in order to grasp at ephemeral prosperity. The challenge of financial education programming, dealt through Christian micro-crediting organizations, lies in coding the moral with the economic.

Financialization, at its broadest, refers to multi-faceted process of financial institutions, financial actors, and financial motives increasingly driving economies, as opposed to “real economic production.” Financialization has become the animating force in processes of accumulation. Importantly, financialization buoyed with the injection of financial products, such

as credit cards, microcredits and microinsurance, train an economic habitus in a new ethics of personhood, a new set of disciplinary technologies of control over the self. Financialization, as I proposed in the introduction to this study, should be understood as a regime of control, a disciplinary program that trains body and soul to the tune of a prosperity that is little more than succeeding at surviving the everyday of late capitalist formations of austerity.

Randy Martin, invoking both Michel Foucault and Max Weber, states, “financialization promises a way to develop the self, when even the noblest of professions cannot emit a call that one can answer with a lifetime. It offers a highly elastic mode of self-mastery that channels doubt over uncertain identity into fruitful action” (Martin 2002, p. 9). The apparent altruism woven into micro-finance has much to do with the modern conception of the soul. Financialization moves the disciplining technologies of debt, from debtor’s prison and punishment on the body, to the interiorized site of self-control and constant supervision from Christian “loan officers” “trust groups” and, naturally, God. There is a reason that Gilles Deleuze announced some twenty years ago that: “Man is no longer man confined, but man in debt” (Deleuze 1992, p. 5).

These are all the techniques of financializing capitalism, and the shift from the public body to the private soul is notable—especially in Colombia where the grammar of death is often public and where the body remains a site of brutal discipline. Remedios’ soul is being reformed through the practices imposed on her by Opportunity International, and all other financialized forms of regulation: from the disciplinary to the testimonial. Remedios must become the Chief Financial Officer of her own self-- not just to succeed but rather to survive. One poignant example of this is the weekly 7AM meeting of Remedios’ solidarity bank.

## 2.4 Solidarity Banks

Usme sits at the edges of Bogotá, where the pavement turns to dirt road, and houses perch on the sides of the mountain. Part urban sprawl, littered with rural remnants, the people of Usme are settled squatters. Many arrived recently after fleeing violence in the countryside. And many of those who were able have left for *el norte* where they send *remesas* to help their families in Usme. Colombia receives more remittances than any other South American country, and last year, remittances in the region of Latin America hit an all-time high.

Doña Gloria's house was up a steep, muddy incline, where she often stood at the stoop of her little yard. Buses drop inner-city dwellers off at the last stop, a 15-minute walk away. Gloria's yard was enclosed with chicken wire, to protect her fresh herbs and onion bulbs from the chickens as well as the goats and the occasional cow that wanders through. Gloria nonetheless always proudly displayed the *huerta urbana* (urban garden) she fastidiously cared for.

Remedios strode into Gloria's living room, a little late, on this particular morning. Still smelling of cinnamon-scented floor wax, Gloria's ceramic tiles shone. There were 11 adults at the meeting that cool morning, and 3 small children, too small for school. They sat tiredly on their mother's laps, sucking on pieces of bread dipped in hot chocolate. The mountain breezes chilled most of us to the bone, and everyone was grateful for the warm drinks.

Gloria and her daughter served *panela* in plastic mugs. The "loan officer" Floralba, wore her vest with its NGO emblem, and sat in the corner until 7:10. When the clock struck, she announced: "Ok, everyone. Remember what I told you about punctuality?" She chided everyone around the circle, "It takes me an hour to get here. I leave my house at 5:30 in order to be on time. I expect the same courtesy from you. One of the traits of a successful business owner

is arriving to meetings on time.” She looked frustrated: “We go over this every meeting!” She then smiled to offset the *regañó* (scolding) “Now, let’s begin with prayer. Who would like to lead?” Doña Esperanza raises her hand. Everyone bows their head, although glances are shared and snickers are suppressed. Doña Esperanza always wanted to pray:

“*Papito Dios*, thank you for this morning. Thank you for the rain last night. Thank you for [NGO] and *Floralba* who comes all the way here to help us be better business owners. Thank you for the *gringa* who is here to hear us and tell our stories. Help us learn today the lessons *Blanquita* brought, and how we can become better people and businesses. I want to especially pray for Don Hector, who can’t be here today because he is sick. I pray for his *empanada* business. I pray he gets well soon, because he can’t work when he is sick. *A tu Gloria, Amen.*”

The NGO worker then took out her list and begins roll call. Everyone was asked how their week had gone, and asked to give a short report on their business. This was often an awkward moment, as some members of the group confess to not breaking even in the week. Sales were down for Alfonso, the shoe-maker. A conversation about the importation of cheap footwear because of the recently signed free trade agreement with the United States unraveled. “Its going to put us all out of business!” Alfonso moans. Doña Esperanza is a seamstress who makes baby-clothes and bath robes agrees. “My sales are down too – people are going to the malls to shop for clothes. I can’t make clothes that cheaply. God help us all.” There were murmurs of agreement. When one member is unable to pay their weekly debt, the entire group becomes responsible for that payment. This is the central logic of the “solidarity bank.”

Floralba was sympathetic, but convinced that micro-businesses, even in the face of cheap US imports, will continue to be useful. “If you remain faithful in God, and responsible in your

payments, your business will succeed. Don't forget, you are your own bosses! You can't be fired! If your business is failing, you can change things to compete. If you make changes, your future reality could be much better than your current reality. Now, let's look at our lesson for today. Budgeting.”

Everyone took out their notebooks, and was able to show that they had dutifully recorded their expenses and revenues. Except for Remedios. She had forgotten her notebook. “That's the second time this month, Remedios.” The NGO worker nagged. Remedios was annoyed. “Its not my fault! One of the *empleadas* put it somewhere, and now she can't remember where it is.”

“Just make sure you are making a note of all the money that comes in and go out. You know you need to hand in a financial report at the end of this cycle.” The worker referred to the fact that each group micro-credit loan was to be paid back within a 6-month cycle. At the end of the cycles, all the group members needed to show their financials, demonstrate liquidity, and have paid back the full amount – with interest. Part of the rational of micro-credit is the assumed lower interest rates on loans. Looking a little deeper, however, micro-credit agencies generally charge only slightly lower interest rates than commercial banks.

## 2.5 Profiting off the bottom billion

The profits to be made off the bottom billion are difficult to resist. Even Muhammad Yunus' Grameen Banks (the so-called “banks for the poor”) have become a profit-turning industry. Indeed, microfinance today is a multibillion dollar industry (Roy 2010). Randy Martin links the localizing process of microcredit to offsetting transnational risk, through processes of financializing the poor. “Microcredit speaks to the economics of [multi-lateral banks' and microfinance institutions'] embrace of “localization”—as “Sharing responsibility for raising

revenue”—as a way forward” (Martin 2002, p. 169) The deterritorialization of finance is demonstrated well through this localization of financializing the poor. Instead of tacking blame or cause for failure to the state or bank, the “peer pressure” model puts the responsibility for entrepreneurial success squarely on the shoulders of those so effectively excluded in all other realms, social and political.

Martin continues: “microfinance is dangled before the global poor so that they might identify themselves as entrepreneurs and not as laborers or part of a surplus population. Credit is easier to distribute than land, but it has a delocalizing aspect...this organizes into a chain of command that leads to their door as it applies self-management to cordon off the spread of needs for development” (Martin 2002, p. 171). What Martin offers here is a critique of microfinance, explaining how the program of microfinance pulls the poor into structures of chimeric proportion, in which small, entrepreneurial business efforts relieve the state of responsibility for public welfare as poverty becomes self-inflicted and a question of business acumen, as opposed to a structural problematic.

However, Remedios is no fool, and finds the solidarity bank meetings tedious. As we left the meeting, and walked towards her restaurant she started up: “What we are always told” Remedios complained, “is that we need more discipline. Discipline? I get up at 4:30AM every day, work until 7PM, and I go to all the meetings. I even have to miss work to go to those meetings. And I’m always on time with my payments. I just have to believe in my own self, I suppose.” Remedios conflated her management of the self with the potential of her entrepreneurial spirit. This stubborn commitment to a different future for herself, and her children, drives her work ethic—along with helping putting up with the weekly meetings.

“I began this business with a credit of 2 million pesos” Remedios told me in one of our first meetings at her restaurant. “You have to go into debt in order to have the things you want. To be able to make money, you need to go into debt. If you don’t take the risk, you never gain anything. *Dios te acompañe en el riesgo*. God accompanies risk. Yes, prosperity requires risk. But I believe. *Tengo fe*.”

In the restaurant, the practices of financial education were legible. Every time a customer paid, Remedios dutifully pulled out her tattered and grease stained notebook that sat behind that counter. The income was noted. Every time a neighbour, sister, one of her daughters, or stranger, came in asking for money, she took out the book again, and flipped to a back page. She made a note of who owed her money. The confessional thrust of money coming in and going out reflects, in part, the Christian morality deeply embedded in careful bookkeeping. Perhaps more to the ethnographic point, however, is the genealogical legacy of capitalist rationality that Max Weber captured in determining double entry bookkeeping as one of the necessary historical interventions that allowed for an ideal Protestant type.

“We have to show the workers (from the NGO) that we are doing this. We get in trouble if we don’t” Remedios flapped the book. Although a useful business practice, it created an anxiety in her, and she would sometimes forget to write a sale down, or a few coins passed to a passerby. Then, at the end of the day, she would pull out the notebook, with her calculator, and struggle to find out why the books didn’t balance. The actions here might not read legibly as “Christian” to some. However, the affect that the moral imperative of balanced books cultivates certainly is.

“I need to show that I’m balancing my budgets; this is how they decide to give us another loan” she explained, “we have to go the meetings on time, pay on time, plus this. This is how we show we’re trustworthy.” Remedios needed to know her revenues and expenses as well as she needed to know herself. And prove it.

The solidarity bank operates according to so-called “trust groups.” These groups are under surveillance from the NGO workers, and co-debtors. If one person in the group does not pay their weekly debt, the others must pay in that person’s stead. While Opportunity and the local NGO name this strategy as “building social capital” Remedios often gets frustrated. “*Fulana* didn’t pay again. I had to pay for her this week. Again! I call her and she doesn’t respond. I’m so tired of this. But if I don’t pay, well, I’m her *fiadora*. I’ll be put into *Datacredito*.” Remedios is *Fulana’s* guarantor. If *Fulana* doesn’t pay, Remedios gets stuck with the bill. And if Remedios doesn’t pay, her name will be entered into the national debtor’s list, *Datacredito*—Colombia’s credit reporting agencies.

The trust groups function, supposedly, as an equalizing metric of accountability. More of a threat, however, is the *Datacredito* list, Colombia’s debtor’s list. Once on this list, individuals are unable of even purchasing a cell phone, let alone access to any other credit. The anxiety at being placed on the list made Remedios shake with anger and frustration as she complained about needing to pay double at the solidarity bank meeting that week. “Some solidarity! You know why I go to the big banks for other credits? It’s not only that I need more money, but I don’t have to be responsible for anyone else, and I don’t need to go to a meeting every week.” Then she paused, “but if it weren’t for [the NGO], I would never have been able to get the other credits. And we would still be living with a dirt floor.”



This confession tacked Remedios' simple desires to a reliance on credit. The control exercised upon her from the Christian NGO includes exhortations to save, working hard and often, and the punctual payment of debts. The pressure from her peers in the "solidarity group" works as a simultaneous "peer pressure"—perhaps a more apt description would be the democratization of the panopticon to use Mariana Valverde's words (Valverde 2008)—that everyone in the group places on each other. Together these work to construct an entrepreneurial interiority that places Remedios into the crosshairs of sub-prime lending to the "bottom billion." And, it should be noted, bottom-billion women, grouped into the homogenous categories of responsible home-makers who will be responsible creditors in the service of gendered and racialized economic stereotypes. Women, and most prominently women of colour, now make up upwards of almost 90% of micro-credit recipients (Bateman 2011).

Remedios explained to me what she used the credit cards for. "Groceries, tuition for my grandson, clothing for my four other children, uniforms" along with the materials for the running of the restaurant and the loans she had taken out to finish her house, buy a separate bed for all her 6 children, and have a proper kitchen, with running water. Remedios certainly does not spend extravagantly, and the risks of taking on greater debt is linked to her conviction that not only will God accompany her risky credits, but that only through debt will she prosper. The spirit of financialization celebrates prosperity, in the midst of fiscal austerity; despite the social limits to future visions of finance.

Yet, as will be illustrated throughout the following chapters, credit traffics in a prosperous future. Austerity has forced the hand of survival. Where an already weak system of social security has been replaced by private insurance policies, where housing is not guaranteed but bank loans for house renovations and purchase are ubiquitous, when education is no longer a right, but

credit can be used to pay for tuition, financialization has turned the conditions of austerity into the ideals of prosperity. Remedios has become a permanent borrower, and a poster child of the faithfully indebted. Her financial education bends her thoughts and actions to the “correct” behavior of moral economic activity. Insofar as she works to diversify her portfolio, seeking out loans from other institutions and other banks, Remedios’ debt accrues. And she puts to work her financialized soul.

## 2.6 Accounting for the Self

Remedios has been a micro-credit recipient for a decade. Her entrepreneurial activity as much as the running of her restaurant has confessional practices of weekly business updates, bookkeeping accountability, and punctual payment. The pastoral role of the NGO worker is the filter of the transnational pastoral power exercised by Opportunity International, its shareholder the Inter-American Development Bank, and the akin corporations, such as MasterCard Foundation, that demand obedience to a strict economic moral code remnant of the “in-depth-Christianization” of the modern era (Foucault 2010). Most important are the technologies of accountability that train and re-train Remedios’ soul. Because financializing the poor, in late capitalism, is accompanied by a set of accountability mechanisms through which the indebted are also held to account. This is the Christian practice that Foucault explained as the technology of the self capable of transforming the self. And self-transformation is the ostensible root of financial capitalism.

Money management also assumes an accountability to God. Remedios has been forced into the frame of the “virtuous woman” and these surveillance measures work to make sure she stays one. Financializing the poor, at least in Colombia, is accompanied by a set of accountability mechanisms through which the indebted are also held to account. Some are easier to

accommodate than others. Photocopies of identification cards, birth certificates for children, marriage certificates for spouses, references, utility bills—bureaucratic governmentality functions through photocopies in Colombia.

More consuming, however, is the work of accounting for the self, while being accountable to webs of institutions that the financialized poor are indebted to. Mandatory home visits from bank-employed social workers are required by some micro-finance institutions. A tour of the micro-business is generally compulsory for most micro-credit organizations. The weekly “solidarity group” meetings with the NGO are another form of accounting. And Remedios was preparing for monthly meetings with loan officers from Bancoldex now having just landed another business loan. This was the latest crediting agency that she was beholden to. These sites and strategies of accountability are yet another way to understand the soul, and its financialization. Interiority is cultivated not only through self-motivated practices and technologies of selfhood, but also through the multiplicity of gazes, at multiple scales. Indeed, giving an account of oneself, to use Judith Butler’s phrase, works upon the soul in new ways through deterritorialized finance across the Americas (Butler 2005).

The different loans and micro-credit programs supported the restaurant. Yet, as Remedios explained to me how she managed her different lines of credit, it became evident that the *very act of applying for a credit was an entrepreneurial practice in itself*. Remedios is a micro-entrepreneur. Her business was the restaurant. But Remedios was regularly seeking out new credits, different forms of financing, and rallying herself to be trustworthy and believable as a woman and as a business owner.

Indeed, Remedios' entrepreneurial practice increasingly hedged in the *very activity of accounting for her moral worth*. The time and resources that she invests into becoming a financially "governable subject" (Rose 1999), renders her "truthful" in this discourse of conduct and relation of power. For all of her resistance to it, Remedios is constantly monitoring herself and in so doing, working to make herself recognizable to God and, in different ways, to the bank. The kind of Christianity that Remedios puts to work balances her consciousness and her actions, rendering her capacity to survive with her ability to borrow. The prosperity Remedios aspires to is regulated and formulated in accordance with the Christian values of transparency, honesty, and worthiness she is beholden to by Opportunity, Bancoldex, and all the rest. Remedios herself as debtor has become the medium of exchange in a lived economy. Her soul the site of production. Her very being the margin of profit.

On one of my last visits to her restaurant, Remedios recited her litany of debts to me. "I pay four million pesos in debt payments every month" she sounded almost surprised at the sum, as though she had never before added up all of her debts. "There's the weekly payments for the micro-credit program, then there's the Woman's Bank payments, the MasterCard, the Visa, the Diner's, and the new loan we have from the bank." She shook her head, furious with poverty and the situation she was in. It all was so degrading and Remedios was indignant. "All of these organizations come here saying they are here to help us. To give us credit to improve our lives. Ha. They charge such high interest; I can never pay it all back." The small difference in the rates of interest charged by micro lenders, compared to commercial banks, is initially insignificant. Millions of times over, however, with a monopoly on the bottom billion, the percentage points add up. The behavior of the indebted becomes more predictable, and cordoned off comfortably. Remedios' astute negotiations of herself are central to her prosperous ideals—albeit ideals of

surviving one more day. And then life caught up with her. Remedios fell ill, to the point of needing to sell her restaurant, because she was unable to work, and unable to pay the medical fees.

The commercialization of Colombia's health system ties intimately to the processes of financialization that cover up the social gaps gouged by austerity measures and colonial legacies of exclusion. U.S. medical insurers now make up a good number of the service providers in Colombia, and money transfer institutions, like Western Union, mediate migrant subjectivities and the webs of surveillance that regulate bodies and souls outside of formal structures of documentation.

Remedios does not have a sister, or an aunt, who could send her a lifeline through Western Union when she got sick, to keep her restaurant afloat, or pay some off some of the debts. She is now selling *empanadas* out of her unfinished house, with her husband, and the future is unclear. The story is unfinished. When Remedios states that credit is for the poor, she evokes the Christian context of the Americas in all its complexity. Her lived religion reflects her lived economy, and as I consider the messy contours of religious practice framed hemispherically, from Bogotá to Boston, and entangled with political economies, a new scope of what it means to be prosperous emerges. A strategy for survival in the shadows of modernity—or perhaps more accurately, surviving in the very heart of the late modern condition of indebtedness.

## 2.7 Managing Money, Managing the Soul

Managing money is a question of virtue. Money management practices are precisely what make an individual “debt-worthy” – a new space of value can then be occupied. When an individual can go into debt, she begins to exist; she is on the grid. And that is what gives her value, worth.

As Nietzsche suggested, “The debtor, in order to inspire confidence that the promise of repayment will be honored, in order to give a guarantee of the solemnity and sanctity of his promise, and in order to etch the duty and obligation of repayment into his conscience, pawns something to the creditor by means of the contract in case he does not pay, something that he still “possesses” and controls, for example, his body, or his wife, or his freedom, or his life (or, in certain religious circumstances, even his after-life, the salvation of his soul, finally, even his peace in the grave...)” (Nietzsche [1887] 1989, p. 64). Debt implies a process of subjectivation that Nietzsche named “labor of man on himself” in a form of “self-torture.”

Capitalism has designed the person capable of promising, of attempting, to control the future. Man and woman is a calculating animal but the calculation, according to Lazzarato, and Deleuze and Guattari, is not in exchange of labour but in debt (Lazzarato 2011). The risks assumed in a creditor-debtor relationship fall upon the individual debtor, and the externalized risks of the State and corporations are subsumed into individual responsibility. The vanguard of neoliberalism—financial capitalism—holds a firm logic of internalized guilt and responsibility. The cross to bear is the possibility that the endless potential promised through credit will not be realized. This, of course, can be traced to nothing other than an individual’s own lack of motivation, entrepreneurial spirit, and dedication. There is no broader structure, financial capitalism tells us, that affects a person’s capacity for wealth accumulation and prosperity. “Credit” Marx tells us in an early essay, “is the economic judgment on the morality of man” (Marx 1975, p. 32). He continues, “human individuality, human morality itself, has become both an object of commerce and the material in which money exists” (Marx 1975, p. 32). Human beings in a process of financialized capitalism that is hinged on the creditor-debtor relationship, find themselves to be the very medium of exchange.

The commodification of belief, then, has become the commodification of the self. It is the action in Prosperity Christianity that reconfigures a believing practice into an exploitative social relation, based on credit. In the essay, “Comments on James Mill” found in Marx’s *Economic and Political Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx further elucidates the believing component of the spirit of money: “Christ *represents* originally: 1) men before God; 2) God for men; 3) men to man. Similarly, *money* represents originally, in accordance with the idea of money: 1) private property for private property; 2) society for private property; 3) private property for society. But Christ is *alienated* God and alienated *man*. God has value only insofar as he represents Christ, and man has value only insofar as he represents Christ. It is the same with money” (Marx and Engels 1975, p. 5). The alienation that Marx understood as central to capitalist modes of production, in which the labourer is distanced from her product, and profit is further estranged from the working class, is in this quote painted as a central feature of Christianity and Capitalism in collusion. Money and Christ are both originally representations of direct relations. The key to understanding these relations in the light of the dialectical program of Marx, however, is to recognize the emphasis placed on the idea of “representation” and that while Christ *represents* direct relations, the structure of the governing church have corrupted this relation, just as in relations of exchange, and Christ alienates as money does. The importance of the second degree of alienation through finance money is central to the concept of the social that the Garzal community dwells within.

The alienation, the reification of the social, is articulated by Santiago, my companion in Garzal, when he speaks of the two pillars of social cohesion and safety, in a profoundly unstable political context: the angels will protect us, and loans will allow us to prosper and improve our agricultural practices. The logic is obvious yet devastatingly telling. The conviction that an alienated Christ mediates for a distant God is as effective as a bank loan. This is not a prosperity

theology that seeks excess, but quite differently a minimum: survival. Can it not be, then, named prosperity?

## 2.8 From cash to credit: cashless societies

When I discovered that some members of the community in Garzal were opening bank accounts, and that some had qualified for credit cards, I was curious as to their motivations. Santiago, one of the first in the community to have both a chequing account and a credit card, explained to me how many people in the community saved money. “*Claro que sí*, of course people bury money. They keep money under their mattresses. They invest their money in livestock or land. The banks are too far away, and too expensive.” The nearest municipality with a bank was about three hours away. “If we want credits from the bank, we need to open an account. When women qualify for *Familias en Acción*, they have to open a bank account. But a lot of people don’t trust the bank. Opening an account usually means we lose money. They charge for everything—they even charge for checking how much money we have! It’s safer to bury the money.”

*Familias en Acción* is a governmental subsidy program for women who are heads of households, primarily in rural Colombia. The women receive a small subsidy every month, depending on how many children are in their care and what other levels of income are accessible (cash crops, etc.). I interviewed the director of the governmental social bank, *Banca de las Oportunidades*, which coordinates the program, on three separate occasions. Beginning in 2012, the *Familias en Acción* program had begun to make direct deposits into bank accounts. The director explained to me the ways the money used to be dispersed:

We would go into the local municipal centers, and women would come from communities all around. Some had to travel for hours. They lined up in the central plaza, and we set up a table. We had a sack of cash, and a list of names. The men would be waiting around, many of them drinking because it was payday. Children ran all around. It was actually kind of celebratory. The women waited in line for hours, watch one coming up individually, giving their



identification card, and receiving their stack of cash. It was incredibly cumbersome. The direct deposit allows the women more control over their money, and much less hassle. But it has not been easy to educate the women in how to use a bank.<sup>31</sup>

He explained to me the difficulty in convincing the women to open bank accounts, for similar reasons Santiago explained. “The women would make photocopies of their cards, and present them to the tellers. They would laminate their debit cards and try to use them. The women who lived in the *vereda* would give their cards to the one woman going to town to shop or sell vegetables in the market, and tell her how much money they wanted her to take out for them. They don’t realize that every time they check their balance, the bank charges them. These are the problems we’ve encountered. It has not been easy.”

When I interviewed Doña Lizette in El Garzal, about her experience with the *Familias* program, she was candid: “The banks rob us. But I can’t get the money any other way.” While the money from *Familias* is not credit, the process of “banking” the population in Garzal certainly falls within the purview of financialization. The insight here is that opening a bank account in Colombia is equivalent to owing the bank money—immediately. The further insight is that financialized capitalism, as any economic system, does not rely first on exchange, but rather on inequality (Lazzarato 2011). Economy and society are coordinated through power differentials, not systems of exchange, as economists would purport. This insight was first developed by Marx, and then developed more carefully by Gilles Deleuze. This of course does not imply that exchange does not exist. It does. However, the insight is that exchange does not come first, and does not function according to forms of equality, rather imbalance and difference are the driving logics.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview, Gustavo Obregon, *Banca de las Oportunidades*, March 2013.

Lazzarato illuminates the relation between credit, debt, and Christianity, pointing out that where finance capitalism intersects with Christianity is at the point of the infinite (Lazzarato 2011, p. 52). The endless potential and ever-possible future is a character of Christian teleology without telos. There is an eternal afterlife and there is no end of debt. The Christian injection of infinity into social relations paved the way for the perpetual imbalance of the creditor-debtor relation, even in the very structure of the Trinity. Lazzarato once again cites Nietzsche in his argument, “God sacrificing himself for man’s debt, none other than God paying himself back, God as the only one able to redeem man from what, to man himself, has become irredeemable—the creditor sacrificing himself for his debtor, out of *love* (would you credit it? —), out of love for his debtor!...” (Nietzsche 1918, p. 51). While debt could have been understood as infinite in a pre-Christian state apparatus, Christianity introduced the particularly important dimension to infinite debt: interiorized debt (Lazzarato 2011). As Deleuze helpfully quips, “The pain of a debtor is interiorized, responsibility for the debt becomes a feeling of guilt” (Deleuze 1962, p. 142).

Ursula’s shame surrounding her debt came on the tails of over-spending during the Christmas season in order to gift her family with the objects of prosperity; on credit. Likewise, at the MCI Fernanda engaged the Christmas spirit with sacrificial indebtedness, putting herself into debt in order to give to God. As the next chapter highlights, at no other time does the confluence of prosperity, believing, and debt shine as brightly than at Christmas in Colombia.

*Death, credit, and messiness*

*May 2014. Hector was dying. The fifteen-year-old I had watched grow up in our small community of friends, was yellow and his bones stuck out of his joints. He had been at the cancer hospital now for almost a month. Maria, Cristina, Tatiana, and I are taking turns spending the night with him. His mother had died when he was five, and his father was simply unable to watch his son suffer so...so much. Hector needed us to hold him, feed him, massage his taugth skin and his aching body. Scream at nurses that he needed morphine, curse the medical system, go into debt to pay for the most expensive medicines available. Thank god we had credit cards.*

*We would tell him lies, that he would be OK, that he would grow up and be the chef he dreamed of being. We snuck in scrambled eggs with rice when he was supposed to be eating only tasteless hospital food. We brought him raspberry juice and plums. We sat with him. We slept in the narrow hospital bed, holding him as he shook with fever and pain.*

*I tried to continue fieldwork. I went to the MCI on a Sunday morning.*

*The night before I had received news that a close friend in Toronto had passed away from a brain aneurism. My partner's best friend. It was all just a little much.*

*I showed up to the MCI on a Sunday morning.*

*I saw Fernanda. I collapsed into her arms weeping. She prayed over me for as long as I needed her to.*

*Then she said, "OK. You be strong now. You are a woman of God now. Now you understand."*

*I didn't. But that moment changed our relationship. Give as much money on credit as you like, Fernanda. Pray for us all, Fernanda. May everyone believe as completely as you do.*

## Chapter 3

### Giving is Believing: Credit and Christmas in Colombia

*It is not simply to show power...that a man throws copper into the sea...in so doing he is also sacrificing to the gods and the spirits- Marcel Mauss*

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Fernanda swiped her credit card. She then she took a deep breath and closed her eyes, praying silently amid the thousands of swaying bodies and arms around her. The usher tore off her receipt, and handed it to Fernanda to initial. She emerged from prayer with pen ready. The usher leaned in, “May God reward you one hundred-fold.” Fernanda replied in agreement, “Merry Christmas.” She turned and smiled at me, then stood and moved to the aisle so she could dance freely to the rhythms of the offertory music. Her face turned upwards and arms raised high. It was Christmas in Colombia, we were at the *Misión Carismática Internacional*, (MCI hereafter) in the middle of Bogotá, and Fernanda had just given God a “gift” of two million pesos (approximately \$1000USD). With 28% interest accruing immediately on her debt, Fernanda acted on the belief that God would reward her. “You’ve gone into debt to give to God?” I asked her. Fernanda laughed, “Of course. Hasn’t everybody?”

### 3.1 Credit and Believing: *Credere*

This chapter details the debt upon which the prosperity gospel rests in Colombia. Throughout my time in Colombia, I found that the work of credit and debt overlaps with the religious fervor of growing Evangelical and Charismatic Christian movements, and never more so than at

Christmas time. It spurred the question: What does religious practice reveal about the gift in finance capitalism? Specifically, this chapter demonstrates that the relationship between finance capitalism and Christianity reshapes the social relations bound up in the gift—from a gift based on social debt to a gift based on financial debt.

Fernanda's gift to God animates this new relation of exchange, and Colombia's process of financialization illustrates the shift from industrial to finance capitalism. Fernanda's gift is "different and deferred" as Pierre Bourdieu suggested (1977), but it is based on a new kind of economy of exchange that requires a believing economy (de Certeau 1984). While belief can be understood as being a characteristic in relations of exchange before finance capitalism, the ways in which I understand believing in relations of financial exchange is different. I understand believing as a social relation, as a practice of social mobility and, as Michel de Certeau states, "the subject's investment in a proposition, the act of saying it and considering it as true" (de Certeau 1984 p. 178). The proposition of believing in the context of Colombia's rapid financialization is tied to credit insofar as credit, and specifically credit cards, facilitate exchanges impossible without them. The gift relation is one relation of exchange that is most affected by the distinct form of relationality that propositional belief in credit provides. Finance capitalism changes the gift relation in two important ways.

First, giving on credit mobilizes a third party in the gift relation. In pre-capitalist societies, as were the ones that Marcel Mauss was addressing in his assessment of the social and political crisis of capitalist society in terms of social relations, two actors operated in the field of exchange: the giver and the receiver. In the act of gifting, the object gifted retained the *hau*, or a part of a person remained as part of the object (or person in the case of women as wives) that was gifted. As Michael Taussig explains, "the fetishism that is found in the economics of precapitalist

societies arises from the sense of organic unity between persons and their products” (Taussig 2010, p. 37). The process of reification between produced commodity and labourer is the first distinction that the gift exchange in capitalism represents. The credit card company facilitates the exchange of gifts, reifying the relation between commodity and labourer twice over. The gift on credit, if it is a material commodity, is bought with the credit money that profits not only the capitalist merchant, but also the bank and the credit card company.

The second difference is that the use of credit in order to gift money, credit money, introduces an immateriality to the gift that Mauss did not consider, and further extrapolates the idea of Bourdieu that the gift in return must be different and differed. Perhaps resembling more closely the Vedic principle that inspired Mauss’ analysis, that sacrifice “is a gift that compels the deity to make a return” Fernanda’s gift of credit money was an immaterial offering that did expect return (as all “gifts” do) (Douglas 1990, p. ix). What is different is that giving money to God, or the gods, that come of one’s physical money, pound of gold or coin, or on a debit card is already a reification of the contradictory money form. However, credit money is fictitious capital that exists only as a promise, yet is understood as a materiality. “Money” as Marx exclaimed in reference to credit moneys, what he names “fetish capital” “is now pregnant” (Marx 1976, p. 256). It is this incredible contradiction that prompts Taussig to declare, “how could such a mutually reinforcing combination of rationality and fantasy so systemically coexist?” Holding this contradiction in tension is where the productive power of believing enters this now disperse social relation, between giver, receiver, facilitator, merchant, and processor.

The gift relation that Marcel Mauss explained as foundational to pre-capitalist systems of exchange was based on “interested and obligatory” reciprocity, rather than a simple equation of “voluntary presentation” (Mauss 1990, p. 3). As Mary Douglas in her forward to the 1990

translation of Mauss' essay states, "there are no free gifts" (Douglas 1990, p. vii). The point of revealing the gift relation in pre-capitalist societies, for Mauss, was to recognize the total social fact of reciprocal giving. The example of the potlatch in West Coast First Nations communities, the Haïda and Tlingit, is a case in point. Douglas explains, "the cycling gift system is society" (Douglas 1990, p. ix). Tied up in the gift relation is the pursuit of honour. A failure to return the gift, and oftentimes in greater excess than the original gift, is to lose the competition for honour. This, however, is different than "interest" as it is imposed on a financialized credit card expense, and these should not be confused (more on this below). Most importantly, Mauss' essay on the gift is a commentary on politics and economics, issues that Mauss understood to be in disarray, even crisis, in his context of Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century, on a steady path of industrializing capitalism. More specifically, Mauss wrote against the utilitarianism of English liberalism (Douglas 1990, p. x). *The Gift* is an essay about human solidarity.

Pierre Bourdieu further theorizes the gift within a paradigmatic form, or rather, *social strategic* form in which gift-giving becomes a strategy. "Until he has given in return, the receiver is *obliged*, to show his gratitude towards his benefactor, or, at least, to have regard for him" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 6). The gift must be different because, according to Bourdieu, to return the equivalent gift would be to annul the gift relation. Deferred because "to abolish the interval is also to abolish strategy" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 6) Referring back to Michel de Certeau, the need for deferral in the return of the thing given is as much about the gift, as it is with believing itself. "A plurality and a historicity are knotted into the act that posits, by the same gesture" de Certeau suggests, "a different partner and a deferred restitution. This temporal practice of difference endows delay with all its social pertinency. It is by this "deferred" that believing is separated from

seeing” (de Certeau 1984b, p. 193). The gift is imbued with power and hierarchical social structures reflective of the capital, both symbolic and financial, that circulates in society.

Although credit is not a gift from MasterCard, per se, the exchange of payment operates according to the logic of different and deferred payment through interest. It is the injection of time into the equation that brings the gift at Christmas in Colombia back to questions of believing and commerce in the form of credit. Here, Michel de Certeau’s analysis of believing illuminate relations of exchange, and the crediting system, anew:

The object of exchange is itself altered by the distance between moments, since the due—or expected—is not the same as the given, but an equivalent: the analogy between the offered and the received would be the work of time on their identity. The sequence of the gift and restitution thus temporarily articulates an economy of exchange...It will develop on the side of credence, or “crediting” of the creditor or the “believer” and, more explicitly, towards credit, where Marx sees ‘the judgment that political economy bears on the morality of man.’ (1984, p.193).

Credit differentiates and defers the gift, but return on the gift is based in new systems of belief that are tied up in ongoing interest payments and extended return over time. Giving a gift on credit introduces a new dimension to the gift relation. Credit underwrites the gift in financial capitalism, because long after the gift is given, the lingering remnant of debt weighs on the devout soul, and profits the bank and credit card company. Fernanda made a covenant with God in her Christmas gift, but importantly, she also made a covenant with the gods of finance: the credit card company and her bank. This new system of gift relations, I argue, rests upon the practices of believing that financial capitalism requires. And at no other time do believing and credit collide as legibly as during Christmas.



## 3.2 Belief and Believing

The financial system is (at least in part) a “system of belief” (de Certeau 1985, p. 194) and belief underwrites the practices that make up the everyday operations of Colombia’s emerging credit system. De Certeau explains, “a system of belief links present behavior to a future that escapes them” (de Certeau 1985, p. 194). One objective of this chapter is to engage in the on-going debate among scholars of religion that has revolved around the usefulness (or uselessness) of the concept “belief.” To do so, I consider both believing and credit as relations of exchange and as social practices central to finance capitalism. This exploration into believing and credit leads me to problematize of the oft-assumed divide between categories of “religion” and “economy” through querying the distinction between “belief” and “practice.” The beginning point for this inquiry is based in an etymological curiosity found in the Latin verb *credere*—the root of both belief and credit—and the work that *credere* does on the gift.

This chapter develops a distinction between *credere* or believing, on the one hand, and “belief” or “belief system” on the other. In order to support this claim, and to illuminate its significance, I lean on Catherine Bell’s exploratory work on belief and believing.<sup>32</sup> Bell invites the scholar of religion to take a step away from considering belief as a closed system, a fallback anthropological method of differentiation (i.e., “Those people believe such and such, those other people believe some other such and such”), or a term collapsible with either “culture” or “religion.” My ethnographic research pushes the “question of belief” towards a question of believing. This question develops a deeper consideration of religious worlds embedded in credit-based social and economic relations. Through employing categories of economic exchange, assumptions about believing and capitalist economy are unveiled. At the same time, thinking

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<sup>32</sup> The works I am referring to here include Bell’s published articles and chapters, including Bell 2002; 2006; 2007; 2009.

with believing and credit in complex relation offers an important analogical insight into the functioning of finance capital, its temporality, and the contradictions inherent therein. To do so, I focus on believing in relation to the gift in order to illuminate the shifts in emerging forms of financial social forms (Mauss 1990; Levi-Strauss 1969; Bourdieu 1977; Certeau 1984). Doing so reveals a temporal contradiction deeply embedded in finance capitalism: short-term profiteering rubs against tempos and timeframes of long-term accumulation strategies and interrupts production. The intrinsic instability of such a temporal contradiction reveals a conceptual opening that is held together by believing and credit, and critically, debt.

Belief is a slippery category that has fascinated and frustrated the scholar of religion since Durkheim claimed that, “religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is, things that are set apart and forbidden” (Durkheim 1912, p. 62).<sup>33</sup> Yet, as Catherine Bell aptly pointed out, while religious practices have been a focus for the study of religion, belief has not been the subject of significant scholarly attention in the field. This is ironic, she notes, because “Although it is ignored in all formal senses, the field makes nearly constant reference to the idea of belief in nearly every publication” (Bell 2008, p. 88). Overlooked

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<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that belief as central to “religion” was a trope employed long before Durkheim. The literature is thick. Evolutionary anthropologists of the Victorian era defined beliefs as central to rituals, indeed, as central to religion itself. As Talal Asad deftly explains, the trope of “beliefs” as central to religion relies on an exclusively “Christian” historical narrative that has problematically, and Eurocentrically, imposed “the problem of belief” onto all scholarship of religion. Asad’s critique is most famously found in his dismantling of Clifford Geertz’ definition of religion as cultural system, found in Asad 2003. Asad further teases out his critique in Asad 2012. Manuel A. Vásquez (2011) carefully treats the legacy of immateriality in the study of religion, and the role that the discipline’s concern with “belief” has played. Vásquez calls for a “materialist theory of religion” through moving past the colonial inheritance of religion being considered equivalent to belief. Robert Orsi offers a discussion of the problems with “religion-as-belief” from his perspective from the conceptual frame of lived religion. The article, “Belief” in *Material Religion* 7(1) reviews the history of the term belief, the colonial legacies that a Christo-centric worldview imposed upon different religions around the world. Orsi indeed warns that the overwhelming dismissal of belief, for a focus on the body and materiality, has only served to place the debate back at the problematic risk that empties the minds of “ordinary religious people” and does not allow for a consideration of the “inevitably relational nature of these operations of mind and body in religious contexts” (15). The debate has most recently been taken up by Kathryn Lofton and the Department of Religious Studies at Yale University in 2012. The Yale Roundtable on Belief is documented in Lofton (2012) in which she concludes that while belief remains a theme of interest in the discipline, it cannot be detached from the “strange social politics of its invocation” (p. 54).

in the field of religious studies, the “problem of belief” has nevertheless been addressed in various other disciplines, such as anthropology (Evans-Pritchard 1965; Needham 1972; Engelke 2002; Lindquist and Coleman 2008), philosophy (Hume 1992; Wittgenstein Davidson 1984; Žižek 2001), cognitive theory (Atran and Norenzayan 2004; Barrett 2000, 2004; Willard and Norenzayan 2013), and of course extensively in theological studies (Hillar 2012; Frank 1981; Collins 2010). Bell assigns blame for the oversight in religious studies to the “routine reliance on [belief]’s nebulous status passing back and forth raw datum and theoretical tool” (Bell 2008, p. 89).<sup>34</sup>

This tacking back and forth has maintained a tendency towards sidestepping belief as a category of inquiry in itself. Assumed, yet without theoretical foundation, the study of religion preserves the distinction between internal “beliefs” and outward “rites” collective and coherent ritual acts that represent what “those people believe” and how distinctions between the sacred and the profane are maintained (Durkheim 1912; Eliade 1959; Smith 1978). This tendency has resulted in “a scholarly imagination interested in meaningful differences rather than hierarchical interconnections” (O’Neill 2013, p.1095). The bright distinctions drawn between belief and practice precludes the study of complex entanglements between believing and practice, hierarchical interconnections of power and discipline, and Prosperity Christianity and financial capitalism. In this vein, the argument follows Bell’s suggestion that rather than belief, the scholar of religion should consider believing, as verb and as social practice.

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<sup>34</sup>The insistence on distinguishing between “belief” and “practice” as distinct conceptual arenas can also be traced back to the materialist turn in the study of religion, and the welcome emphasis on the body, on embodiment, and subjectivity, as Constance M. Furey (2012) outlines in her provocative article, “Bodies, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies.”. As Furey helpfully explains, the turn to the body and materiality has upset the Protestant bias towards the “religion as belief” concept. She warns, however, that the new focus has maintained the religious subject in a world to herself. Furey suggests moving towards emphasizing the relationality inherent in subject formation along with the consideration of embodiment and praxis.

### 3.3 Christmas and *Credere* in Colombia

Bogotá Mayor, Gustavo Petro, boasted to local press, and the country at large, that Christmas 2013 was going to be one of the best and brightest in all of Latin America, (*Alcaldía de Bogotá, D.C.*, October 31, 2013). Petro announced, “We invite all Colombians to Bogotá. We want you to witness how the Capital [city] experiences a disarmed Christmas. Without weapons, a new time can be lived. This Christmas must send a strong message of security to counter what has happened in previous celebrations, where homicides increased in Bogotá” (*El Espectador*, October 31, 2013).<sup>35</sup>

This invitation emerged amidst on-going revelations of mass graves filled with the broken pieces of over five thousand bodies, tortured and dismembered for the most part, and scattered throughout the country. Colombia’s “new time” that Mayor Petro called for was more than an economically new time, but a political and social new time of a “disarmed Christmas” and a disarmed country. In light of the on-going violence, and the shared hopes throughout the country for a peace agreement to be signed soon, Mayor Petro’s invitation was understood as a call to Bogotá, and the rest of Colombia, to believe in the real possibility of peace time—new time. Colombia’s new time, it can be argued, is half a century coming and, many will further claim, will take at least twice as long to fully arrive. It is a new time that suspends itself teleologically within a belief in the future. It is a vague promise of a new and peaceful country that is tied up with prosperous aspirations of economic development. This drive to make anew, however, rides on believing and credit, and so Fernanda’s gift reveals so much more than a simple gift.

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<sup>35</sup> “Invitamos a todos los colombianos a Bogotá, queremos que sean testigos que la capital vive una navidad desarmada. Sin armas se puede vivir un nuevo tiempo. Esta Navidad debe tener un mensaje muy fuerte en seguridad para contrarrestar lo que ocurría en anteriores celebraciones en donde se incrementaron los homicidios en Bogotá” (*El Espectador*, translation by author). According to Bogotá police chief, Edgar Sánchez Morales, homicides indeed decreased from twenty-four cases in 2012 to thirteen cases during Christmas celebrations in 2013. See RCN Radio 2013.

In Bogotá this year, there would be nearly five hundred Christmas shows around the city with synchronized water fountains, light displays, and musical events. This so-called *Ruta de la Navidad* (Route of Christmas) would have “48% more lights” than the year before, and the light shows would play every evening beginning the first week of December until the New Year (*Semana*, November 29, 2013). Twelve million lights would illuminate a city of 10 million people and snow-machines would shower biodegradable snow-foam onto delighted children throughout a city tamped down by greater military presence in the streets, army patrols around shopping malls, and police presence in all commercial centers, (*Semana*, November 1, 2013). The disarmed Christmas was to be the kind of peace that disarms the civilian population and assigns military might to those representatives of official state power.

In part, Colombia’s economic emergence has been tied to the greater liberalization of its markets, and the influx of foreign direct investment in the financial sector. This has translated into markets flooded with easily accessible credit. Economic ability is a marker of middle class security and the globalization of Colombia’s markets has infused the growing middle class with credit allowing for greater purchasing power. Prosperity and peace are once again conflated. However, in Colombia both prosperity and peace are desired futures, because they are not yet. They are the expectations of greater economic development and peace agreements. Credit puts into practice the belief that a new time is possible at all, and Christmas is heralded as the proverbial new time that Colombia has been seeking—in myriad forms and campaign. The new time, then, of prosperity is put into practice by giving gifts that perform a kind of middle class wealth despite those gifts being purchased on credit.

This refrain of a “new time” has been marketed as the horizon of hope for an ostensibly optimistic nation with the shared conviction that peace is possible, happiness is always just

around the corner, and prosperity is attainable for all.<sup>36</sup> The most aggressive push of the new time narrative at Christmas emanated from state-sponsored messages and boisterous advertising campaigns by Colombia's government. Mayor Petro's office plastered billboards around the city, wishing all Bogotános a "Merry Christmas" and proclaiming, "Peace and Prosperity Await Us." President Santos declared in his Christmas message to the country that "the God-child of Christmas brings a message forgiveness [and peace], in order to begin anew, to commence a new era...we must forgive, be humble, seek peace, and work together for prosperity" (Presidencia de Colombia, December 26, 2013). We must begin anew. Peace, so the logic holds, will be waged by means of prosperity. Economic and social prosperity will produce peace. Recollecting the conversation of the political economy of war in the previous chapters, this claim is not entirely misplaced.

However, some of the loudest voices calling for a new time were also coming from burgeoning Pentecostal and Charismatic movements throughout the country; and especially from the Charismatic movements growing in Bogotá's urban centers, like the *Misión Carismática Internacional*.

### 3.4 Acts of Believing

The hundreds of ushers at the MCI, in the center of Bogotá, wear blue vests, indicating their role. Those who carry the credit card machines have the word "*DATAFONO*" ("credit card machine") stitched on the back of their vests in bold, white, capital letters. At the time of giving offerings, tithes, or financial covenants, the machine-wielding ushers begin to pace the aisles of

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<sup>36</sup> The "Barometer of Happiness and Hope" managed by the WIN/Gallup International Association, consistently rates Colombia as one of the "happiest" countries in the world. According to the Barometer, 86% of Colombians self-identify as "happy."  
[[http://www.wingia.com/en/news/colombia\\_is\\_the\\_happiest\\_country\\_in\\_the\\_world/46/](http://www.wingia.com/en/news/colombia_is_the_happiest_country_in_the_world/46/)] Accessed January 12, 2015.

the enormous church, holding high their wireless electronic devices. At any given service, there may be upwards of two dozen of these ushers. The service in which Fernanda gave her gift to God already depicted above was during the week leading to Christmas. An LED screen, framed by Broadway lights, flashed the theme of the week, “*Jesus es la Luz*” (Jesus is the Light), and illuminated the stage. After a rousing half hour of singing, dancing, light show, and prayer time, the band left the stage, and the house lights began to brighten. As soon as Pastor Cesar Castellanos walked on stage, a close up of his smiling face simultaneously projected on five, movie theatre sized, screens throughout the auditorium, and the credit card ushers began to unobtrusively mill at the intersections of the aisles, scanning the crowds for hands waving them over. The first “teaching” at an MCI service is usually an invitation to “make a pact with God” “claim your vision” “make the promise a reality” and other such prosperous aspirations.

As Castellanos speaks, hands begin to rise from among the bowed heads looking into purses, wallets, and pockets for coins, bills, and cards. The hands wave down the machine carrying ushers. The ushers rush over to the giver, the donor, the debtor, and if possible crouch over the person. There is an exchange of information—what kind of card? How much? How many payment quotas?—the card is swiped, and the receipt spills out of the machine. The merchant’s copy must be signed and handed back to the usher. The receipt is handed to the giver.

“Nothing is impossible for those who believe!” Castellanos’ boomed in stereo, and he proceeded to tell the story of David and Goliath. “Your giant is your finances. Prosperity is real, it is Biblical. This moment of pacting is to conquer your giant of debt, of scarcity, of ruin. This is the time for financial freedom!” Castellanos paced up and down the stage, speaking to the multitudes.

“You can be the blessing you want to be this Christmas season. How many believe that this month of December you will be able to conquer what you weren’t able to conquer in the last 11 months?” a chorus of “Amens” affirmed that everyone believed. “Think of all the gifts you need to give. Giving is better than receiving. God gave so generously he gave his son; this Christmas we remember that God’s greatest gift is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the light!”

The band returned to stage, and rock and roll Christmas carols began to play into the auditorium. The credit card machines darted around the floor. As the music became louder, it began to drown out the rustle of thousands of hands reaching into thousands of wallets to make thousands of sacrifices to one God. Like Fernanda had done. Once cards had been swiped, and cash had been dedicated thanking God for his gift of Jesus, receipts were held up in the air alongside envelopes stuffed with faith-based investment. “Repeat after me” Castellanos extolled, and receipts and envelopes clouded the air in the convention center. “I am prosperous! In the name of Jesus, I am prosperous!” The crowd enthusiastically echoed Pastor Castellanos. “Now say to the person beside you, ‘Wow! You look prosperous!’” Fernanda came back to her seat beside me. She placed her hands on my shoulders and told me, “You look prosperous!”

### 3.5 What is a Believer?

Christmas in Colombia, however, is not only about the lights and the cheer, the excitement of a new time. Christmas in Colombia is also about a different time, the after-effect of overspending, overeating, overdrinking, and over-hoping. Despite the promise of prosperous futures, paying off debts of Christmas in Colombia seeps into the new time of the New Year, leaving most everyone involved with a financial headache. In more ethnographic terms, growing access to credit in Colombia has reframed the Christmas gift in ways that elongate rather than eliminate this interest-laden payback. Colombia’s recent moves to free up credit for the masses offers



particularity to this insight, insofar as new credits are promoting access to forms of consumption that produces an aspirational class, while being propelled by the aspirations of individuals who were denied access until recently. Credit cards were not available to the large majority of the population, even ten years ago. Now, credit card machines are available in corner stores, bakeries, and beer vendors, when a decade earlier these establishments would accept only cash. Credit in emerging Colombia, however, represents much more than only accessibility, because credit in Colombia is tied to a future that is still under construction.

Emile Benveniste etymologically traces the concept of believing to *credo*, stating, “From the time of the earliest texts the meaning of “credit” is extended to include the notion of “belief” (Benveniste 1969, p. 284). Benveniste provides the initial clues that led Michel de Certeau to challenge the Durkheimian divide between belief and practice. Benveniste states, “To believe...is to give something away with the certainty of getting it back” (Benveniste 1969, p. 286) at some point in the future, we might add. De Certeau proposes, “Belief, indeed, concerns “what makes it [society] run.” Believing, for de Certeau, for Bell, and for me, is relational. “Belief is perceived by the more or less strict links it maintains with what makes it happen and/or expects to see happen” (de Certeau 1985, p. 198). In this sense, believing concerns what makes the credit system run. To believe is to act, and this action could be called reciprocal social practice. Financialization is not the ending of social relations, or the complete disconnection between debt and obligation. Financialization reforms the ways in which social relations, debts, and obligations are realized. When belief ceases to exist within a relational web, I argue, it ceases to be believing; it ceases to be a social practice (de Certeau 1985, 196).

While Fernanda ostensibly makes a covenant with God, her two million pesos go to coffers of the MCI, and the interest payments will go to the private energy company,

CODENSA, who provides her credit card through a contract with the Colombian bank, *Colpatria*, which is owned by Canadian conglomerate, *Scotiabank*, and distributes the credit cards for CODENSA. And MasterCard, the “processor” owns the technology that animates the credit card machines and receives a fee for every devout debt that is created. MasterCard does not tire of reminding the world that they are “the driving force at the heart of commerce” providing the technology for millions of electronic payments to be made every minute of every day, around the world. MasterCard facilitates the guarantee from banker to merchant to consumer. The guarantor is always absent, yet omnipresent. This is what MasterCard is, throughout the world. MasterCard runs the technology through which credit card transactions occur. MasterCard is a brand name of the card that uses their technology.

As they explain on their website, “MasterCard is more than the brand you see on your card. We’re the technology making payments happen around the clock. In fact, we operate the world’s fastest payments network, processing transactions in more than 150 currencies” (MasterCard 2016). The role of banks in this process are known as “issuers” they hold the money and send the money for the purchase made with the credit card. MasterCard is, essentially, a network. For every transaction, MasterCard receives a payment. MasterCard, then, is everywhere. They are an invisible, fiber-optic network that facilitates exchange. This distinction, between presence and absence, “here and there” “real and imagined” is central to believing, and clearly, central to the financial system. Indeed, de Certeau tells us, “The coincidence of absence and presence is one of the secrets of believing” (1985, p. 201). MasterCard is precisely this confluence of absence and presence; while some things are priceless, everything else—*everything* else—can be purchased on credit. As the credit card company boasts, they are the heartbeat of the global financial order, they are the mediator for exchange of everything that is not “without

price.” As the well-known advertisement states: “There are some things money can’t buy, for everything else, there’s MasterCard” (MasterCard 2007).

However, what separates believing from knowing or seeing is the suspension of return on an act of belief. Time. Believing is a practice hinged on expectation of future recompense – being rewarded one-hundred fold for a virtuous financial sacrifice, going into debt in order to gain an education with a vague assurance that a prosperous future awaits a university graduate, or, and importantly in the case of Colombia, believing in a new time of a peaceable future after decades of civil war. Believing in Colombia is a practice that moves beyond the expectational towards the aspirational. And in Colombia, at Christmas, the narrative of prosperity is the illuminated future that is aspired to through giving on credit. Financialized capitalism ushers in a complex management of aspiration through the temporal contradiction that finance requires—immediate satisfaction accompanied by the long-term saddling of debt has become a new form of accumulation. Indeed, interest payments on credit card debt are central to profit-making in financial capitalism (Soederberg 2012). Production of profit has moved from the factory and sale of commodities to accruing interest and profiting off time itself. Herein lies both the enchanted dimension of financial capitalism and its weakness. For such a contradiction creates an inherent instability in the system, as was effectively felt throughout the world with the credit crisis of 2007-08.

### 3.6 *Credere*

The private energy company, CODENSA, has a monopoly on electricity distribution in Bogotá. It is a subsidiary of the European company, Grupo Enel, and was formed through the privatization of Bogotá’s public energy company in 1997. Over the last decade, CODENSA has paid a large part of the city’s Christmas light show expenses. For Christmas 2013, the CEO of

CODENSA explained, “Illuminating Bogotá is a [Christmas] gift for all Bogotános, because it will be free and we estimate that millions of people will enjoy [the lights], from within the Capital as well from the rest of the country, (*Portafolio* November 5, 2013).<sup>37</sup> CODENSA’s motto is “*mucho más que energía*” (much more than electricity), and according to their advertisements, they distribute *alegría* as much as *energía*—happiness as much as electricity. CODENSA’s gift of light suggested as much.

Incidentally, CODENSA is also one of the largest commercial credit card providers in Colombia—and it charges some of the highest interest rates in the country (*La Republica*, October 21, 2013). CODENSA credit cards are the most accessible cards for a majority of Colombians as they are available to everyone who makes at least a minimum wage, approximately \$256 USD per month (*Banco de la Republica* 2014). CODENSA has a monopoly not only on electricity, but also credit cards for the lowest income bracket of Colombians. These cards carry credit that can be paid off over a period of up to four years, with interest rates exceeding 28% (*El Tiempo* May 13, 2006).

To CODENSA’s own benefit they do distribute much more than electricity. The easy credit they distribute is about improving “quality of life” and buying “what you’ve always desired” they claim. In other words, it is about channeling aspiration towards attaining a better life. In other words, credit is about channeling aspiration and managing expectations. Prosperity, for many of the faithful masses that hold this conviction, affirms that “something new” and “something better” is not only possible in this lifetime; it is what both God and the Corporation promise faithful followers.

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<sup>37</sup> “Iluminar a Bogotá ... será un regalo para los Bogotános, porque será gratuito y estimamos que lo van a disfrutar ... millones de personas, tanto de la Capital como procedentes de otras zonas del país.” (Translation by author)

In one of his best-selling books of instructions for fulfilling a pre-destined plan of prosperity, Pastor Castellanos explains that, “[believing] is the capacity to see oneself in a future that is completely different from the present reality” (Castellanos 2006, p.16). Pastor Castellanos explains that believers must “enter the spiritual plane and see there all the blessings God has for every one of us” (p.37). Central to accessing these blessings is the work of clearly articulating and visualizing the hoped for result. “When these images are engraved in the mind, your lips begin to easily confess what your heart is fully convinced of. Scientists have been able to prove that what a person is able to perceive in their mind, the nervous system receives as though it has already occurred, in other words, understand it as reality” (p. 37).

And for churches like the *Misión Carismática*, there is no harm in stating your vision, and then using your CODENSA credit card to make a financial covenant (*pacto*) with God in order to bring about that completely different reality. It is an act that demonstrates believing power—a gift that serves as a contract. The economic sacrifice is to be recognized with celestial and material interest. However, as levels of consumer debt steadily rise in Colombia, the interest payments extend gift giving beyond a one-time sacrifice. The credit-fuelled gift is the proverbial gift that keeps on taking.

Christmas in Colombia is a time of abundant hope in a vague newness, as much as a time for giving. And churches, corporations, and even the state, encourage generous giving—on credit if necessary. CODENSA calms anxious yet committed consumers with marketing campaigns that guarantee a happy Christmas with credit cards that require no payment until February the following year.<sup>38</sup> Pastor Castellanos chides congregants of the *Misión Carismática* for allowing

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<sup>38</sup> CODENSA’s marketing campaign for Christmas spending includes the offer of not paying anything until February. See <http://www.creditofacilcodensa.com/beneficios.html> [Accessed January 19, 2015]

doubt to cloud prosperous believing, encouraging members to “be the blessing you could not be all year, now. At Christmas.”<sup>39</sup> And Bogotá’s mayor invokes the message that Colombia wants the world to hear: Peace and democracy await not only Bogotá, but also the entire country.<sup>40</sup>

Even, perhaps most especially, President Juan Manuel Santos has joined the call for believing in a new country. “We will convert this nightmare of violence into the rebirth of our homeland” Santos assured at a march for peace.<sup>41</sup> While talking of the need for the rebirth of the nation, Santos donned a shirt that stated, “My contribution is to believe” (*Mi aporte es creer*). CODENSA’s Christmas lights brighten the refrain that Colombia can indeed “live a new time.” It is this potential, this newness, the perceived image of something that can be real amidst all of these lights, that provokes a fundamental ethnographic observation: Christmas in Colombia rides on believing that “a new time” is possible. The Christian overtones of new life and renewal shimmer into full relief, as credit cards become mediators of endless potential. Believing that Colombia can become new brings into relief the aspirational future practices that credit allows, and elongates. However, new times, in Colombia, are borrowed time. Debt with interest will be what deters the complete fulfillment of the dream of the future. War debts, economic debts, drug debts, social debts, political debts will all need to be paid with interest. Credit and believing in Colombia pay for the gift in the present but the payout is compounded.

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<sup>39</sup> Transcript of sermon given by Pastor Castellanos, December 5, 2013.

<sup>40</sup> *Primicia Diario*, December 25, 2013, <http://primiciadiario.com/archivo/2013/saludo-de-navidad-a-los-habitantes-de-Bogotá/> [Accessed January 10, 2015]

<sup>41</sup> Transcript of Presidential address, *Marcha por la paz: Mi aporte es creer, yo creo en la paz*, (March for Peace: My Contribution is to believe, I believe in peace,) April 9, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2lPsUdNOog> [Accessed December 29]

### 3.7 Believing in Prosperity: Ursula's Gift

“It's a new car!!!! It's for all of us! Merry Christmas!” Ursula clapped her hands, and hugged her family. “Now we can all go on holiday together in January. AND they gave us a year of gasoline!” The KIA SUV glimmered in the light. Ursula's grandchildren excitedly climbed around the car, while Ursula's children smiled, hesitantly, at the new vehicle. “How did you pay for this?” they asked. Ursula crowed enthusiastically, “Does it matter? I know how to manage my finances. This for all of us! Now we can drive together to our favourite vacation spot!”

It was only after Christmas that Ursula confessed her credit card calamity to me, “I am in so much debt” she confided. “I did it all for them, for my family. I wanted prosperity. I know God wants that for us. I believe that. I must.”

Ursula's guilt and conviction brought her to max out three credit cards and a line of credit, spending over \$25000 USD in the short course of two years on her family. She expected nothing in return, but happiness and security for her family; happiness and security that she never had as a younger woman. She is the Colombian “aspirational class” and she is the harbinger of Colombia's “new time”. She is the new consumer in Colombia. And while her conspicuous consumption includes new SUVs and tablets for her family, she also consumes the hope trafficked by Colombia's banks, churches, and the credit card industry.

But unique to Colombia, aspirations of the Mayor and the President for a “new time” of disarmament betray deeply rooted anxieties about the country's past and present. For Mayor Petro was a former guerrilla with the *Movimiento 19 de Abril*, M-19, and has had to spend much of his political career living down this past. While President Santos is leading peace negotiations with the FARC, that have been continually interrupted by outbreaks of violence. The “old times”

are not quite yet past, and although the peace negotiations are moving forward, ongoing state sponsored violence and drug-related bloodshed threatens a fragile and precarious ceasefire. In the collective memory of Colombians, the “old times” of powerful guerrilla armies and drug cartels. The macabre violence of the past fifty years leads to a focus on the future, rather than the past, despite these dynamics being still very present but muted for many city dwellers. Christmas is the time of year when the temporal dynamics of forward motion of aspiration are most palpably put into practice.

New time in Colombia is a mode of social action, as much as it is a rhetorical trope. The past in the country, as was detailed in the first chapter, is not one for which there is a nostalgic longing. Indeed, in the context of peace talks, the work of historical memory is relatively new, and painfully torturous for most of Colombia’s population. Now, three generations have known only a context in which violence as a form of discipline is the *modus operandi* of the Colombian government, and all the armed actors involved in the conflict. This context has affected everyday relations in the aggressive everydayness of living in urban centers, and the country side. As CODENSA’s Easy Credit Card affirms, credit, and indeed finance is much more than just electricity—it is about futures and aspirations. The opening towards forms of regulation that are increasingly internalized and controlled through an abstract system of a market can be understood as a welcome shift from the public demonstrations of war crimes and violent money-lenders. CODENSA, as they promote, traffics in happiness while the Colombian state along with prosperity churches affirm that new times are possible. Financialization, however, might be better understood outside of a teleology of forward moving economic evolution, and rather a process of new forms of governmentality, playing out in a new relation of power. The gift on credit in times of finance capital illustrates newly emerging social relations and the compound



work of overlapping discipline and control.

### 3.8 Giving is Believing

The gift in Colombia is, of course, about reciprocity, obligation, and the power of gift in social relations, as Marcel Mauss theorized. But Christmas in financializing Colombia brings the credit-fuelled gift into new relief, and reveals that the gift is now about much more.

The vignette from the MCI gives an animation of the different and deferred gift as the strategy *par excellence*. Through interest bearing finance capital, parishioners of the *Misión Carismática* are encouraged to make their offering count, to “pay it forward” and to do so with compounding interest. The misrecognition of the gift through mistaking credit as liquid asset is the believing practice that financial capitalism relies upon. Bourdieu’s explanation of misrecognition is animated through what he names “complicity” of the precarious classes in appropriating ideologies (believing practices) of the dominant institutions of power (such as state, church, and bank). De Certeau states, “The process of belief works starting not from the believer himself but from an indefinite plural, presumed to be the debtor and the guarantor of the believing relationship” (de Certeau 1984b, p. 201). Believing, credit, the anteriority of past desire, and future possibility open up the resting contradictions that make the credit system an institution of belief.

It is this contradiction that ties believing to practice in the sense that Bell proposed, and it is this contradiction that animates *credere*, believing and credit, as the practices that underwrite finance. It is also this contradiction of believing in the future—believing in the Colombia that could be—and the disastrous human toll of securing the country for greater foreign direct

investment and financial stability, that is held together through the believing practices of a population whose debt is conflated with their prosperity.

Importantly, however, Bell clarifies that such misrecognition is not a “matter of being duped, but a strategy for appropriating symbols, despite how structured and structuring the symbols may prove to be in practice” (1992, p. 191). Prosperity is the ideology of financialized capitalism – and credit is the enabling force that promises to democratize the spoils of capitalism to the masses. The promise of prosperity is inherently inclusive, and therefore not a vehicle of unanimity but great difference within a whole. “Prosperity for All” the Colombian government promises, Easy Credit for All, the private corporations and banks proclaim, God’s prosperous plan is for all who believe—the practices that make up the “micropolitics of everyday life” in Colombia play out the power relations that financial capitalism embeds in its foreclosure of alternate [economic and religious] practice.

### 3.9 Even Santa Claus believes in Colombia

“My contribution is to believe, I believe in peace”<sup>42</sup> is a governmentally coordinated social-media campaign that has accompanied on-going peace negotiations between the FARC and the government in Havana since 2012. In a widely viewed television commercial, Colombians of all ethnic backgrounds, geographic locations, and socio-economic status, including well-known personalities such as rock-stars *Juanes* and *Shakira*, tell the nation, “My contribution is to believe.” *Juanes*, the last of the celebrities in the clip, states, “I believe in peace.

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<sup>42</sup> “Mi Aporte es Creer. Yo Creo en la Paz.” Luis Eduardo Garzon, former mayor of Bogotá and currently Minister and Advisor for National Dialogue and Citizen Mobilization, launched the campaign in 2012 and invited Colombians to do more than simply be observers of the peace negotiations, but rather Colombians “should act, believe, and mobilize for peace.” Importantly, Garzon reminded the country that “resolving the conflict would give us additional points for growth in our economy and would raise the quality of life for all citizens.”(Equipo Ecos de Combeima, “Ministro Garzón lanza campaña ciudadana por la paz” *Ecos del Combeima*, <http://ecosdelcombeima.com/regionales/nota-21318-ministro-garzon-lanza-campana-ciudadana-la-paz> [Accessed January 16, 2015])

Do you?” Driving along the busy streets of Bogotá at Christmas-time, billboards show a Rockwellian Santa Claus sipping contentedly on a bottle of Coke. The billboard smiles down on Bogotá, and states, “Even I believe in you, Colombia.” Even Santa Claus believes in Colombia.

To further animate this point is to dim the bright lights of the illuminate city streets, and those 10 million light bulbs and their unlimited potential of new time. It means stepping into the shadows of January, into light of Ursula’s own Christmas tree, which was still decorated weeks after the New Year. Her deferred, different, and devout gifts were now a financial reality. She explained her belief in prosperity, her commitment to a “new time” through counter-disciplinary spending, in light of a dark past.<sup>43</sup>

Ursula held back tears as she told me why she wanted prosperity for her family. Having been married at 15 to an evangelical missionary twice her age, she had her first child at 16. She had entered into an extreme depression after numerous new converts that her husband brought home had tried to rape her, and after 3 failed suicide attempts, she left her husband, taking her young child with her. She met another suitor and had her second child. Without any education, she worked in construction for a number of years—a highly dangerous and *machista* workplace. After two years of construction work, she decided to leave her children and work illegally in Japan in the fish markets. Japan is not a particularly common destination for Colombian migrants, and the reasons as to why Ursula decided to go there remain hazy. Her sister had gone

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<sup>43</sup> Some recent studies of neoliberalism and its relation to religion deserve to be highlighted here. Bethany Moreton (2009) offers a detailed and sensitive telling of the “quiet backstory” of neoliberal expansion in the Americas. Moreton deftly explicates that parallel to the debt crises of the 1980s in Latin America, in the United States “...faith in God and faith in the market grew in tandem, aided by a generous government and an organized, corporate-funded grassroots movement for Christian free enterprise. Ultimately, they helped shape American-led globalization itself” (Moreton 2009, p. 5). The broader context of free market spiritualities across the hemisphere illustrates the thicker analytical threads that hold together religion in the Americas and acute experiences of neoliberal restructuring, of countries, institutions, and individuals. Other works that further this conversation include Muehlebach 2012; Hackworth 2012; Brown 2105.;

before her, and had helped secure a travel visa. More details were not forthcoming. “One of my largest regrets, my deepest pain, is that I left my children.” She caught her breath on a surge of tears. “I decided then that I would do anything and everything, that I would “*salir adelante y voy a tener algo pa’ mis hijos*” (get ahead and have something for my children).

After having worked in Japan for some time, she returned to Colombia with enough money to make a down payment on a house, and to demonstrate her debt-worthiness for a mortgage. “I got down on my knees and I felt that God was there. I felt—I have never felt anything like that day, that day something happened, the earth opened, and great miracles were possible. That day I believed, and I kneeled and said, Lord Jesus, I beg you, with all my heart, that you open a door. I want a house for my children. Tell me what I have to do. And in faith I said, ‘Lord, give me a house, a place to be with my children, where no one can take them from me, where no one will humiliate me ever again.’”

Ursula began to work in Bogotá, where she bought her first house on credit. She began to study nights to finish her high-school diploma with the goal of one day becoming a doctor. Fifteen years later, she had graduated from medical school and got her first job as an emergency ward doctor in a small town outside of Bogotá. Her children by that time already had children of their own, and Ursula was receiving a steady income and qualified for credit cards and an open line of credit for the first time. Since then, she has re-mortgaged her house “four or five times” and entered into significant credit card debt. But rarely does she go into debt with purchases for herself. “Its better to give than to receive, I think” she told me in the blue light of the glowing lights of the Christmas tree still standing towards the end of January. “I’ve never had this much debt. And yes, the debt is great, but God is greater. God will provide, God knows what He is doing, nothing is impossible for God.”

Ursula's debt is conflated with the happiness that CODENSA promises. It is the contradiction of being tied to debt payments for years, re-financing her debts with different banks, and re-mortgaging her house, while at the same time being able to renovate her house for her children and purchase a vehicle for family vacations that animates the gift as believing in Colombia. This contradiction is what believing permits. Believing and credit do the work of re-imagining the gift. Her "new time" financial woes are tied to old time struggles and heartaches.

Ursula smiled at me, her CODENSA bill on the table, along with the other credit card statements she had been showing me. We had sat down to analyze the debts about which she was receiving phone calls from the bank. The compound interest payments were overwhelming, as we looked at all the additional charges on her credit card bill. Account maintenance fees, transaction fees, fees for things she could not identify. Each debt and each card had its own rate of interest. "*Ladrones*" she breathed. "Crooks." We made a plan to bundle her debts with a different bank that had approached her, with lower interest rates and the promise that there would be no hidden fees. A different bank would be a better option. She touched my arm as we finished up, "it's true, you know. If you believe, anything is possible. I choose to believe that God wants prosperity for my family. I am showing that it is possible. The gifts I gave this Christmas put me into debt, but nothing makes me happier than giving. I'll get out of this debt. God knows, believing makes anything possible." Ursula's conviction was a revealing practice that tied her commitment to her family to a prosperous future. Ursula understood herself as included in the campaign of prosperity preached by pastors, government, and banks. The contradiction, however, lay in the debt that accompanied her inclusion.

## Chapter 4

Debt as Inclusion: Financial inclusion and the encompassment of the market

*And the citizens, the invisible ones, they have been left without their countries, with an enormous debt to pay, broken plates from this distant celebration, and with governments that do not govern, because they are governed, from afar. - Eduardo Galeano*

*Lend yourself to others, but give yourself to yourself*

Michel de Montaigne

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“Welcome to the Davivienda family!” said the debt “fixer” and shook Ursula’s hand. She beamed. As she vigorously shook the fixer’s hand, she exclaimed: “You’ve saved me!” She turned to her friend, Fabian, who had brought the fixer to her house. “And thank you, Brother Fabian, for bringing your colleague here. I know I can trust you!” Ursula had just consolidated her Christmas debts with a new bank. The Davivienda Bank “family” with a small, red house as its logo, offered Ursula the streamlined debt payment plan. With only one payment per month, on all of her debts together, Ursula felt relief. Brother Fabian was a member of a sister evangelical church to the one that Ursula was a member of, and worked with the “Davivienda family.”

The fixer had arranged the house visit with the financial fixer (who was actually a financial advisor, and employed to do house calls for the financially floundering). “Of course, *hermana*, sister. You know that this is a better situation than what you were dealing with before. You will be able to pay off your debts much faster now!” Ursula had invited me to witness the

friendly take-over of her finances by the Colombian banking giant, Davivienda. After confessing her debts to me during New Years (see Introduction and Chapter 1), and considering her options, Fabian, a financial planner himself, had suggested to Ursula to take her debts from one bank by whom she felt very betrayed, to Davivienda, where she would enjoy a “financial service appropriate for her portfolio.” At least, so said the financial fixer. Ursula’s inclusion into a new financial family was a moment of “salvation” as she put it.

This chapter considers the theological underpinnings and political weight of financial inclusion as the vanguard of financialization as disciplinary regime. While Ursula’s story is at a secondary level of inclusion (i.e., she had a bank account and various financial services at one bank already and only shifted her assets and debts from one to another), and not an example of becoming “banked” for the first time, the concept of financial inclusion sticks. Central to this query is the work of financial education, financial inclusion programs and policies, and the critical work that the category of “inclusion” does on the political economy of believing in Latin America’s history, and present, of debt.

## 4.1 Financial Inclusion: Designing Demand

Financial inclusion is defined by the World Bank as “access to financial services through formal accounts [that] enable individuals and firms to smooth consumption, manage risk, and invest in education, health, and enterprises” (Cullens, Demiguc-Kunt, and Lyman 2012, p. 3). In another World Bank publication, the concept is much more streamlined, and defined simply as “use of formal accounts” (Allen, Demirguc-Kunt, Klapper, and Peria 2012, p. 1). According to the Colombian Bank of the Republic, financial inclusion is the “integration of financial services with everyday economic activity of the population, which may lead to economic growth insofar as it may limit the costs of financialization, security, and management of resources for individuals

and for companies” (Department of Financial Stability, 2014, p. 2). For anthropologist, Anke Schwittay, financial inclusion is the “global assemblage that constitutes materially poor people as fiscal subjects, financial consumers, and monetary innovators” (2011, p. 381).<sup>44</sup>

All of these definitions assume an inclusion into *something*, through the use of technological tools and institutionally offered services of commercial banks. According to the United Nations, access to a supposedly smoothly running financial infrastructure is the key to poverty alleviation. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs extols the benefits: “Financial inclusion is universal access, at a reasonable cost, to a wide range of financial services, provided by a variety of sound and sustainable institutions...financial inclusion can improve people’s lives by generating income and economic activity, creating jobs, increasing access to social services and protecting people from unforeseen risks” (United Nations, DESA, 2015). What all of these definitions share is a concept of the individual, the subject, the person or firm that will have increased admission to the club of credit, the club that is opening up membership for those formerly excluded. This inclusion, I infer, will have an effect on their personhood. By personhood, I refer to the ways in which Ursula, and prosperity Christians in Colombia more broadly, constitute themselves as prosperous. The ethics of this particular personhood, a financialized personhood, is constructed through the practices of banking, accounting, spending, owing, and believing that all of these practices are reforming the self along with a bank account.

Becoming banked is more than a ploy of the commercial banking sector to increase profit. Higher profit margins are consequences of financial inclusion, and profit has become a motivator

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<sup>44</sup> Schwittay here follows Tania Li’s work on “assemblage” in considering community forest management as a “set of practices that encompass things, subjects, and organization as well as various systems of knowledge, objectives, and regulations” (p. 382). For Li, “assemblage” does the work of connecting “agents who connect disparate elements, accommodate sometimes contradictory knowledges, and render social problems amenable to technical solutions” (Li 2007, p. 34).



for commercial financiers, but it is also a program of discipline. Notwithstanding, for a moment, the uneven hierarchies of power and benefits that the process of financialization may produce, what the United Nations, the World Bank, the Colombian Bank of the Republic, and Schwittay all agree on is that access to the formal financial system will change people somehow. Furthermore, the prevailing assumption of the beneficence of the financial system goes without saying for the banks and the United Nations.

Schwittay demonstrates this well, explaining that financial services are an “absence that is translated into a need” which then results in “a tension at the heart of the assemblage between ‘financialization of development’ that constitutes poverty alleviation as the new frontier of capitalism, and ‘the democratization of capital’ that promises access to financial services as an eradicator of poverty” (2011, p. 383). Just as “development” itself as a concept of “improvement” is a contested and ambiguous category, the financialization of development compounds the assumptions of its effectiveness.<sup>45</sup> Those assumptions, held by the development industry and the champions of financial inclusion, consider that the financial system is one of benevolence and that lack of access and understanding of it is the main culprit of poverty.

As the World Bank states, financial inclusion is very concerned with “banking” the population. The gateway financial product of a savings account is seen as not only a pathway towards sustainable development, but also, “It [enforced saving] can also help empower women, increase productive investment and consumption, raise productivity and incomes, and increase expenditures on preventive health” (World Bank 2015). Saving money, as Max Weber projected a century ago, is a central component of becoming a responsible, and pious, capitalist.

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<sup>45</sup> There is a robust and long-standing literature on “Development” as concept. For an exploration of the literature, see Wickstead 2015. For a critique of development as Western Imperial complex, from a post-colonial perspective, see Kapoor 2008.

Improvement upon the self, as Ursula's case demonstrates, involved a forensic analysis of finances in which Ursula laid out her manifold financial sins and weaknesses in the form of credit card statements, mortgage statements, bills and financiers threats, across the living room table for a fiscal authority to see, judge, and then recommend appropriate conduct.

Ursula's pecuniary confession rendered her an ideal subject of financial inclusion into the Davivienda family. She had confessed, been judged, and now would reform her inner-self and become a "born-again borrower." To do this, Ursula began a new regimen of asking for receipts for every purchase. If receipts were unavailable (which in Colombia is a common occurrence), she now had a notebook in which she wrote down every expenditure. Ursula began to carefully analyze credit card statements, calculating interest, assessing her expenditures in comparison to her income, paying more than the minimum payment, and recognizing how much more the actual expenditure was in comparison to the price the commodity was advertised as.

A grocery shopping trip of \$100,000CUP (roughly \$50USD), paid back over twelve months, at an interest rate of 28%, results in the final cost of the groceries to be \$196,000CUP, almost double the original cost of the groceries. Ursula began to realize how much was actually being charged for use of the credit card, and her bank account. The locus of Ursula's soul, within the strictures of spreadsheets and databases, illustrates the new focus of moral management in the process of financialization. Proper economic practice became the juggernaut of a reform in Ursula's fiscal, and therefore moral, habitus. Both actions *on* the self and *of* the self required Ursula's believing practice to be deployed in the form of correct monetary behavior, in order for her inclusion into the system to be maintained in healthy form (i.e., Avoiding the debtor's list of *datacredito*, the Colombian regulating body that registers all morose debtors and thereby actively limits access to credit, even a cell phone).

However, Ursula's commitment to her new financial family was as much about managing debts in a new way as it was managing her payment options, her credit rating, and her self-governance. "I will be better! *Seré mejor!*" she affirmed as much to herself as to everyone around her, as she gathered up her receipts, and bills, and payment planning charts after the meeting. She would "be better" because she would now be part of a new family, starting anew, beginning fresh, being saved from her chaotic debt and delivered into the chimera of regulation and self-control through a stern talking-to from the financial advisers and confidence that she would make it all right again. With the words, "*Seré mejor*" Ursula outlines what financial inclusion sells and what financial inclusion manages: the fiscal management of the self.<sup>46</sup>

Her practice of confessional credit rendered Ursula "truthfully into a discourse" that has effectively shifted inclusion into the economic domain of crediting and borrowing from specialized access to happiness and proper administration of the soul, to universal accessibility (Rose 1999, p. 224).<sup>47</sup> Ursula began praying about her debt in morning services at her house church, she began speaking about it in more open way with her family, and she enlisted in an on-line financial literacy course. Her "will to improve" incorporated a balance of prayer, confession, and training. Ursula put to work a new ethic in the development of her prosperous selfhood. Her debt worked to train a soul that was constructed, not as a historical Christian, Catholic theological conception, "born in sin and subject to punishment" but "born rather out of methods of punishment, supervision, and constraint" (Foucault 1995, p. 29). Ursula felt she was being punished for irresponsible spending (don't we all?), not saving, and now was being supervised

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<sup>46</sup> Again reminiscent of Li's "Will to Improve", the drive to "be better" is a key component to the technique of "inclusion" that finance incorporates in the media and methods of including the population.

<sup>47</sup> Nicolas Rose makes this point about the realm of psychology and psychotherapy, as a new universal offer to the masses as a recipe of self-regulation, control, and the path to bringing the self to happiness and perfection. As he states, "The Protestant revolution begins a new era in the culture of the self and systems for self-direction...each individual comes to bear the obligation of doing the will of God without the benefit of learned confessors, directors, and advisors" (Rose 1999, p. 12).

anew, and central to the message from the “debt fixer” was, “you must spend less.” Restraint in consumption is one more contradictory, among the many contradictions, of finance capital. On the one hand, consumption is encouraged, on the other, financial inclusion preaches restraint.

Financial inclusion as a national project and policy was officially launched in Colombia in 2007 when the government of Alvaro Uribe decreed financial inclusion as a policy initiative for all commercial banks and the Bank of the Republic.<sup>48</sup> The initiative was in keeping with the growing worldwide infatuation with the idea of “banking the unbanked” and financially including the unbanked masses into the formal banking system by way of “financial products that specifically attend to the needs of the poor” (World Bank 2010).

The enterprise of financial inclusion dealt a favourable hand to micro-financing institutions especially, and generally re-framed the concept of poverty. Socio-economic conditions and political structures became secondary problematics to the precedence of “access.” Access to education, services, and credit have become the operating mandate of dominant economic development strategies. As the *Bank of Opportunities* proclaims, “we seek *improve access* to financial services for the population, so that they might have the same opportunities to save, obtain insurance, acquire credit, and make transfers quickly, easily, and safely” (Banca de la Oportunidades 2013). The World Bank heralds access to financial services as central to economic development. Indeed, World Bank President, Jim Yong Kim, has declared the goal of achieving “Universal Financial Access” (UFA) for 2020. The international consulting and “multi-sectoral

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<sup>48</sup> In part, this financial education and inclusion protocol was in response to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) requirements for non-member countries to enter the ranks of OECD countries. These countries are the most developed countries in the world, and at the moment OECD membership consists of an elite thirty-four countries. Financial inclusion and literacy, indeed, are now components of the PISA exams (Programme for International Student Assessment) which are one of the many requirements for country integration into the OECD. This also explains in part the initiative of the Colombian government to charge both the private commercial bank sector and the Ministry of Education, to develop curricula for financial education. See *Informe de Inclusión Financiera* 2013.

network” *Child and Youth Financial International* (CYFI) is funded by MasterCard Foundation, among others, and has worked with the Colombian Bank of the Republic, Bancolombia, and Asobancaria to develop financial inclusion and financial citizenship programs for children and youth in Colombia. They declare that “to improve the financial inclusion of every child, CYFI aims to ensure that every young person has the right to own and operate bank savings accounts by working with banks and other financial service providers” (CYFI 2015).

The point here is that, according to these institutions, the reasons for poverty, for economic inequality, for crippling debt, are ostensibly a lack of access to and education about the financial system. Once education and access are resolved, the “system” should work for individuals. At this point, individuals are responsible for their well-being. The actual composition of power relations within the structures are not questioned, nor even considered as relevant. In a recent conversation with a friend of mine, who is also the Director of Thought, Leadership, and Consultancy with CYFI, he told me, “Listen, having a bank account is a human right, and economic citizenship is the way we want children to be thinking of themselves, as part of a national community and a financial community. I mean, the best time to start training financial education is even before kids enter kindergarten. We hope that soon banks will start subsidizing entire schools, then the economic education will be a transversal value that kids get in all their subjects.”<sup>49</sup> Banks becoming the owners of institutions of learning has been ongoing for decades, as part of programs of austerity push public commons into private hands. The ScotiaBank Information Commons in Robarts Library at the University of Toronto, is just one example of many. The concern, of course, is the strings that would be attached to curricula designed by banking institutions, making finance, and a very particular perspective of what “economy” is, a

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<sup>49</sup> Personal conversation, December 2015.

program of financial proselytization, and a naturalized representation of very socially constructed ideals of prosperity.

Indeed, as the program of bankrolling schools illustrates well, finance has become the epitome of the virtual gaze. This is the gaze that operates at the level of digital accounts and numbers in order to animate a governance of the self, of the digital self, in an age of democratized economics—away from the stratified class structures of proletariat and capitalist classes, the secret of finance is found in the mirage of deregulated power, and the extrapolation and networking of the panopticon.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, in the individualized, privatized, and differentiated realm of the neo-liberal soul-scape, it is truly a risk to be excluded from the credit system. Credit, credit cards, and other forms of micro-credit, without a doubt, create possibilities of consumption, of education, of securing groceries in the midst of precarious employment, or even unemployment. Credit offers an immediate and miraculous degree of access that was not available without it. And that access would not be available without the credit.

There is no inherent morality within credit itself. Indeed, it can be a very useful and necessary form of access. Survival, then, increasingly becomes the driving dimension of prosperity. Prosperity thinking loses some of its magic when the miraculous is the only possibility for survival that remains. However, financial inclusion is also a degree of designing demand in markets oversaturated in credit; that demand for a bank account. Accompanying the need for “banking” is the work of careful calculation and management in order for the spirit of finance to flourish. As Arjun Appadurai points out the relation between redemption and calculation have

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<sup>50</sup> Deleuze inspires this idea of the virtual gaze, writing, “We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become “*dividuals*” and masses, samples, data, markets, or “*banks*.” Perhaps it is money that expresses the distinction between the two societies best, since discipline always referred back to minted money that locks gold in as a numerical standard, while control relates to floating rates of exchange, modulated according to a rate established by a set of standard currencies” (Deleuze 1992, p. 5).

long been considered matters of “religion and meaning” (Appadurai 2012, p. 5) For Appadurai, this relation has become central to human innovation and technology (Appadurai 2012, p. 5). More than only a demand for financial access, fiscal management is about constructing a certain type of financial consumer, and financial subject.<sup>51</sup>

Financial inclusion plays on the trope of prosperity, insofar as inclusion is sold as a medium for securing wealth and economic development, and correct financial conduct is coded as a question of morality. Ursula’s inclusion into the Davivienda family illustrates just that. Through becoming part of a bank “family” Ursula’s personhood is reconfigured as *homo economicus* “all the way down” as Wendy Brown has explained (Brown 2015a). Her financial subjectivity is newly reformed through a revised set of practices she is expected to carry out as part of the Davivienda family. Regular payments of her debts, careful accounting of her interest payments, prayer for restraint and acts of saving all contribute to the regimen of fiscal responsibility that acts on Ursula’s bank account as much as it does on her soul. Now having confessed her debt, Ursula enters into a new contract with a new banking family to which she is now committed.

## 4.2 Life Projects and Financial Education

Colombia’s largest bank, Bancolombia, was the first national bank to design a financial education curriculum to be implemented in elementary schools. Following the tutelage of

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<sup>51</sup> The idea of “design” here is important, and follows the proposals of Arjun Appadurai. Appadurai suggests that humans “are, and always have been, designers” and that the system of capitalist calculation is a technology of design, of human and conscious design that is central to furthering a “theory of the spirit of capitalism” (Appadurai 2016). Appadurai interprets Max Weber’s focus on calculation as a “key element” in the capitalist ethos. Indeed, Appadurai makes the bold proposal that Weber’s insights into understanding the capitalist spirit could inform the opening of an entirely new field of social science; that is, the development of a “science of the spirit of capitalism” (Appadurai 2012, p. 4). Provocatively, Appadurai asks, “has the spirit of capitalism given way to an entirely different spirit in which finance has become a magical space?” What is important for the current study, nonetheless, is Appadurai’s work in emphasizing the doctrine of *certitudo salutis*, or the Calvinist certainty of salvation in the face of extreme *uncertainty* in Weber’s development of the capitalist spirit. This uncertainty is, in part, the precarity whereof the present study has focused.

international advisory organizations, like Child and Youth Financial International and the World Bank, Bancolombia has developed an educational platform available on-line, as well as a twelve-module educational packet that begins in kindergarten. On the on-line platform, children can play games that teach them about different kinds of financial services, such as savings accounts, chequing accounts, the difference between a debit card and a credit card, interest rates, and the concept of “investment.” Central to the financial education program is the overarching theme of “*Proyecto de vida*” or ‘life-project.’ The life-project is a transversal axis of financial education programming. The children that are the focus of these programs are school-age, between five and sixteen years old, in public schools throughout the country. The Bancolombia program has been implemented in one-hundred and sixty schools throughout the country (Atlantic Coast, Antioquia, Cundinamarca, including Bogotá, Valle del Cauca, Cauca, Córdoba, and Northern Santander). One hundred and seven thousand children have been trained in the financial education modules in schools and almost ten thousand are registered on the on-line platform (Bancolombia 2016).

While Ursula, Fernanda, and Remedios enter into the financial foray through opening new bank accounts, accessing credits and credit cards for the first time, and tying a pious practice of debt management to their financialization, financial education programs are just as interested in the future of finance: children and youth. On the walls, in the office of the for-profit advising company that helped the bank write the curriculum, posters of satisfied 9-year-olds greet the newcomer to the world of inclusion. “Financial education from Bancolombia gives me the possibilities of working for the future of a new society” shares one eloquent sixth-grader. “Financial education has taught me to save money to live my life project” beams another



youngster. The *leitmotif* of “life project” places financial inclusion within an overtly moral register. Yet this is nothing new for strategies of banking the poor.

While presented in the flashy gloss of the early twenty-first century, the strategies of financial inclusion are not all that recent. The move to “bank” populations in Europe and Euro-America through the implementation of national currencies and paper money began already in the late eighteenth century. Campaigns of education and inclusion named the practice of hoarding money under the mattress as “barbaric” and the “civilizing mission” of generating national reserves was presented as a democratizing move. As Gustav Peebles explains, the socialization of the hoard in the form of nationalized currency, a central reserve, and democratization of banking played a central role in Europe and Euro-America’s rise to global dominance. “One can see” Peebles quips, “that history attests to the gradual creation of one, giant mattress [under which the collective savings of the nation should be secured]. In the United States, this mattress is called Fort Knox” (Peebles 2008, p. 236). Peebles explains that “hoarding” has been a maligned practice for centuries.<sup>52</sup> Hoarding has been associated with “barbaric” practices of immobilizing capital and even the humanity of those who remained outside the financial system, was put into question (p. 240).

National currency and the accessibility of banking services as a campaign of empire, also resulted in the elevation of the practice of saving (in a bank) a question of moral good, and proper Christian practice. Christian reformers were the first advocates for banking services for the poor in England. Indeed, “Sunday banks” were the first banks in which deposits were accepted after

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<sup>52</sup> Peebles goes so far as to note that Dante reserved the Fourth Ring of Hell for “hoarders and wasters.” Hoarding was associated with selfishness, greed, and deep irrationality. Even Marx offers his critique of hoarding as a barbaric practice of “people of the East”, a practice he associates with pure ignorance. Peebles furthers this analysis through offering that from Keynes to more recent anthropological evaluations, those who keep their wealth out of circulation of the economy, even in societies far removed from any European or North American context, are regarded as “antisocial” and even “outside the community” (Peebles 2008, p. 238-39).

the services. Oliver Horne's 1947, *A history of the savings bank*, explains that influence of Jeremy Bentham, the inventor of the Panopticon and the inspiration for the constancy of an external gaze, was central in the establishment of the first "Industry Houses" that would employ the "burdensome poor" and who should retain "Frugality Banks." "If no Industry House was near, the Church Vestry might serve as the bank" explains Horne (p. 28). The problem of the poor and their assumed hoarding tendencies was the focus of the "Sunday Banks" and the "Frugality Banks" of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries in Scotland and Great Britain. Similar to the logic of financial inclusion in Colombia today, the early charitable reformers from religious groups, like Priscilla Wakefield who championed the first Sunday Banks in the region of Tottenham, said:

From observing that many of the poor, particularly servants, either squandered away their savings or lent them to those less prudent than themselves, from the want of a convenient opportunity of placing them where they would be secure, it occurred to me that an association might be formed which would afford them complete safety, in their own neighbourhood, by the guarantee of a few respectable persons of property.

(Horne 1945, p. 25-26)

The pooling of savings served a regulatory role as much as serving an important role in bringing greater sums of money into circulation, strengthening national economies and currencies.<sup>53</sup> Peebles offers, "by circulating one's economic wealth as capital, one is announcing a *trust* in social institutions, a willingness to *trust* things outside oneself" (2008, p. 240, emphasis

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<sup>53</sup> It is important to note the connection here between trust and money circulation in the beginning stages of capitalist forms of production, in which currency and money were both a signifier of value as well as value itself. This central contradiction in capitalism is one that Marx fleshes out in some detail in the first volume of *Capital*, chapters 3-10. For further reading on the relationship trust and money, see Dodd 1994.

added). This is an important component of the growing trust in the financial system that has been necessary over the last centuries, to secure the believing structure that sustains international finance today. These moves towards a centralized banking system are often written into history as simply the natural evolution of economics, and, indeed, part and parcel of the beneficent and “improved effectiveness” of banking institutions. As the “Father of Savings Banks” Henry Duncan, attested,

Those who know anything of the situation of the lower orders will readily be aware of the temptations and discouragements to which such a plan [to store money under the mattress or under a rock] is necessarily subjected...The temptation to break in upon the little stock on every emergency might be too strong to resist. (Horne 1947, p. 42-43)

The process of banking the poor, even two centuries ago, was a civilizing process as much as an effort to produce a financially responsible subject. The objective was to train money handling as much as train the body—and the soul.

This process, of course, developed a special class of workers who would take over the commons of public assets and relieve the worry of individuals in protecting their hoard. These were the bankers and bill brokers, and the upstanding property owners (Peebles 2008, p. 241). By removing the temptations of money from the individual and transferring responsibility to “upstanding members of society” the church or the banker, in these early cases, the “proper use of money” was instilled in an errant and still uneducated populace of the “newly banked” or in modern parlance, the “newly served.” This was a positive development for all parties involved, so goes the history, as it converted tiny hoards belonging to individuals into interest-bearing capital

and provided a new source of investment money. At the same time, the newly inaugurated into the banking system were trained in bodily comportment and moral regulations befitting of the new status they had acquired as “diligent investors” (Peebles 2008, p. 243). As one “banking school” taught, the manners and benefits of depositing money required combed hair and appropriate attire (Horne 1947, p. 84-5).

Financial education and inclusion, then, began as an intentional campaign to strengthen national currencies through the wide circulation of paper money and a democratization of the banking system. Peebles points out the importance of the banking endeavor in the establishment of the European powers moving into the Industrial Revolution and the twentieth century, citing an article from the *Edinburgh Review*, shortly after the Battle of Waterloo: “It would be difficult, we fear, to convince either the people or their rulers that such an event [the spread of savings banks] is of far more importance and far more likely to increase the happiness and even the greatness of the nation than the most brilliant success of its arms or the most stupendous improvement of its trade or agriculture—and yet we are persuaded that it is so” (Horne 1947, p. 50, cited in Peebles 2008, p. 243-4). I belabour this history because in the era of financial inclusion of the twenty-first century, much of the rhetoric and discourse of the morality of banking the poor remains a constant. And inclusion into the financial system is as much a project of the financial elite, as it is a project of the charismatic faith this study considers.

This history of anti-hoarding is also part of United States fiscal history, and thereby, Colombian banking history. In the 1930s Herbert Hoover initiated an “Anti-Hoarding Campaign” in response to the Great Recession (Phillips 1994). In 1933, incoming United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a governmental decree, Executive Order 6102, that made it illegal to “hoard gold coin, gold bullion, and gold certificates within the continental United

States by individuals, partnerships, associations, and corporations” (Lord 1944, p. 506). It should be noted that the development of the Colombian Bank of the Republic, its operations and its philosophy, was significantly influenced by economists and “bank doctors” based out of the United States, who had inherited English banking systems, and were involved in the development of the Central Banking system of the United States that became one of the most powerful institutions in the United States, and, arguably, the world, in the wake of the Great Recession and Roosevelt’s “New Deal” initiated as it was by Herbert Hoover (Phillips 1994). Already in 1923, the Colombian government invited Edwin Walter Kremmerer, a renowned “bank doctor” who was in high demand as a consultant and advisor for the development of “healthy” banking systems around the world in the post-World War 1 era. Kremmerer advised the Colombian government to establish a Central Bank, which became the Colombian Bank of the Republic. The creation of the Bank of the Republic constituted centralized control over money creation (minting and printing) and thereby established Federal management of liquidity in the Colombian economy.

In a 2014 missive, the Colombian Bank of the Republic called for individuals to put their “coin into circulation” through spending and investing (by opening bank accounts), stating: “the high demand for metallic money [coin]...is related to public hoarding...which has restricted free circulation of coin as a method of payment and generates pressure on other forms of payment” (Banco de la República 2014). This hoarding of coin had to do with, on the one hand, the lowest denomination that had been printed in bills until 2013, the \$1,000 pesos bill, had been taken out of circulation and is now produced in coin. Second, the call from public institutions for Colombians to “save money” backfired as millions of Colombians took their new, \$1000 peso

coins, along with all the other coinage, \$500, \$200, \$100 pesos, and threw them into piggy banks, instead of using them in circulation.

When the public sector, the banks, the government, and the public education system enjoined the Colombian public to “become banked” the meaning is to put their piggy-bank savings, the savings under the mattress, the money buried in a field, into a bank account, and simultaneously, affect the manner in which individuals think about saving and money. As the director of financial inclusion for the Bank of the Republic told me in an interview, “Colombians don’t have a culture of saving. They don’t trust institutions. But we need to change this culture. Banking the population is a way to change the culture of hoarding money under mattresses and in holes dug in the ground. Their money is so much safer in a bank.” In conversation with Pastor Miguel in Garzal a few weeks after this interview in the Bank in Bogotá, I asked him about people burying their money. “Oh, of course people do that. Yes. They bury it in a secret hiding place on their land. Or under their house.” I asked why people did not put their money in a bank. The pastor laughed. “Because it’s not safe there!”

### 4.3 Fernanda’s Inclusion

I sat in Fernanda’s kitchen, watching her busily make coffee. First, she reached for the aluminum *chocolatera*, or chocolate maker, an appliance also appropriate for making *tinto*, thick, and often very sweet, coffee. She filled it with water, and set it on the gas stove to heat. She stirred in raw, brown sugar, and then waited for the water to boil. As the water heated, she got out the *Sello Rojo* coffee. The recognizable red, shiny bag flashed and my taste buds activated, already anticipating the hot, sweetness that I knew was on its way. It was a sunny morning, but ceramic tile floors always give a cool, mountain chill to a room on the first floor of any apartment building in Bogotá. Fernanda lived in a quaint residential neighbourhood in Bogotá’s east end.

Her apartment was in a gated residence (*conjunto cerrado*), guarded by security guards around the clock, with large shotguns under their desk and muzzled Rottweilers who sniffed cars for explosives upon entry into the parkade. As a public school teacher, and middle class to be sure, Fernanda was proud to show me her lovely home. It was a sign of God's blessing upon her life that she was a homeowner; that is how she explained it to me.

Busied with the coffee, Fernanda told me about the first moment she realized God was "working in her life." It was at her mother's funeral, when she felt inexplicably compelled to give an offering to a Pentecostal pastor from her mother's church. "I was still an atheist...I never understood what the Lord did with me." The water boiled, and Fernanda turned off the burner, scooped two heaping tablespoons of ground coffee, stirred, and then covered the *chocolatera* with a plate to let the coffee "sit" or filter through the water. She poured the coffee into a cup that proudly read "Colombian Coffee" through a cheesecloth sieve. Finally, placing the tiny *tinto* cup on a tiny saucer in front of me, Fernanda sat down and told me that at her mother's funeral she had been moved to give money to the pastors of the church. "I saw them [the pastors] and I told them, "take, take this offering. Use some of it for your buses and transportation to visit people, and give the rest as an offering to your church." Fernanda tells the story of her gradual conversion or as she puts it, "drawing closer to the feet of the Lord" her "salvation" and "being well with God" as a genealogy of small miracles. And many of those small miracles were small financial interactions, or what she called, *milagros cotidianos*, "everyday miracles." "The first thing I did was give them money, and I didn't even know why. God works in wondrous ways."

Notably, Fernanda describes her initial participation in God's plan as through the gift of money, what Simon Coleman has convincingly analyzed in terms of the "Charismatic gift" (Coleman 2004). The pastors of her mother's church had visited Fernanda's mother in her last

days, and Fernanda noted, “my mother’s face changed when the pastors spoke with her about God, or read the Bible to her.” In retrospect, Fernanda realized that the first moment she began to include herself, or feel drawn to participate, in the community of believers of the *Mision Carismatica Internacional*, MCI, was the moment she economically engaged. The practice of giving money to these particular pastors for Fernanda was completely different than “giving alms to [Catholic] priests who take everything, and all other manner of dishonesty.” This was different. This was a true and God-directed decision, according to Fernanda. It was her first promise, her first pact, her first sacrifice, her first contract with God, her first debt payment, and her first commitment sealed through financial transaction. It was a ritual practice of believing and inclusion into a realm she had not yet comprehended.

Inclusion for Fernanda, into God’s Kingdom, into the community that is the MCI, in her cell group led by a Senator of the Republic, Claudia Wilches, and her inclusion into the nation, turned on a central practice of monetary transaction. What began to emerge in Fernanda’s story is that financial transaction has been a signifier of vital importance in her “faith journey.” After having gifted her mother’s church with an offering, she had a miraculous experience only a few months later, with a sister who was already a “pastor” in the church.<sup>54</sup> “What do you want? Ask for it, and I will pray for it for you” Fernanda’s sister had told her. Fernanda asked for an apartment. Just three months after praying for an apartment, Fernanda won the lottery in a work sponsored rotating savings and credit association (ROSCAS).<sup>55</sup> This win was enough for

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<sup>54</sup> In the MCI, members who lead consolidated cell groups of twelve or more members and meet regularly with their “disciples” are recognized in the ranks of the MCI as “pastors.” There are dozens of pastors at the MCI.

<sup>55</sup> ROSCAS are commonly found throughout the world’s rural and urban poor. Generally, the manner in which these ROSCAS operate is, individuals come together in a neighbourhood, workplace, church, union, etc., and everyone contributes a specified sum of money. Often money is contributed to a common pot on a monthly or weekly basis. At the end of an agreed period of time, a name is drawn, and a member of the association takes home the money that has been collected. It is an alternative savings and credit system, operational ostensibly throughout the Global South and post-colonial world. For more, see Gugerly 2007.



Fernanda to put a down payment on her apartment. She was now eligible for a loan from the bank. “If it hadn’t been for that miracle, I would never have been eligible for a credit from the bank.” The economic miracle was more than simply providing Fernanda with the liquidity she needed to become “debt worthy.” It was, in her mind, a direct intervention from God in one of the most resolutely miraculous and difficult areas of life for members of the MCI, and Colombia generally: finance.

Analyzing debt relations also aids the project of unveiling the religious dimensions of a spatialized market and its projected goals of encompassment (Ferguson and Gupta 2008). Inclusion into the national economy of Colombia, as into the MCI, as into the global market, must be interrogated spatially, for the first question that emerges in a discussion of inclusion and encompassment, must be “inclusion into what?” in order to understand debt as inclusion itself. As Dutch geographer, Manuel B. Aalbers precisely captures, understanding financial crises is essentially an exercise in parsing the difference between the “local and the global” (Aalbers 2009). By this he means that the actions focused in a presumably localized scope of action have impact at a global level, and vice-versa.

This exercise of considering the spatializing of the market collapses already shaky borders between the seen and the unseen, the believed and the practiced, the “now” and “then” (Smith 1987), the “local” and the “global” the real and the possible. Practices of prosperity in Colombia are productive of the relations of difference that brand financialized capitalism through indebtedness, and into hierarchical power relations of encompassment (Ferguson and Gupta,

2008).<sup>56</sup> Inclusion into the economy as encompassment into the virtuous family of God rides on debt in emerging Colombia.

#### 4.4 Civilizing Missions

“You have to get them to trust you. The banks won’t give you any more loans if you can’t show you’re trustworthy.” Gloria toured me around her make-shift tailoring shop, in the back room of her small, yet immaculate house at the edge of Bogotá. Gloria was another member of the “Solidarity Banks” funded by Opportunity International, and managed by the Christian NGO discussed in Chapter 2. She showed me all the cloth, the different patterns, the two sewing machines, the little table with a cash box and calculator, with a spreadsheet carefully drawn out by hand on a pad of paper. This was the business she had been able to cobble together through the microloans she had received from a woman’s bank, a crediting bank that served only low-income women entrepreneurs. “Making them trust you” was the focus of the conversation I was having with Gloria, and she explained to me what that meant to her.

As she fried up plantain for us to snack on, she explained, “well, the bank comes to visit the shop and they need to see everything is clean and organized. I need to be clean and organized” Gloria laughs. Her self-deprecation seems only one more insult to the close regulation the loan bank imposes on Gloria’s unobtrusive life. “I need to have all of my bank statements up to date and show that I am paying my debt off in good time. But I am happy to do that. If I show them I am trustworthy and they will give me another loan. I have taken out 3 loans already.”

Gloria has been a successful borrower. Her debt trains her comportment, as much as it trains her

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<sup>56</sup> Ferguson and Gupta’s concept of “encompassment” is parsed out in their 2008 article and is tied to their concept of “the state” in a moment of globalization. They juxtapose the term “encompassment” with “verticality.” By verticality they refer to the “central and pervasive idea of the state as an institution somehow “above” civil society, community, and family.” Encompassment, on the other hand, conceptually fuses state and nation, and places the state “within the ever widening series of circles that begins with the family and local community and ends with the system of nation-states” (Ferguson and Gupta 2008, p. 987).

business. These practices of correct behaviour and appropriate hygiene fit within the grid of financial inclusion and education. The cultural designs form an elaborate web of moral regulation that ushers in what Gloria, and so many other newly banked and freshly credited Colombian Christians, associate with prosperity.

In the curriculum of financial education promoted by Bancolombia, the civilizing mission of the bank is unmistakable. The education program begins in kindergarten, although the developer of the curriculum confided in an interview that she thought financial education should begin as soon as children “are learning to speak and are copying the actions and habits of their parents.” The focus of financial education for children, as mentioned above, is the conflation of “life project” and “responsible banking practice.” The life project involves the children identifying their strengths and weaknesses, then declaring how they envision their future, and imagining the steps they will need to fulfill that dream. On the virtual platform of the Bank Foundation that directs the financial education program, children are led through a series of exercises from games that distinguish between “needs” and “desires” to “calculating interest rates.” “When you have a life project” the website home page animates, “it’s easier to orient your actions and understand the impact they will have, and take responsibility for them” (Fundación Bancolombia 2016). Inclusion into the financial system is an assumed improvement on hoarding money under the mattress, as well as an individualization and privatization of responsibility for present and future action. Managing debt is central to this education, and offer a frame for understanding the dimensions of the market into which financial inclusion ushers the newly incorporated.

Debt relations are productive of hierarchical inclusion, or “vertical encompassment” as James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta framed the spatial dimensions of the state, following James

Scott's imaginative proposal for "seeing like a state" (Ferguson and Gupta 2008; Scott 1998). Indeed, debt relations are particularly insightful measures for imagining and framing the space of the market. In this sense, market encompassment scales economic relations at varying degrees of debt. Individual and micro-debt is encompassed by household debt, which is encompassed by national debt, which is encompassed by international debt markets and creditor-debtor relations at a global, imperial scale.

One of the great mysteries of capitalism, however, is the manner in which relationality is hidden within the fetishism of commodities, in which material relations are established between people, and social relations are built between things, as has been discussed in previous chapter. The fetishism of the commodity is a process of alienating the labourer from her labour. This is why understanding the spatiality of the market is key to understanding the hierarchical structure of relations that debt produces, that credit veils, and the ritualized practices that frame this hierarchical structure. "The spatial fix" is defined by Marxist geographer David Harvey as the "geographical expansions and restructuring as a temporary solution to crises understood in terms of the over-accumulation of capital" (Harvey 2006, p. xviii). Harvey explains that the landscapes created by capitalist modes of production are constructive of "regions" of activity and purpose in the hierarchical system that debt relations animate.<sup>57</sup> Harvey suggests that the "conceptual muddle" of "global-local relations" can be cleared through a complex understanding of the dynamics of the different spatio-temporal frames that help immensely in understanding the

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<sup>57</sup> Harvey proposes that a three-pronged spatio-temporal approach is required to understand capitalisms dimensions and scales, and its inherent contradictions. For Harvey, the three theories are: absolute, relative, and relational. Absolute theories of spatio-temporality, inspired by the work of (among others) Newton, Descartes, and Kant, suppose that "space is a fixed and unchanging grid, quite different from time" (Harvey 2006, p. xix). In the world of relative theory, associated primarily with the work of Einstein, it is a world of motion that defines space-time structures that are "neither fixed nor Euclidean" (Harvey 2006). Here the relative space-time is the realm of exchange value, or commodities and money in motion. Lastly, the relational view holds that value, as an internal relation within the commodity, hides the historical geography of the labour process. All three of these frames, Harvey insists, must be held in dialectical tension with each other. None exist without the other two.

spatiality of power and control over space in the market. Harvey explains, “we cannot say that the value relation causes the factory to close down [in Mexico] as if it [value] is some external abstract force. It is changing concrete conditions of labour in China when mediated through exchange processes in relative space time that transforms value as a social relation in such a way as to bring the concrete labour process in Mexico to closure” (Harvey 2006, p. 144).

#### 4.5 Decolonizing Prosperity

For Fernanda and for Gloria, all of these practices of consumption—from the basic level of survival to the brazen level of a down payment on a house—were revelatory of God’s abundant love for them. The practices of prosperity became central to Fernanda’s engagement with the MCI and Gloria’s involvement with a local micro-credit NGO. At the MCI, congregants consume the dozens of books written by lead Pastor Castellanos and his wife, Claudia, as well as the other tomes by evangelists and pastors from around the world, such as Benny Hinn, David Yonggi Cho, and Joel Osteen. The “Commercial Center” at the church was constantly abuzz with women and men contemplating the new jewelry collections that came weekly, CDs and DVDs of the local celebrity church music group, *Generación 12*, clothing, stationary, and all other manner of products not only attracted the consuming habits of an upwardly mobile congregation, but indeed branding them as a particular kind of Christian in the streets of Bogotá. Youth proudly sport their G12 backpacks and notebooks, while the women recognize each other’s jewelry and umbrellas, and the gentlemen compare Bibles. These acts of consumption proudly announce inclusion into the institution of the MCI. They also betray a purchasing power made possible by an increasingly affluent and also indebted urban population in Bogotá. This conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1918; Mason 1981; Douglas and Isherwood 1996; Schui 2014) marks the faithful as fully included in the MCI, and proud of it.

Yet, the promise of prosperity offered in remuneration for faithful practice is only where the MCI and Christian credit begin the program of inclusion into God's Kingdom. The promise animates a louder discourse of inclusion coming from governments, banks, and non-governmental institutions in Colombia. Invitations to "become part of something new" or at the very least something "better" the promise drips with potential prosperity, advancement, and the ever-elusive "development." It is tremendously appealing, of course. However, the promise and its ethnographic analysis reveal much more depth than simply shallow material wealth being the sole animation of prosperity, and certainly not the only objective of the MCI, micro-credit organizations, or Colombia's banking sector.

Prosperity practice is perhaps most legible at the level of the ostentatious. The study of Prosperity Christianity has indeed spent significant time analyzing these manifestations of prosperity practices that include the purchase of such non-essentials as new television sets, million-dollar houses, Apple tablets, thousand-dollar shoes, fancy cars, and the like by successful Prosperity Evangelists. From Susan Harding's *The Book of Jimmy Falwell* in 2001 to more recent articles like, "Did Christianity Cause the Crash" published in the *Atlantic* in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, prosperity theology has been cast in a critical light, not quite escaping the "repugnant other" denomination by scholars.

Perhaps the best known critiques of the Prosperity Gospel as the vanguard of neoliberalism are found in the work of, among others, Jean and John Comaroff, for example "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming" (2000), the work of William E. Connolly (2008), and more recently, Jason Hackworth (2013). These studies tend to position Christianity in relationship to economic and political change. Either as victim or reactive force, variously named Evangelical, or Prosperity, or Charismatic, Christianity is kept in a separate

sphere from the economic and political. Rather than placing religious practice apart from economic practice, this study places emphasis on the connecting nodes of practice between religion and economy. Prosperity practices, then, betray the closed off-ness of stark distinction between the sacred and the proverbial profanity of the market, and rather exist and emerge precisely in the spaces of encounter between economic and religious. An analysis of prosperity Christianity from this purview overrides any judgment of correct doctrine or theology, and rather works to identify a broader phenomenon. Yet, prosperity is the promise not of a select few Pentecostal churches in the Global South.<sup>58</sup> Nor is it only about flat screen televisions.<sup>59</sup>

Centuries of colonialism in the Americas have found epistemological, even ontological, justification in “prosperity.” In the very idea of Latin America (Mignolo 2002) the prosperity of dominant classes has been cloaked in the ethic of coloniality and an ethic of entitlement veiled in religious airs. Pope Nicholas V issued the papal bull *Romanus Pontifex* in 1455, saying as much:

We weighing all and singular the premises with due meditation, and noting that since we had formerly by other letters of ours granted among other things free and ample faculty to the aforesaid King Alfonso -- to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit -- by having secured the said faculty, the said King Alfonso, or, by his authority, the aforesaid infante, justly and lawfully has acquired and possessed, and doth possess, these islands, lands, harbors, and seas, and they do of right belong and pertain to the said King Alfonso and his successors. (*The Doctrine of Discovery* 2014).

According to Walter Mignolo, many Latin American scholars, and scholars of Latin America and Americanness at large, would argue that the colonial project of “inventing” America

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<sup>58</sup> Simon Coleman makes a significant argument in *The Globalization of Charismatic Christianity*, 2000, in his ethnography of a Faith Church in Upsala, Sweden.

<sup>59</sup> See Naomi Haynes (2012) work on prosperity in the Copper Belt of Mozambique.

is a project that is on-going. For Mignolo, this invention of the “idea of America” was an historical moment in which capital became capitalism (Mignolo 2005). Mignolo explains that the colonial and empirical project of Europe through the Enlightenment, to the era of Modernity was accompanied by, tied to, necessarily a part of coloniality. Mignolo explains that the “logic of coloniality” can be understood within four domains of human experience: “i) the economic, through appropriation of land, exploitation of labour, and control of finance; ii) the political, through control of authority; iii) the civic; control of gender and sexuality; and iv) the epistemic and the subjective” (Mignolo 2005, p. 11). This colonial history, as it is given through fits and starts, resists linear historical lines because, as Mignolo also suggests, in order to understand coloniality as it operates today as a program of power one must recognize its heterogenous historico-structural form. To understand the ongoing project of modern and late capitalist forms of accumulation and subjectivation is to understand capitalism as continuing its expansion over lands, over bodies, and over souls.

Max Weber did not consider Latin America in his analysis of industrial capitalism and the spirits that guided its progress. In Latin America, the Spirit was not of a protestant nature, yet the end game of colonial capitalism was designed within an effectively religious tenor (Kinsbruner UT, 2005; Lugo UT, 2008; Croucher and Weiss, Springer, 2011; Cushner, 1982; Song 2011). The prosperity of the empires of Spain and Portugal, two of the most significant colonizers of the Americas, developed within the “civilizing project” of the Christian conquistadores. The Americas were conquered, and particular historical understandings of prosperity shaped religious colonial America. Of course, prosperity in the fifteenth century was understood differently than prosperity in contemporary Colombia. However, the point here is that accumulation by dispossession, what during the Conquest was a brutal overtaking of land, looting of communities,



and indigenous genocide, has transformed in Latin America to today being all of those things including now dispossession by financial accumulation of credit card debt. Capitalism develops differently in conquered lands than in conquering lands. The spirits, then, that guide its movement look and act differently. *Where* capitalism develops determines *how* capitalism develops. It is a spatialized and emplaced process of “vertical encompassment” (Ferguson and Gupta 2008).

Capitalist practices of prosperity within a Weberian analytic, many centuries after the launch of colonial capitalism, focused on industrialized capitalism in the United States and Europe, and tied capitalist development to a distinctly pious ascetic, a Calvinist focus on predestination, and an impenetrable individualism (Weber 1958). Weber staked the claim for a series of interrogations into the “mentality of Western capitalism” (Weber 1958). Of course, Weber was very critical of German Catholicism’s “traditional, hostile to progress, and culturally ‘inferior’” approach to economic development, above all, their “unworldly” pietism that seemed antithetical to express participation and animation of the “philosophy of avarice” championed by the Protestant founders of North America. Invoking the famous words spoken by the quintessential capitalist, Benjamin Franklin, Weber describes what this “spirit” of capitalism that separated the New World from the Old might be:

Remember that time is money...Remember that credit is money...Remember that money is of the prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on. The most trifling actions that affect a man’s credit are to be regarded. The sound of your hammer at five in the morning, or eight at night, heard by a creditor, makes him easy six-months longer (Weber 1958, p. 48-50).

Practices of prosperity for Weber’s Protestant capitalists were rooted in a disciplined ethic of austerity and accumulation. This had as much to do with their Protestant sensibilities as it did

with the site and mechanics of capitalist development and production. Colonial capitalism animated a different set of practices of prosperity. Although importantly tied to Catholic structures of organization, governmentality, and bureaucracy, Latin America was produced by colonial capitalist progress and indeed was not, has never been, detached from capitalist development in North America. Indeed, there are those who suggest that if it were not for the conquest of the Americas, global capitalism, as we know it today, would not have developed.<sup>60</sup> The genealogy of both colonialism and capitalism entangle endlessly with the shifting religious landscapes of the Americas. The emergence of religious practices and discourses that give animation to prosperity practices within the matrix of colonial capitalist development are as much a response to said development, as they are productive of it.

In the current wave of capitalist emergence, financial capitalism, pluralistic and diversified practices of prosperity are required for furthering financial reach. In this sense, the democratization of Latin America that took hold in the region in the early decades of the twentieth century has been as important to religious diversification as economic liberalization has been. Far from confirming David Stoll's well-known question, "Is Latin America turning Protestant?" religious diversification and pluralization in Latin America has been the trend of the last century. Religious pluralization, or the diversification of religious freedoms to officially recognize religious traditions other than Roman Catholicism, has also become a central component of Latin America's growing inclusion into the global community, including growing inclusion into the world's expanding financial institutions. Diversified practices of prosperity cross the borders between bounded sites of religion and practice. Prosperity today is the promise that

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<sup>60</sup> This is far from a closed debate. For further reading on the discussion between the the so-called "Decolonial theorists and critical approaches to Latin American studies and liberation philosophy, see: Escobar 2011. For an excellent review of the literature, see Coronil 2008.

Also, Mendieta 2008; p. 301. For more reading on Latin America theoretical thought see Ribeiro2000; Castro-Gómez, 2008, p. 269.

capitalism holds, shrouded in the mysteries of microeconomics, financial architectures, central banks, and religion. Practices of prosperous inclusion take place as both religious and economic practices.

#### 4.6 Inclusion into what?

Banks are the tallest buildings in Bogotá. The Bogotá skyline, beautiful, full of light and life, always moving never quite completely concrete, reflects a definitive imprint of vertical relations in its architecture (O'Neill and Fogarty-Valenzuela 2014). The tallest building, the *Colpatria* building, illuminates the evenings in Bogotá, with a light show running up and down its fifty stories. On major Canadian holidays, a Canadian flag undulates across the windows. *Colpatria*, one of Colombia's largest banks, was recently acquired by Canada's Scotiabank and is now under Canadian management. Scotia bank's slogan, "You're richer than you think" reverberates in Colombia and twists under the precarious weight of Colombia's growing consumer debt. The promise of course is unmistakable. The Canadian flag can be seen from the hills of *Usme* on a clear night.

On a sunny day, Bogotá sparkles as light reflects off the high-rises and skyscrapers, totems to Colombia's successful project of economic development. The places and spaces where the market happens are thought to be housed in these impressive concrete structures. However, as an analysis of financial practice reveals, the market happens in every transaction, in every miracle of credit, in every withdrawal from an automated bank machine, in every purchase, in every offering.

Gloria, Fernanda, and the millions of other Colombians who seek to be "included" may first wonder: included into what, precisely? At first glance, this might seem obvious. For

Fernanda, primarily, it is inclusion into the MCI. By extension, this allows for inclusion into a cell group led by a Senator of the Republic, as well as stronger connection with her family (one of Fernanda's sisters, again, is part of the same cell group, another sister is an MCI pastor in Southern Colombia) and also an imaginary of the nation of Colombia that she can believe in, and she can invest in. For Remedios in Usme, financial inclusion into a market-economy that suits her entrepreneurial interest is the goal of her inclusion.

By further extension, her financial inclusion also guarantees her religious inclusion into a prosperity-based Christianity, as well as assures her ability to build her house and provide food for her family. For banks, inclusion is tied not only to participation in the economy. It is also appropriate performance of a financialized subjectivity that can be, and is taught in religious centers such as the MCI, micro-credit programs such as the one Gloria participates in, and elaborate programs of financial education, training, and public outreach. Financial inclusion, then, in a broad sense of the word, refers to inclusion into the "market" and the practices necessary to participate in the market correctly.

The market, can be regarded as a spatialized entity, one that has limits and borders, a place that one can be inside or outside of. The spatialized consideration of the market evokes J.Z. Smith's critique of Mircea Eliade's demarcation through difference in his comparative project of defining sacred space. "Comparison requires the acceptance of difference as the grounds of it being interesting, and a methodical manipulation of that difference to achieve some stated cognitive end" (Smith 1987, p. 14). For Smith, and the many voices before him who contributed to his work of re-spatializing religion, ritual practice is "above all, an assertion of difference" (Smith 1987, p. 109). Bourdieu reiterates this assessment when he claims that the hierarchization

constructed by difference is a “strategy of integration in and through division” (Bourdieu 1977 cited in Bell 2009, p. 103).

## 4.7 Foreign Debts: Inclusion as Encompassment

Debt as a national practice of inclusion has a storied history in twentieth century Latin America. Being included into the global economy like a state, to borrow from James Ferguson’s concept of “encompassment” and the very idea of spatializing the state, is a helpful category to think with when considering the inclusion into the market, or the economy. As Ferguson and Gupta explain, “it is here that it becomes possible to speak of the State ... as constructed entities that are conceptualized and made socially effective through particular imaginative and symbolic devices that require study.” I suggest that it is important to consider the economy as spatialized, in the way that Ferguson and Gupta suggest thinking about a state. The economy can be conceptualized through the particular devices that require study (Ferguson and Gupta 2009, p. 981). Inclusion into this market, the specifically capitalist market, has been stimulated through debt relations in the Americas. The region of Latin America and its inclusion into the global economy through (primarily U.S.) external financing began in the nineteenth century in accordance with the Monroe Doctrine, and broader geo-political contexts.<sup>61</sup> As economist Victor Bulmer-Thomas reflects, “Throughout the subcontinent, it was generally thought that the best

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<sup>61</sup> The Monroe Doctrine is generally regarded as the response of the United States to the encroachment of the Napoleonic wars on the Western Hemisphere, and was the result of a declaration made by the fifth United States President, James Munroe. On December 2, 1823, Munroe declared to the European powers and fellow statesmen, “...The government of the United States has been desirous, by this friendly proceeding, of manifesting the great value which they [governments of Russia and Great Britain] have invariably attached to the friendship of the emperor, and their solicitude to cultivate the best understanding with his government. In the discussions to which this interest has given rise and in the arrangements by which they may terminate, the occasion has been judged proper for asserting, as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers...We owe it, therefore, to candor and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those [European] powers, to declare that *we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety.*” (Gilman 1883, p. 161-164; Emphasis in the original.)

hope for rapid economic advancement in Latin America was based in a more direct integration into the world economy by way of exporting products and importing capital” (Bulmer-Thomas, 66; translation by author).

To explain, the Monroe Doctrine, as historian Samuel Eliot Morison quips, “...was the declaration of a policy that had slowly ripened with American nationalism. As such it so well suited the position, the interest and sentiment of the United States, as to become a doctrine, deriving its sanction as no less from faith than from experience; and like religious doctrines, used to justify their later developments that their founder would hardly have recognized” (Morison 1924, p. 27). While the declaration is often read by historians as American isolationism and exceptionalism—a break from European encompassment—it was certainly an act of inclusion of Latin America into the hemispheric empirical architecture that the United States government then leveraged to balance power across the Atlantic. One of the effects of the Monroe Doctrine was staving off European armies seeking debt payments from Latin American countries.

Even before the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine, hierarchical relations of debt and land ownership blurred lines of sovereignty and autonomy as many national economies of the region have found themselves dwelling in varying degrees of sovereign debt crises from the time of Independence. The implementation of the Monroe Doctrine effectively spatialized Latin America in reference to North America (more specifically, the United States) and marked Latin America off from European colonial advancement. Of course, this uneven inclusion has produced a particular stratagem of power, a matrix of contradicting invitations to inclusion in the broadly hierarchizing order, which is the market.

Here we also must invoke the spirit of Louis Dumont, and his conceptualization of “hierarchy.” For Dumont, as quoted by J.Z. Smith, states, “I believe that hierarchy is not, essentially, a chain of superimposed commands, nor even a chain of beings of decreasing dignity, nor yet a taxonomic tree, but a relation that can succinctly be called ‘the encompassing of the contrary’” (Smith 1987, p. 55). Smith later goes on to conclude that, “the royal place is, at one and the same time, both the most inclusive category...and the most sharply distinguished and delineated.” (Smith 1987, p. 57). The encompassment, or inclusion, of Latin American states into an encompassing global structure of biopolitical governmentality has been channeled through sovereign debt relations (Smith 1987, p.63). The very contradictory nature of this economic hierarchy of debt relations begins to unveil paths towards understanding deeper contradictions within financialized capitalist system (Harvey 1980).

It was the debt crisis of the 1980s that, according to Bulmer-Thomas, most significantly and devastatingly affected contemporary Latin American economic history (Bulmer-Thomas 2010). It was the “lost decade” preceded by significant shifts in the global economic agenda that pushed Latin American nations into the program of financialization through debt relations and structural adjustment at levels of both collective nationhood, and individual personhood.

The dissolution of the Bretton Woods agreement in 1971, the OPEC oil crisis of 1973, the unhinging of global currency from the international gold standard and the shift to the U.S. Dollar as global standard for currency pricing, along with the establishment of the Federal Reserve in the United States, all contributed to the significant transformations in world financial relations during the 1970s. The New York investment banks found themselves with a surplus of liquid assets and scarcity of sites for investment, after several decades of significant economic growth after the Second World War. In the 1970s, the threat of stagflation pushed the U.S.

government, under Carter, to begin a process of restructuring of production in the United States through dissolving labour organizations, privatizations, and the massive shift of capital investment abroad in search of cheaper and less-organized labour (Harvey 2005). The recycling of “petro-dollars” in the post-1973 OPEC crisis resulted in a flush Wall Street with desperate need to seek investment opportunities abroad. The countries of the Global South lined up for loans. The United States financiers, along with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, offered loans to Latin American countries, and far more than what the countries could feasibly pay back. Effectively, these were sub-prime international loans, and the wager was made on foreign debts incurred at national levels of responsibility.

David Harvey considers the New York banks upholding the “US imperial tradition” through continuing imperialism without “colonies” *per se*, but through financialized debt relations. Harvey cites Nicaragua as another paradigm case (Harvey 2005, p. 27-29). In the 1920s, US marines were deployed to Nicaragua in order to protect US economic and political interests. Finding themselves embroiled in an insurgent guerilla war, led by *campesino* Augusto César Sandino, the United States sought out a local strongman to help repress an uprising that would potentially lead to the establishment of a government unfriendly to US interests. Through CIA collaboration, General Anastasio Somoza Garcia took control of the country in a *coup d'état*, and Sandino was assassinated by the military dictatorship in 1934. The dictatorship of Somoza would last for the next forty years in Nicaragua, and effectively secured not only Nicaragua, but also the region of Central America, for US interests (Harvey 2005; Moreton 2009). This model of US military intervention in Latin America would continue throughout the region for the majority of the twentieth century, with last-remaining bastions of US military support secured in the country in question for this study, Colombia.



Bethany Moreton names this US convention of the Washington Consensus of 1989 as the “hardware of neoliberal perestroika in the Western Hemisphere” coalescing in 1989 with the “Washington Consensus” (Moreton 2011, p. 104). Connecting back to Nicaragua, Moreton tells the “quiet backstory” of free trade in the Americas through rigorous research of the Christian overtones that shape-shifted political economy in the Americas. Moreton outlines the concomitant process of Pentecostal revival and free-market capitalism in Latin America as tied together in the making of “Christian Free Enterprise.” She cites the private sector “Bentonville Consensus” as the Christian counter-point to the Washington Consensus, saying “transnational evangelism dwarf[ed] other popular globalisms” (Moreton 2009). A series of privatizations, undoing of labour laws and protections, inverting economies from import-based to export-based through what Bulmer-Thomas, among others, has named the “New Economic Model” (Bulmer-Thomas, 1996) were the characteristics of the Washington Consensus. Within the confines of international capitalist relations, the process of reducing the production potential of Latin American economies through the narrowing of national production to specialized commodities began with sub-prime loans and flooding the Latin American financial sector with easy credit. Countries awash in foreign capital began to invest as their economic advisors tutored. Many of those tutors were U.S. trained in Chicago School economics, and attended their MBAs in the Ozarks and Christian-based universities of America.

The “Lost Decade” of the 1980s was a major win for US, and other international private interests. Unable to pay the money owed, Latin American countries found themselves in the position of relying on foreign governments and International Financing Institutions (IFIs) to continue lending in order for them to continue paying. Defaults on debt payment, however, were tied to policy intervention and under the conditions for further loans, debt forgiveness, or other

forms of international aid (earmarked for natural disasters, humanitarian aid, etc). These conditions were most clearly established in the aforementioned Washington Consensus. Made up of the ten commandments of economic growth for the world's developing economies, the Washington Consensus became the blueprint for policy reform in Latin American countries that defaulted on debt payments. These countries were instructed to implement a strict regime of economic and political discipline outlined in the consensus. The ten commandments of the Washington Consensus are as follows: i) Fiscal discipline - strict criteria for limiting budget deficits; ii) Public expenditure priorities - moving state economies away from subsidies and administration towards previously neglected fields with high economic returns; iii) Tax reform - broadening the tax base and cutting marginal tax rates; iv) Financial liberalization - interest rates should ideally be market-determined; v) Exchange rates - should be managed to induce rapid growth in non-traditional exports; vi) Trade liberalization; vii) Increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) - by reducing barriers; viii) Privatization - state enterprises should be privatized; ix) Deregulation - abolition of regulations that impede the entry of new firms or restrict competition (except in the areas of safety, environment and finance); x) Secure intellectual property rights (IPR) - without excessive costs and available to the informal sector (Arestis and Sawyer 2004). These structural adjustments make up what is generally understood as "neoliberal policy." These were the steps that indebted countries were instructed to implement in order to be included into the global economy, and be eligible for more credits from the international financing institutions.

The case of Colombia is particularly interesting as Colombia was the only one of the major Latin American economies to avoid defaulting on foreign debts in the 1980s, in grand part due to the flourishing drug economy that had infiltrated all sectors of government and society.

Pablo Escobar, manager, mastermind, megalomaniac, and magician of the Medellin Cartel, supposedly offered to pay Colombia's entire foreign debt in exchange for not being extradited to the United States. The shrouds of mystery and myth that surround the legendary *capo* (mafia boss) hinder any official confirmation of such overt corruption. However, it is not outside the realms of possibility, given the generally overt nature of Escobar's (and the introduction of a highly successful and lucrative drug industry in Colombia) political, spiritual, and cultural influence to this day, including the recurring revelations of intimate relationships between drug mafia and political elite.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, the debt relations and relations of exchange between drug lords and politicians in Colombia is yet another theme for a more in-depth study. For the moment, this study will only mention the importance that the drug economy had in terms of Colombia's foreign debt, in light of the broader debt crisis that brought Latin American economies into the program of financialization within the designs of neoliberal restructuring.

#### 4.8 Financial Inclusion, Becoming Banked, and Economic Encompassment

In Ananya Roy's recent work for her project, *Bottom-billion Capitalism*, she develops the argument that debt is the inclusionary tactic, at a personal and moral level, that brings the "fortune at the bottom of the bottom of the pyramid" (C.K. Prahalad 2006) into the space of the market. In eighteenth-century England, Jeremy Bentham proposed the National Charity Company, where paupers would be put to work in "Industry Houses." The architectural design of the "industry houses" would be the foundation for Bentham's Panopticon, the prison, but first developed as ideas for Frugality Banks, as discussed above. Under the watchful eye of guards,

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<sup>62</sup> For further reading on the parapolitics scandal, see Sanches 2012.

labourers would produce millions for investors who had paid into the project. Poverty and Free Enterprise have had a long relationship.

I sat down with Juan Carlos in his corner office, overlooking the Bogotá skyline. Juan Carlos was then the director and inventor of DaviPlata, Colombia's first e-banking system for cell phones, offered by banking conglomerate, Davivienda. He had just been awarded the McKinsey M Prize for Management Innovation from the Harvard Business Review for his work in financial inclusion through DaviPlata. He was happy to share his ideas with me. I had contacted Juan Carlos after a meeting with a broker for DaviPlata who I had met through a friend. I had introduced myself as a Canadian researcher from the *Universidad Nacional* looking into processes of financial inclusion in Colombia. That was enough for Juan Carlos to make time in his busy schedule for me to have three meetings with him.

He swiped his desk clear, revealing a desk white-board, and pulled out 3 different coloured markers. "What are your questions?" he probed, looking at his watch. "I have forty minutes." Juan Carlos was a busy man. But first, as is custom in any meeting in Colombia, he asked if I wanted a coffee, *un tintico*. "*Manuelita*" he called, and a smiling woman in a grey maid's outfit with a white apron appeared, "*dos tinticos, porfis*" ("Two black coffees, pretty please.") She answered sweetly, "*Si, Doctor.*" All offices in Bogotá, large and small, have *empleadas de servicio*; women who clean, serve coffee, water, tea, run errands, pick up groceries, pick up lunch, stand in line at the bank to pay bills, and all other manner of small tasks. The manner in which JC called Manuela by a diminutive form of her name, and her response to him as "Doctor"—without any medical training, or other qualifications that would properly identify this banker as "Doctor"—is one of the most legible (and common) animations of social inequality that is prevalent in the highly stratified class system that operates in Bogotá's offices, and streets. As questions about

financial inclusion tumbled out of my mouth, JC sketched on his desk, explaining how financial inclusion was revolutionizing Colombian banking and Colombian society. According to the inventor of inclusionary technology for banks, financial inclusion was all about people like *Manuelita*.

The DaviPlata service has become one of the most successful strategies for financial inclusion that Colombia has experienced. “We realized we had saturated the peak of the market. Colombian banks had focused on the top tiers of economic productivity, and the top of the pyramid” JC sketched a large pyramid on his desk, and circled the top tip, “the wealthiest sector of society has been banked for decades.” I nodded, and sipped my thick, black coffee out of a tiny cup, teetering on a tiny saucer, that Manuela had brought me on a silver platter. “There was a whole other sector of the market that we weren’t exploring. The bottom two-thirds of the economic spectrum in Colombia are underserved, or unbanked.” He was referring to the fact that 32 million people in Colombia (out of a population of 45 million) still do not have a bank account. “And there is money at the bottom of the pyramid. In general, there is money in all sectors of society. We just needed to find a way to access the market. That’s how DaviPlata—mobile banking—developed.”

Financial inclusion was not a humanitarian mission for Juan Carlos. It was about channeling the millions of pesos that circulated in cash every day in Colombia, into the financial system. It was about funneling the money that millions of women like Manuela sent to their mothers every month in remote rural towns through official financial channels. It was about including Manuela into a system that had excluded her for most of her life because of her social and economic condition. It was also about making money from her transactions. “There are no

poor in Colombia, there are only people who don't know how to manage their money" Juan Carlos confidently confided.

"Davivienda Bank believes that the human is an endless source of value" the winning proposal to the Harvard Business Review states. It goes on to say, "This concept represents the center of its culture. The bank shares the Group's [Bolívar Group] Higher Purpose: to enrich life with integrity." The human is an endless source of value, and the Higher Purpose of the Bank is to enrich life with integrity. The moral designs of the banking program cannot be overstated. Financial inclusion is as much about "enriching life" and accessing the endless value of every person, as it is about making money. Indeed, the very logic of financial inclusion was revealed as the firm conviction that every human being is a commodity in and of himself or herself. They have an intrinsic monetary worth. They are resources to be tapped. More specifically their actions, such as sending an ailing mother money, and practices, such as tithing in their churches, are to be harnessed within the financial system. "We are in the business of breaking the root of how things are done. We are introducing a new model."

Financial inclusion is the vanguard of banking around the world – and has been for centuries. The role of the moral management of bodily comportment entangles with the moral management of money, of life projects, of responsible consumption, and of becoming part of a financial family.

Even if the state has not been capable [or willing] to establish its presence in the entire country, in the form of schools, hospitals, security, and so on, the financial sector has certainly made the moves to become completely accessible and present in all sectors of Colombian society. Indeed, the initiative for financial inclusion was a state-decreed enterprise, only ten years ago.

Where there are banks, it would seem the logic continues to lead, there is organized debt. Where there is organized debt, there is control. While profit is the central goal for financiers and bankers, like Juan Carlos, the broader consequence of the project of financialization is the control of subjects through a prescribed regulation of morality and action. The believing practices of prosperity work as vehicles of control in an increasingly financialized society. In particular, these vehicles act on the bodies of the newly accessible demographic: women.

## *Disciplining Gender*

*Fernanda and her disciple, Luz, arrived at my apartment at 7AM. I had told them the day before about a strange dream I had experienced, what some refer to as “sleep paralysis” but what Fernanda and Luz immediately recognized as demonic presence in the new space I had just moved into. Fernanda sat down on the couch, and took out her Bible. Luz sat in the chair across, and refused any beverage because she was fasting. “I need to focus in order to help you” she reminded me. Fernanda began to explain to me how the Devil tempts the mind with doubts and questions. Her narrative consistently referred back to her own experience teaching as a professor in a public university when she was an atheist and a communist, and sympathized with the guerrilla. It was only through an attempted rape by a guerrilla-sympathizing colleague that she began to attend the MCI seriously, left university teaching to become a high-school teacher, and stopped asking philosophical questions. “Those questions, those doubts, those criticisms, those are the work of the devil. Too much thinking will drive you to madness” she cajoled. In my apartment, she began reading from the Bible, from the book of Genesis, about the woman after whom I am named, Rebecca, wife of Isaac, mother of Jacob. The conviction that my life was to be a reflection of “God’s Glory” was constant with Fernanda. She never missed an opportunity to remind me that this research was going to reveal God’s greatness, and the purpose of the thesis would be to glorify the mission of the G12. After she had read the Biblical story, she took out a small bottle of oil, anointed in Jerusalem—the Holy Land—and brought back to Colombia by her pastor, Claudia Wilches. She passed the bottle to Luz, who began to apply oil in doorframes, corners of walls, mirrors, and windows. The application of anointed oil was meant protect the entrances and intersections in the apartment, and convince any visiting demonic spirit to leave, or to pass on by without entering at all. What began to be apparent, however, was that Fernanda and Luz were far more interested in my personal life than just a superficial biblical reading and (once again) inviting me to be “more Christian.” It was about pushing me to ask forgiveness for the sin of fornication, for my partner and I were unmarried, but worse than that, he was not a confessing Christian.*



## Chapter 5

### Consuming Christianity: Debt, Credit, and Gendering Prosperity

*This [trafficking in women] was the means of overcoming the contradiction by which the same woman was seen under two incompatible aspects: on the one hand, as the object of personal desire...on the other as the subject of desire of others*

Claude Lévi-Strauss

*The [Elementary Forms of Kinship] confirmed my notion of woman as other; it showed how the male remains the essential being, even within matrilineal societies, generally termed matriarchal*

Simone de Beauvoir

### 5.1 Dancing for the Lord

“*Mujeres! Women! It’s time to dance for the Lord! The Lord wants to multiply you! Call Him to multiply you! *Multiplícame, Señor. Lord, multiply me!*”<sup>63</sup> Claudia Castellanos, the indefatigably energetic co-pastor of the *Misión Carismática Internacional*, swayed on stage with the worship band as back up. Fernanda and her sister, Louisa, stood on either side of me in the crowd of women at the MCI women’s convention. They began to jump, clap, and twirl together with *Pastora* Claudia. She danced, she threw her head back and laughed, she raised her arms in the air and twirled. She grooved all over the stage.*

She: a lawyer, a mother of five, a doting wife, an ex-ambassador to Brazil, a former senator, a one-time member of Congress, a successful CEO.<sup>64</sup> She wore a flattering red dress and

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<sup>63</sup> This sermon was recorded on May 2, 2013 at the women’s convention of the *Misión Carismática Internacional* in Bogotá, Colombia.

<sup>64</sup> Claudia Castellanos biographical history is registered in her first book, *La Mujer en el Ministerio*. 2005. Bogotá: G12 Editorial.

high-heeled black leather boots. She had wagged her finger and demanded explanations from a male ex-President earlier in the morning and had argued with a male presidential candidate the day before—her public interview in front of the women, a performance of empowerment and bravado in front of the nation’s patriarchs. At this convention, she was selling her latest book, *Give Colour to your Life*. Commercials for the book came on the large screens around the convention center every hour, during breaks. On the cover of her book, she wore the same red dress she now danced in.

In the book—written by a woman, for women, it begins, “*queridas lectoras*” “female readership”—and explains that God has a plan specifically for women: “The invitation God makes is to experience the life He has designed for you; A life in which you can have it all!” (Castellanos 2014, p. 5). She recommends “finding your fragrance” for every Christian woman carries a unique “fragrance of the spirit” (p. 35) She makes fashion suggestions to flatter the physique, for every Christian woman “is beautiful and should reflect the beauty that the Lord blessed her with” (p. 28). She encourages being “anointed with the spirit of shopping” because “all women love to shop, and God wants his daughters to delight in their prosperity.”<sup>65</sup> She is the multiplied “she.” All women, yet one woman, she is the product and the producer; the universal particular of Christian womanhood. All these pieces of herself make a whole and impressive sum. Her example is at once celebrity and intimate pastor; sisterly confidant and sage mother. And here, on stage, in front of thousands, she danced. The women followed suit, seeking their own multiplication.<sup>66</sup> Fernanda grabbed my hand, and pulled me into the aisle of the church to dance with the crowd of women.

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<sup>65</sup> In more than one sermon at the MCI, Claudia Castellanos preached about the “spirit of shopping” and being anointed with the spirit of shopping, “*la unción del shopping*.”

<sup>66</sup> This word is productive for thinking with. It refers to much more than only economic accumulation or growth in one dimension. Within the concept of “multiply me” Fernanda and the women of the MCI find a depth of meaning including prosperity, ecstatic spirituality, fertility, and leadership.

Claudia Castellanos is doing it all, and she tells the women at the convention, that so can every woman. Straddling the public and the private realms, Claudia Castellanos encourages a set of practices that hold such contradicting realities in tension. Consumption as discipline is the focus here, and as “being anointed with the spirit of shopping” illustrates, consumption at the MCI is a matter of believing, an aspirational practice towards becoming a woman who can ‘do it all’. In Colombia’s emerging financialization, credit cards designed especially for women, commercial micro-credit programs that cater only to female heads-of-households, and the *Bank of the Woman* (*Banca de la Mujer*) demonstrate a growing trend in financializing capitalism: women are the new financial subject (Roy 2010; Kellet 2011; Schuster 2014).

In counterpoint, women in Colombia’s burgeoning Prosperity Christianity movements are breaking out of an “elevated domesticity” (Brusco 1993) with conversion to evangelical Christianity. Female leaders in *La Misión Carismática Internacional*, (MCI) hold law degrees and public office. More like Oprah in their influence than quieted queens of domesticity, the MCI woman celebrates spiritual consumption, financial independence, entrepreneurialism, and public life. The majority of women in the MCI, however, as with Colombian society, are not lawyers or senators. The promise that greater access to credit in emerging nations will create conditions of “financial democratization” especially for women to be more significantly included in the economic system, creates an entirely new dynamic of risk to the most vulnerable members of society: poor women.<sup>67</sup> However, the exhortation to “believe in yourself” to live as the prosperous Christian woman you “can be” draws aspirational women into uneven processes of economic access. This chapter outlines ethnographic observations of what Kathryn Lofton

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<sup>67</sup> While Indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations are recognized as the most vulnerable ethnic populations (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2012; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2013), impoverished women from these populations, as well as women living in rural and urban poverty are by far the most vulnerable persons in the country vis-à-vis the armed conflict, domestic violence, discrimination, and political and social exclusion (Arias et al. 2013).

names the “symphonic way in which consumption and religion are categories not in opposition to each other but rather in collaboration” (Lofton 2011, p. 10). More specifically, consumption and religion in financializing Colombia shape the gendered limits of a performed prosperity.<sup>68</sup> This chapter argues that critically laboring, by the ethnographer, in the realm of embodied practice as believing practice, and the relation of consumption to financialized systems of believing, leads to an analysis of the way gender is disciplined through consumption, the emancipatory promises of credit, and the female selves that are multiplied and reproduced by it.

Neither Weber’s industrial capitalism, nor charismatic,<sup>69</sup> millennial,<sup>70</sup> or spiritual capitalism,<sup>71</sup> financial capitalism is a different category altogether. Financialization brings together the heavy freight of the full troika: of ascetic spirits of measured consumption and rational savings plans championed by Protestantized industrial capitalism, the “door-to-door persuasions” of charismatic capitalism (Lofton) and the salvific enterprise of millennial capitalism (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). However financial capitalism offers something more—always prescribing a “not yet” to the process of human becoming, indeed finance *is* speculation and produces profits from hawking in futures and the possibility of “more.” Financialization converts

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<sup>68</sup> By “gendered limits” I refer to the disciplinary regime of debt on women in Colombia. While the chimera of greater freedom and independence is conflated with greater purchasing power, this capitalist take on feminist values is to be called into question. Secondly, I refer to limiting work of greater control over women’s bodies and souls, in particular in conservative evangelical churches where female consumption patterns are equalled with virtues of femininity and worthy of not only the male gaze, but God’s approving gaze as well.

<sup>69</sup> Nicole Woolsey Biggart gives an important sociological take on what she calls “charismatic capitalism” from a Weberian perspective. Biggart considers charismatic leadership and authority in the direct-selling organization (DOC) movement that begins in the United States in the 1930s Depression Era. More significant, however, is the gender analysis that Biggart weaves through this work in American corporate history that, although perhaps more optimistic than critical, provides a good history of the movement and its importance in offering women entrepreneurial opportunities in times in which women were much more confined to the domestic sphere.

<sup>70</sup> Jean and John Comaroff suggest a millennial capitalism that lies at the vanguard of Pentecostal Christianity in post-colonial Africa. See this discussion in Chapter 1.

<sup>71</sup>In Kathryn Lofton’s *Oprah*, she offers a very clear, and useful, conceptualization of what she considers to be “spiritual capitalism.” Through Oprah’s consumption practices as commodity themselves, Oprah sells and promotes something very antithetical to Weber’s ascetic or charismatic capitalists. The spirituality, or perhaps better “Spirit” of Oprah’s brand of consumption, according to Lofton, is the very redundancy of the pursuit of the “Best Life” that Oprah sells.

categories of social life into social assets. The consumptive ethos of financialization offers a new zeitgeist that encourages a constant “fondling” of money, for money to be mined daily, for a throwing off of the strictures of the Protestant ethic of deferred pleasure (Martin 2002). The Eros of finance seduces and convinces, as does the spirit of Prosperity: you can have what you want today; you can pay it off tomorrow. The message is indulgent and robust: consumption is a right—even if it means going into debt. A specific focus on the disciplining power of consumption on gender performance leads to a second conclusion: women are newly tapped source of profit for the emerging financial system in Colombia.

As has been mentioned in previous chapters, financial capitalism motivates “free market spiritualities” as a specific regime of practice that builds atop all capitalisms that have come before it: colonial, industrial, liberal, neoliberal. Finance capitalism’s capitalism unfolds in a genealogy of discourses and designs for the fulfillment of an endlessly possible reality—and the debt created by it. More specifically, this chapter details the imbrication of Christianity and consumer credit in Colombia to understand ethnographically the supposed empowerment of women by way of mounting debt.

## 5.2 Being Anointed by the Spirit of Shopping

Claudia Castellanos is more than a Colombian Evangelical version of Oprah, and demonstrates some clear differences. Kathryn Lofton explains the “spiritual capitalism” exemplified by Oprah as the “overlapping of the nature of these categories” (production, commodity, and consumption) traditionally defining capitalism processes. Lofton highlights that Oprah is both capitalist and consumer—but it is her taste that is so very productive; her O-pinion, as it were (Lofton 2011, p. 20-35) Castellanos represents something similar, but it is not her taste, however that might be categorized, but rather her relations of exchange and meaning that are productive.

She, and what she represents, is more complex than a simple commodification of Christian woman, although she also represents the commodification of the self. At the convention, on stage, she performed not only for the Lord and her disciples in the congregation, but also for her husband, co-pastor Cesar Castellanos. On the stage of the women's-only conference, Cesar peeked through from behind the curtains on stage as his wife undulated in front of him, making appreciative faces at her dancing derriere for the whole congregation to see on the big screens around the hall. The women at the conference cheered and shrieked in appreciation of such conjugal sexuality.

Claudia Castellanos does not operate in the individual vacuum of removed royalty that Oprah does. She operates only and entirely through a web of relations and social reproductions—and obligations, or debts. These webs of debt are the ties that construct the Christian woman, the consumable woman, and the consuming woman; following Judith Butler, the Christian woman becomes both the object and the instrument of financial capitalism, (Butler 1999, p. 63). The Christian woman, according to many more conservative Christian traditions and theologies, is primordially in debt. She owes her existence to Adam's rib and God's (understood as celestial Father) efforts at creating her to be Adam's companion.<sup>72</sup> The MCI

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<sup>72</sup> There are two Christian creation myths found in Genesis, the first book of the Christian Bible, as well as the first book of the Torah. In the first creation story, Adam and Eve, man and woman, are created at the same time, and made by God, on the sixth day of the seven days of Creation. In the second story, Adam is created first, and Eve is made from Adam's rib after Adam requests a companion. God creates Eve, from the rib of Adam. Woman, conservative interpretations follow, only exists thanks to man's a priori existence, and does not exist independently from it. (Genesis, Chapter 1-2). The second creation narrative is the most often recited in the MCI, and many other Christian spaces where the emphasis on woman's subordination and long-standing debt to man for her existence is necessary for the continuation of patriarchal structures of power. From this starting point, not only does Butler correctly map the genealogy of phallogocentric economies and structures of epistemological logics that find the woman as a non-entity, but rather only as reflection and reference in relation to the male. In addition, woman's primordial debt to man, and to God, is furthered by Eve's primordial sin—the audacious desire for knowledge, the subsequent rebellion of God's rule, and the temptation of Adam, resulting in the expulsion from the garden of Eden, and the fall of humankind. Because of woman's sin, all humanity existed in a fallen state, a sinful and unredeemed state, until Jesus, the son of God, was sent to serve as the sacrificial lamb and redeem humanity of Eve's

woman is reminded that she is first a daughter, then a wife, then a leader in the church, then a mother. “God made us from men. *Dios nos sacó del hombre*” a sermon at the women’s conference reminds the women.

Financialization, as Randy Martin has said, “offers a means to develop the self” (Martin 2002, p.12). It is the very *idea* of correct womanhood, the “regulatory fiction” (Butler 1999, p. 44) that is the consumable product, and makes the product desirable. The act of consuming that idea is what pushed Fernanda to go into debt in order to attend the women’s conference at the MCI. And it propelled Fernanda’s sister Luisa to begin her own business with a multi-level marketing company called *Nu Skin*, for which she went into debt, yet told me, “everything I learn here in church prepares me for working with *Nu Skin!*”<sup>73</sup> Finance as a system of governmentality, as a disciplining regime, works on the idea of womanhood in its becoming—as Christian womanhood, as prosperous womanhood, as financialized personhood, is never complete and without end. Financialization as governmentality, then produces the discursive regime within which womanhood performs itself into a “desired subjectivity”. “Today, liberate yourself from the mentality of a maid, *empleada*” writes Claudia Castellanos in *Give Colour to your Life*, “you are not a slave, you are a daughter of God, and God’s inheritance is for you. Financial resurrection is possible in God, you can be multiplied” (Castellanos 2014, p. 13).

*Multiplicame* (“Multiply me”), as Castellanos called for during her performance on stage, refers simultaneously to making more of the self as well as making more in material terms. The phrase points to work on the self, and the self in relation to external materiality, as financialization also does, “as a means of acquiring the self” (Martin 2002, p. 10). Fernanda

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sin. Christian womanhood in these contexts of conservative theological interpretation, begin and end time in a condition of debt.

<sup>73</sup> Taken from a personal conversation with interlocutor, September 2013.

explained to me that God’s work of perfection is never done—the self is an eternally unfinished project just as the accumulation of goods is unending. “Multiply me” posits the individual as the product and the production of multiplicity in the financializing economy. The following vignette illustrates this idea of multiplication.

### 5.3 “God wants to gift you”

“When God created women, he created them with a nature of purity, in her thoughts, her emotions, and her words. We need to recuperate our pure nature. Our identity is clear. It is not right for a man to be alone. Women were created to be the ideal helper. God wants to gift you. *Dios te quiere encomendar.*”<sup>74</sup> The pastor and Senator of the Republic, Claudia Wilches, explained to the women their condition of commodity. It was a breakout session at the women’s convention, and Fernanda and her sister Luz scribbled down notes, and repeated the Bible verses that were being quoted to me, hoping I would write the verses down, and not just my observations.

It was such a banal form of obedience, but one of a register of technologies that form Christian womanhood in the MCI.<sup>75</sup> These practices, technologies of the self that train and order womanhood, these performances of believing a “right” kind of woman into being, these are the practices that in the emergence of finance capitalism re-form the “desiring subject” (Foucault

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<sup>74</sup> There is a fascinating etymological connection here between *encomendar* as verb, as gift, and the root of the word, *encomienda*, the noun, the parcel to be gifted. In the colonial economy of the conquered Americas, *encomiendas* were parcels of land, and more importantly, the people on that land, granted by the Spanish Crown to *encomenderos*, or Spanish colonials, and often the Catholic Church. In effect, the *encomienda* was a “set of property rights...whereby the Spaniard could extract tribute from the Indians [sic] in the form of goods, metals, money, or direct labor services. In exchange, the *encomenderos* provided the Indians [sic] protection and instruction in the Catholic faith, promised to defend the area, and paid a tax to the Crown” (Yeager 1995, p. 843). More succinctly, the *encomienda* was a form of slavery without naming as such since Spain had officially abolished slavery in 1542 under the New Laws. For further discussion, see Zambrano 2011 Lane year.

<sup>75</sup> Here I intentionally use “woman-hood” as opposed to “personhood” in an effort to draw attention to the “genderless” concept of “personhood” that works to universalize an uncritical notion of subject that is nevertheless suspended within the webs of meaning of a dominantly “masculinist mode of signification” (Butler 1999, p.17). The critical work of this chapter draws on the critique of sex and gender following Foucault, Judith Butler, and Latina feminist theorists and activists, Florence Thomas, Gloria Andalzua, Dolores Bernal, Ruth Galvan, and Michelle Telez.



1990, p. 5) into becoming the properly *desired subject*. “God wants to gift you” forces a consideration of woman as commodity, or rather the *idea* of woman as commodity, as “sign and signifier” in a masculine economy of exchange, (Butler 1999, p. 52). Invoking a critique of structuralist anthropology, Judith Butler clarifies that Levi-Strauss’ consideration of the bride-gift and collateral-gift appeals to the misogynistic relational structures that strip woman of identity for herself, and only as a reflection of male identity, (p. 50-55).<sup>76</sup> Becoming the “desired subject” to *become* “the gift” in financializing capitalism, is to perform the correct relational practices in reference to others, and especially by going into debt in order to more fully perform the womanhood prescribed.<sup>77</sup> Going into debt in order to put into practice the self-grooming and commodification of the relations that define women in reference to children, husband, and church, is part of the regime of believing practices that animate such a becoming. Ursula’s Christmas gift (Chapter 1) is one illustration of this regime of practice. “I did it because I wanted prosperity for my family. God wants us to be prosperous. I believe that. I must.”

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<sup>76</sup> Butler offers up the quote from Claude Levi-Strauss to illustrate the dynamics of structuralism’s phallogocentric economy in which women are indeed objects of exchange, before we become more complexly objects of desire, or more importantly, groom ourselves as such. Levi-Strauss said: “the emergence of symbolic thought must have required that women, like words, should be things that were exchanged” (p. 56).

<sup>77</sup> To follow on the previous note, and to expand on the role of capitalism and its connection to the oppression of women, Gayle Rubin (1975) offers an essential insight from a Marxist analysis. First, Rubin considers how the reproduction of labour required by the “historical and moral element which determines “wife” is among the necessities of the worker” was a central element in domesticating labour and value of women – as commodity and as the quintessential alienated worker (Rubin 1975, p. 37). This “historical and moral element” Rubin continues, is the first nod to capitalism as heir to a “long tradition in which women do not inherit, in which women do not lead, and in which women do not talk to God” (p. 38). Now, here in the MCI, women are indeed talking to God. This is yet a further “deviation”, to use Rubin’s terms, and might be construed as a form of emancipation or agentive opening. This is duly noted. On the other hand, Rubin continues with her analysis of capitalism and patriarchy, by approaching Mauss’ “Gift exchange” and the extrapolation of Levi-Strauss upon the gift exchange in primitive societies. Levi-Strauss identified the gift of woman in marriage as the “supreme gift” (see Carrier and Gewertz 2013). Levi-Strauss provides that “the gift of the bride is the answer to the folly of war because the exchange of brides is merely the conclusion to an uninterrupted process of reciprocal gifts, which affects the transition from hostility to alliance, from anxiety to confidence, and from fear to friendship” (Levi-Strauss 1949, p. 68). Rubin considers this intervention into the anthropology of kinship from Levi-Strauss as constructing an “implicit theory of sex oppression” as the essence of kinship ties for the anthropologist lie in an exchange of women between men. Men, then, became the only exchangers, while women were trafficked, as wives, as slaves, as chattel, but also, simply as women (p. 45). Importantly, then, Rubin concludes that “if Levi-Strauss is correct in seeing the exchange of women as a fundamental principle of kinship, the subordination of women can be seen as a product of the relationships by which sex and gender are organized and produced” (47). See also Chapter 2 of this study for further discussion of the “gift”, and for further reading on the gift and gender, see Strathern 1988.

## 5.4 God as Father, God as Husband

Consuming on credit as a regime of practice exists outside the walls of the MCI and into the streets of Bogotá. Here, in the broader urban society of Bogotá, the performance of gender, and gendered prosperity, are also disciplined into being. Of course, credit allows for a certain degree of autonomy. Fernanda regularly expressed her pride in having a healthy credit limit. She has been able to purchase a home, travel to conventions as far away as Miami, and make her covenants with God. As mentioned before, credit in itself is not good or bad. Indeed, credit for many women in Colombia, means the ability to purchase many commodities, including things like washing machines, which open up hours of the day for all sorts of activities that would have otherwise been necessarily sidelined.

However, insofar as debt accompanies this credit, Christian womanhood has become an important site of discipline of the Prosperous Woman hawked by the prophets of emergence in a Colombia becoming new. The push to become an entrepreneurial woman, to be “your own boss” and to become financially independent is the foundation of the micro-finance phenomenon sweeping the development industry in the country (Amaya et al. 2011). The *Banco de la Mujer* (Woman’s Bank) in Colombia is a subsidiary of the World Women’s Bank, and exclusively attends to economically marginalized women, primarily through micro-loans, for micro-businesses. The logic of micro-finance is tightly correlated to financial inclusion, and microcredits are regarded as a vehicle for incorporating these most vulnerable women into the financial system (Fernando 2006; Hulme and Arun 2009; Bateman 2011; Mersland and Strøm 2014). Through receiving a microcredit, women necessarily open a bank account and thereby become “*bancarizada*” literally “to become banked.” The focus on poor women that microfinance has maintained, has led to a “feminization of financialization” and thereby a “feminization of

indebtedness” (Wichterich 2012).

The financialized woman may proudly look to credit, credit cards, and micro-credits, in order to liberate herself from the confines of scarcity. Her web of relations is the matrix of intelligibility through which consuming practices define and discipline her into the “virtuous woman” she is expected to be. Prosperity is tied up with consumptive power, and the prescriptions of materiality that shape gendered performance of the Prosperous Christian kind. The pastoral couple of the MCI animate the narrative of an ideal marriage, the desired family, the prosperous life. Susana Wilches says as much in a cell group meeting after the women’s convention: “When we see the relationship that pastors Cesar and Claudia have, that is how our relationship should be with God. Their relationship is how our relationship with God should be.”

The relationship is, in all of its celebrity swagger, the idyllic vision of a healthy, hetero-normative, loving relationship. Cesar Castellanos respects his wife on stage, and Claudia Castellanos plays the role of a strong wife, while at the same time maintains the balance of demure obedience and deference. However, Cesar and Claudia also perform the appropriate marriage dynamics of feminine sexualization for male pleasure. The issue here is not with the sexualization of women, but with the question of to whose power this sexualization submits. Claudia Castellanos reminds the female readership of her book that her relationship with her husband also reflects her relationship with the Spirit. She writes of an argument she had with Cesar. He became angry with her, and for three days, was short with her and acted “indifferently.” When he called her up to the stage at a conference, still angry, she writes that her words were:

Brothers and sisters, the Pastor has been indifferent to me. He has been cold to me over the last three days. But through prayer, the Holy Spirit has taught me

an important lesson. We have been indifferent to Him. My feelings of sadness and rejection reflect the way the Holy Spirit feels about His church. He has been very sad and very afflicted. We must ask for forgiveness. It is time to allow the Spirit to enter, because He is a gentleman. It is time to reconcile with the Holy Spirit (Castellanos 2014, p. 38)

Back to the stage at the women's conference, Claudia pretends to be unaware of her husband's appreciative gaze as she performs for him, for the women of the conference, and for God. Only after the dancing is over, does Cesar come out from behind the curtain to "surprise" his wife, and proceeds to publicly confess his love and admiration for Claudia. The cameras filming the romantic moment close up on their faces, on Claudia's tears as she listens to her husband praise her, on Cesar getting down on one knee...the women scream with delight. Cesar pulls out a diamond ring, and asks his wife to re-commit their marriage vows.

The theatricality of the publicly shared performance of intimacy is commonplace in the MCI. Intimacy is a spiritual currency *par excellence* in the worship services, small group meetings, one-on-one prayer sessions, and is heightened for the conventions. Intimacy is how the Spirit moves in hearts and souls. The practice of "entering your intimate space with God" is regularly invoked and encouraged by the MCI leadership. Throughout the women's convention, this intimacy is fabricated and constructed, by the women in attendance in prayer groups, in lunch time conversations, in tearful laying on of hands during break-out sessions—the ecstasy of intimacy is bright and alive. It is produced in the regime of corporeal practices invoked during worship times. Raised arms, kneeling on the carpeted floor, crying, dancing, clasping hands together in prayer, twisting on the floor in torturous agony of despair, hugging those around you, holding hands, jumping; these are all variations of a corporality of intimacy with the Spirit that is a prescribed performance at the MCI. These are physical technologies of discipline. So too are specific practices of consumption.

The promise of economic independence, of acquiring the self through practices of consumption is at the heart of financialization, as Randy Martin reminds us. Financialization is the dialectic work of making the self both product and production, commodity and consumer, subject but not complete. This is the soul of profiting without producing. And is at the heart of “*multiplicame*”—“multiply me”. These practices are encouraged by a process of emergence that holds in tension an *ancien régime* of discipline and terror in Colombia (through the war, the high indices of domestic violence, and the rampant urban violence so common in large Latin American metropolises), while simultaneously introducing a modern model of biopolitical governance of debt perpetuated through believing financial practice. In Colombia, there has not been a clear “modern” shift from a disciplining governmentality to internalized technologies of the self as closed and complete, especially insofar as the idea of “woman” is concerned. The technologies of the “female self” as internal policing and self-analysis in order to reform the soul, grate against the external, constantly and violently enforced reminders of what “being woman” means. Domestic violence, violence against women in the home, is as ubiquitous as it is silent.<sup>78</sup> Colombia reports astonishingly high levels of domestic violence, and significant popular legitimization for violence against women. A 2015 study reveals that 37% of Colombians agreed “women who dress provocatively put themselves in danger of being raped” and 45% of Colombians believe that if a woman continues a relationship with a man who has beaten her, it is because she enjoys being beaten (Alvarez 2015).

Indeed, as of 2010, an average of 80% of women in Colombia had experienced some

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<sup>78</sup> According to the National Institute for Forensic Medicine (INML), between January and October of 2014, over 800 women were assassinated. An average of 1,000 women have been assassinated each year in Colombia since 2000. There were over 37,000 cases of domestic violence reported, and close to 13,000 cases of sexual harassment (See *Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal*, 2014). The People’s Ombudsman reported in 2013 that on average, close to 1,000 women are victims of sexual violence every month, roughly 85 women are murdered every month, and 2500 cases of domestic violence are reported each month (See Caracol Radio, November 25, 2013).

level of domestic violence, indeed, the percentage of women who reported physical abuse by their husbands rose from 18% in 1990 to 38% in 2010 (López, Murad, and Calderón 2011).<sup>79</sup> In Latin America, cases of femicide are on the rise.<sup>80</sup> Violence against women operates to discipline the feminine body and narrowly prescribe a performance of gender that reinforces phallogocentric and patriarchal economies of circulation and exchange. The prescription of “identity” in relation to a patriarch (God, Father, Husband) closes off the critical theoretical work necessary to deconstruct (once again) the “naturalness” of financializing worlds. It follows that the hegemony of financialized logics are threatened through querying the very “nature” of gendered relations. Credit, debt, and consumption disciplines Christian personhood in Colombia, and in a particular way, gender performance.

The confinement to a binary, heteronormative structure of gendered performativity is reinforced through economic relations that assume female being in contradictory terms. This is especially clear in the microfinance sector, but also in the practices of gendered discipline of financializing capitalism in Colombia more generally. For example, in micro-finance, Third World women have become the target population on the one hand because of the essentialized notion that women are more responsible than men, are more tied to the household, and therefore spend more responsibly than men. On the other hand, credit is advertised to women as a source of liberation from all of the confines that hold them in sacrificial relations to their male partners and children. There are important distinctions of class, of course. The Davivienda credit card for “Her” is advertised as the key to independence for the upwardly mobile, professional

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<sup>79</sup> The study by López, Murad, and Calderón analyzed data from 1990-2010. They define domestic violence according to the Colombian constitution as: “Any type of violence in the family that is considered destructive to harmony and unity, will be sanctioned in accordance to the law.” (Article 42, López et al. 2011, p.15)

<sup>80</sup> Femicide is the systemic assassination of women because they are women. These are gender-motivated hate crimes and slowly are being recognized by international organizations as distinct from generic homicide. See: Laurent, Platzer, and Idomir 2013.

woman: Buy more, rely on no man, consumption becomes the vanguard of emancipation. Micro-credit for female heads of households relay a similar message, but insofar as micro-credit is directed at lower-income women, the poor, micro-credit becomes about liberating the self from male irresponsibility and the chains of “Third World Backwardness”.

Look no further than the “I am a Girl” Campaign run by Plan International. (Plan International 2015). This program, funded by MasterCard Foundation, Visa Foundation, and the United Nations Financial Inclusion branch, among other sponsors, sells sponsorship of girls as the key to developing countries. “Invest in me because I am a girl/Watch me grow and watch your investment grow/Your investment will allow me to go to school” so go the television commercials. All of this messaging, to North American and European audiences, reinforces the idea that investing in girls is the key to improving the developmental conditions of the generic “Third World.” They also further the subjectivation of woman as a “site of investment;” her very body becoming a site of profit production.

Both consumption and debt are ways that the body believes. Prosperity is prescribed through performances that produce the “prosperous woman” who is the multiplied woman and at the same time the non-entity, in the MCI and in other diverse spaces of financialization in Colombia. The disciplining power of debt and consumption defines gender in Colombia. Women are the new objects of financialization’s reach, and the intimacy of debt reproduces practices of indebted womanhood.

## 5.5 Feeling the Spirit Move in You

“You’re thinking too much” Fernanda chided me. I stood with my principle informant in line to enter the woman’s conference at the *Misión Carismática Internacional*. Fernanda had been

explaining to me why going into debt in order to attend this conference was a spirit-led decision. In the busy line-up of women, I knew that many of the faithful had made significant financial sacrifices, many on credit cards, to attend the 4-day conference. My questions (and noted lack of engagement with the Spirit) were beginning to annoy Fernanda. “Stop asking so many questions, and just surrender to the Spirit” she told me as we jostled into the main church building.

The throng of women was loud and thick in the main foyer of the church. It trailed out the doors, down two city blocks, rippling with excitement and expectation. Thousands of women were preparing to feel the spirit move. Thousands more had already felt the spirit lead them to go into debt. Fernanda regularly admonished my barrage of questions with the warning that the devil plays in the dangerous spaces of critical and objective thought. “You must feel the Spirit move in you. You can’t understand anything with so-called ‘rational’ thought. You have to feel him move. *Tienes que sentirlo mover en ti.*” The movement of capital and the movement of the Spirit present an ethnographic problematic when *believing as practice* is foregrounded. Ethnographically speaking, Fernanda’s insistence that I “feel the spirit move” was as much an admonition to internally and affectively sense the spirit move, as it was a demand for corporeal performance of believing practice. And in no other moment did believing practice become as clearly animated than at the moment of going into debt for God.

When Fernanda first encouraged me to feel the spirit move, I asked: how? She named a number of actions: opening up, letting go, tuning in. She placed most emphasis on “completely giving yourself over to God”—a central trope of Christian sacrificial economy. She told me, “once you give yourself over, then you will know what God wants you to do.” But how? I insisted. “Well, the first thing you should do is raise your arms when we are worshipping. Raise your arms high above your head, and let God in. What do you feel when your hands are up like



this?” “Vulnerable” I responded. Fernanda nodded and looked pleased. While Amy Cuddy would have us believe that raising our arms in the air is a corporeal expression of victory, at the MCI, in South America, the body language was performed vulnerability—an act of embodied discipline; a public display of believing (Cuddy 2015).

Kneeling. Dancing. Prostrating. These are practices of believing. These are also disciplinary practices of doing the body, as they are practices of doing belief, or, believing. Discernment as doing, then, is central to understanding going into debt—for God, and with God. Receiving the gift of discernment first requires a regime of embodied practice, raising arms, kneeling, prostrating.

## 5.6 Finance and Social Reproduction

Finance is not only a system of belief; it is a system of reproduction at all levels of social life. In chapter two, I already discussed the important components of debt as inclusion and the “kinship of the financialized market.” Here, I develop the argument that debt disciplines the financialized soul, and more specifically, debt disciplines gender through a particular kind of consumption. The social reproduction of disciplined genders through the faithful practices of a “free market spirituality” belies the freedom and empowerment promised to “third world women” through micro-credit programs and credit cards specially designed for the all-encompassing yet particular “Her.” Purple, pink, or gold with emblazoned flowers and rounded corners, the credit card for “her” represents the affordance of female empowerment cum financial independence associated with consumption for the self, the “treat yourself” mantra, and the conflation of prosperous growth as personal growth.

This is, of course, not to suggest that empowerment and economic independence are not

linked. However, defining “empowerment” (which this dissertation is not directly aiming to do) through a solitary definition of increased purchasing power is precisely the problem that hegemonic belief in financialization-as-development poses. The critique of increased access to the financial system as emancipatory also must critique hegemonic feminist movements and the assumptions that drive institutionalized, Western, hetero-normative, and middle-class feminism. Such critiques have been delivered over the last forty years from the bastions of a complex and marginalized Latin American feminism (if one can regionalize such movements so easily), (Bastian Duarte 2012; Allen, Cova, and Purvis 2010; Garcia Castro 2001; Ortega 2015).

The micro-finance movement, for example, that has focused its energies in “empowering women through credit” relies on a logic that women are homogenously more responsible than their male, third-world counterparts. This reinforces, on the one hand, the “virtuous woman” mold already discussed, as well as whittles down the expression of non-white and non-Western male gender expression as irresponsible and violent. Finance as emancipatory must be critiqued, by the scholar and the beneficiary, insofar as a uni-dimensional answer to oppressive social, political, and otherwise broken economic systems is inadequate. The prescription of increased purchasing power and inclusion into the financial system does not respond to the myriad social and political forces at play in poverty and powerlessness. Critiquing finance-as-development requires also an intersectional feminist approach that takes into account race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability (Ortega 2015). Such an approach places phrases like, “Every woman can have it all” into new relief.

Credit is not the equalizing force for economic democracy it purports to be. Until relations of uneven power structures are considered by the prophets of financialized futures, the emancipatory premise of universal credit, bank accounts, and cashless societies betray the

contradictions that Marx outlined centuries ago. Woman as gift, woman as commodity, woman whose relations are commodified, becomes reified *from herself* as product and producer. Indeed, as Ananya Roy has convincingly demonstrated, the poor, and especially the female poor, are disciplined while appeased through “novel experimentations” of varying degrees of indebtedness (Roy 2010). Credit as a human right, like much human rights discourse and most financial discourse, works to veil structural exploitation, exploitations of the poor, of the aspirational, of the precarious, and of women. Capital’s reproduction, as Max Haiven has proposed, most likely “depends on and transforms the social fictions that animate society” (Haiven 2014, p. 6). The injection of credit, or fictitious capital as Marx called it, into society works to reproduce the disciplinary power of capital accumulation through mobilizing debt as a means of creating and deploying surplus value, exploiting labour, and shaping economic and social production (Haiven 2014). Consumption on credit is one of the primary social fictions that credit—and believing—enables.

## 5.7 Virtuous Women, Prosperous Women

“How are my princesses doing?” Susana Wilches, senator to the Republic and Fernanda’s cell group leader/pastor, addressed the small group women gathered for their weekly discipleship meeting. “For the next few weeks we’re focusing on Proverbs 31, verses ten to thirty-one, the story of the Virtuous Woman, in preparation for the Women’s Convention coming up.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> In the *New Revised Standard Version*, the passage reads as such: A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies/Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value/She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life/ She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands/She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar/She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants/She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard/She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks/She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night/In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers/She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy/When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet/She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple/Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land/She makes linen garments and sells

Wilches thumbed her iPad, looking for the verses on her iBible. She looked up to the group, and ceremoniously removed her glasses. *Senadora* Susana Wilches began by asking the women if they had ever had a “supernatural experience.” Central to having such an experience, explained Wilches, was to “see ourselves as God sees us. When we can do this, miracles happen.” The group of women furiously scribbled notes, recorded on their cell phones, and nodded vigorously. They had all had a supernatural experience of some kind. Some shared—miracles of employment for spouses after months of joblessness, miracles of fertility after years of barrenness, miracles of children turning lives around and beginning to “walk with God.” Wilches always only allowed for very few minutes of talk before she dominated the realm of Biblical interpretation again. “We women are more sensitive and more impatient [than men]” she began. “We have to find ways to be better for God. We’re capricious. We want to tell God what we want, and how we want it. That’s not how it goes. *Así no es.*”

She continued to explain that women speak too much, that women pretend to know and “impose our own thoughts and opinions” when in fact it is only God who can speak and clarify, through the movement of the Spirit, what right action is.<sup>82</sup> “In the Proverb” Wilches explained, “the virtuous woman is married to a prosperous man. She is confident and patient. She does no wrong to her husband. She works joyfully for her household. She is generous and loving. Most importantly, she manages her time wisely.” To illustrate this point, she gave the example of her “dear” *empleada*, who for 23 years had been washing the floors in a way that Wilches considered

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them, and supplies the merchants with sashes/ She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come/She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue/She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness/Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: “Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.” Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised/Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

<sup>82</sup> Feminist interpretations of Proverbs 31 (Maier 2012; Masenya 2004; Carmody 1992; Exum 1993) – the “feminist” interpretation tends to maintain its identity as “subversive”. Herein lies the blockage of equity.

inefficient. “She isn’t using her time wisely, like the virtuous woman should. See?” Wilches looked around the room, waiting for nods of comprehension. Those seated in front of her, the women in the room, represented a swath of social and economic classes. Some of these women were *empleadas* themselves. Others had women working in their homes.

One of the women that Fernanda had brought with her as a first time recruit leaned over to me and remarked, “Maybe she should suggest doing the floors differently. I’m sure there is a reason the *empleada* washes them the way she does. Nobody wants to spend more time than necessary washing floors.” I giggled. This woman had been an *empleada* as so many women who migrate from the country-side as young girls are during their first years in the city. Some transition out of this, as this new believer had, and attend night school. This particular woman had trained in a teacher’s college and become a teacher in the public school system.

Wilches’ *empleada* surely had her reasons for washing the floor the way she did. Perhaps she did want to take more time than was necessary. Perhaps she wanted to finish her duties later in the evening in order to avoid the rush hour line-ups for buses carrying the working poor back to the south of the city. Between four and eight in the evening, on any given weekday, the public transportation system in Bogotá is overwhelmed. It is also the most dangerous time to travel, since with such high traffic, pick-pockets and thieves are abundant. However, for Wilches, the time was not spent the way she would spend it, as an educated and powerful woman. The assumption that time spent wisely, patient, generous, industrious, the virtuous woman is a prosperous woman illustrated yet again the limits to correct womanhood. For Wilches, and the women in her Bible study, prosperity emerged through regulatory disciplined practiced and in accordance to efficiency and productivity.

*Pastora* Wilches concluded that in order to fulfill the expectation of God for His daughters, *hijas de Dios*, virtuous women must also become wives of God. “*El Señor busca el matrimonio con él. We must see ourselves as wives of God.*” Wife and daughter rolled into one being: the virtuous woman and at the same time, the *unrepresentable* sex (Butler 1990, p.13). At once child and lover, obedient and constant, Eve created from Adam (not God) in order to reproduce with Adam. Mary de-sexed and pure, yet mother of God, the impossible contradictions of *woman*, the term is a problematic of gendered discipline, and Butler quotes Luce Irigaray who said, “women are the sex that is not “one”, but multiple” (p. 13). The gendered discipline of virtue that Proverbs 31 explicates appears to outline the “becoming of woman” that the MCI expects. As Simone de Beauvoir definitively stated so many years ago, “one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one” (Beauvoir 1973, p. 130). Judith Butler pushes the “Othering” of woman that Beauvoir radically proposes, and introduces the possibility of a wholly broken system of representation, saying the “falsity of the signification points out that the entire structure of representation is inadequate” (Butler 1990, p.13). Butler then makes the intellectual move that defined her as one of the finest thinkers of the late twentieth century, proposing that a profound dismantling of the gendered binary works to form the basis of critique of hegemonic Western representation and, indeed, the “very notion of subject” (Butler 1990, p.14). The becoming is eternal. Herein lies a central contradiction of becoming a virtuous or prosperous woman that the practices of believing hold in tension, as has been explicated in previous chapters.

Scanning the books on display in the commercial center of the MCI, I noticed an adorable little box, with a sparkling flower on the lid and the title, “Dazzling Beauty for Women” with the sub-title, “Feminine Fragrance.” On the box cover was a cartoon woman, holding a Bible in one hand, and a shopping bag in the other, with different items scattered over the box

cover—new shoes, a bottle of perfume, hand cream, and a new journal. Everything sparkled. It was dazzling. Inside the box were thirty cards, advertised as “Tips to have Radiant Interior Beauty.” The first card in the box read as such: “Beauty is what the world today needs. Beauty is what everyone longs to see in a woman. Beauty is something that God gave you the capacity to give. Beauty is a fragrant essence that God put on you from the moment you were created. Beauty speaks, beauty pleases, beauty inspires, beauty identifies. God invites you today to place yourself in His transforming hands and receive the Total Inner Beauty Treatment. You will shine in all your life!”

However, the construction/becoming of gender is not an even process. Hierarchies of power, knowledge, and class colour every contour of gendered discipline. While some universals about what “women” are may be shared and deployed culturally across spheres of class and ethnicity, the women who may “become virtuous” or, for our purposes here, “prosperous” are particular. The rest hang precariously on their way to becoming—never arriving. Prosperity, following this argument, is dismantled somewhat from the assumed uniform and unidimensional character given it in many studies of prosperity Christianity.<sup>83</sup> Prosperity is not one specific set of material items or collectively imagined definition of wealth or health. Herein lies another contradiction that believing practice holds together: Wilches will remain in a position of power able to demonstrate her own fulfillment of these virtuous expectations, as will Castellanos. It is a regime of practice that differentiates potential in actuality, while maintaining an aspirational discourse of equality. The prosperity promised by financialized capitalism differs from whether you are a real-estate financier in Bogotá or a single-mother living in precarious conditions, whose children’s lives are under threat—yours might also be—and requesting micro-credits from a

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<sup>83</sup> An important exception to this is Naomi Haynes’ work on Prosperity Christianity in the Zambian Copperbelt. See Haynes 2012, 2013, and 2015b.

benevolent bank or NGO.

Late capitalist financial formations are methodically unhinged. Regarding finance in relation to believing is not an exercise in naming financial overstepping—quite the opposite. Putting finance and believing in relation to each other is an exercise in recognizing that finance never has had a set of normative bounds that cordoned one sphere from the other. Finance is also far from a top-heavy financier’s parasite, crawling into corners of social action and contaminating the “pure” realm of the proletariat. No longer. Financialization’s reach is necessarily both a “bottom-up” as well as “top-down” (and everything in-between) expansion. Understanding financialization as a disciplinary regime, as has been discussed in the previous chapter then, also requires an analysis of the everyday practices of believing that collectively form the financial imaginarium: this can be understood as the space of becoming.

Claudia continued: “You don’t “know” the word, you “feel” it, you breathe it. Now raise your hands to God, and listen to what He tells you. He wants to multiply you.” And the ushers with credit card machines were cued to begin receiving down-payments on credit in exchange for a multiplication of the self. These sets of contradictions that dissociate and fragment subjects of neoliberalism, these are held together through practices of believing. Debt carried is worth gained, and the spiritual gift of discernment is awarded as recompense for the corporeal discipline of believing and going into debt.

## 5.8 The Spirit of Shopping

Claudia Castellanos addressed the MCI satellite church in London, England: “You go to the mall, and you see the bed you want. But there is glass between you and that bed. God wants you to break the glass. God wants each and every one of us to be protagonists in breaking the glass



between what we want and having it. This is the financial fight. We depend on God, and we won't have financial problems. The last time I was in London, we arrived from Singapore. And when the plane landed, I received the anointing of shopping. How many women here have received the anointing of shopping?" She smiled and nodded at the women who clapped and cheered in the crowded auditorium. Castellanos laughs knowingly. She embodies the commodified spirit, but is also empowered by it.

As previously explained, the "Government of 12 Strategy" is the patented expansion strategy that Cesar and Claudia Castellanos have developed for their MCI franchise. However, the G12 is also a brand name. Registered with the Colombian Chamber of Commerce as "G12 Congresses and Conventions S.A.S." the G12 brand is one of the corporations behind the MCI church. "Cesar and Claudia Castellanos Ministries Inc." and export-import company registered in Florida and "Castellanos Ministries Corp." along with "G12 Tours" are some of the other corporate entities run by the Castellanos family. Pastor Claudia Castellanos is Chief Executive Officer (Cámara de Comercio 2005) of the corporation. The MCI church itself is also a commercial center, with a jewelry store, perfume vendors, clothing lines, book sales, DVD and CD stands, fifteen different kinds of Bibles for sale to suit personal preference, and stationary materials. And this is all for sale on cash or credit.

Receiving the anointing of shopping is an ethnographic fact that challenges the divided worlds of religion and consumption, believing and practice, in a vein similar to how Leigh Schmidt explains of United States rites of consumption of Christmas, Mother's Day, and Valentine's Day. However, once again, it is important to recognize the distinct context in which the assumed profanity of consumption and the sacredness of believing in Colombia are connected in ways that have not been analyzed before; especially in the case of women. The

Christian woman that Claudia Castellanos models is a woman who can shop in the spirit, whose clothing, jewelry, perfume, Bible, and hair-style all coordinate the performance of Spirit in the lives of believers. The consumer debt, however, that begins to rack up with greater access to credit, creates a newly indebted demographic: women of the aspirational classes. The anointing of shopping illustrates yet again a way that the often cordoned off dimensions of finance, faith, and embodied believing are conjoined. To understand the developing subjectivities of financializing capitalism, and the complicated category of gender within it, the study of contemporary Prosperity Christianity opens an important path towards thicker comprehension, and the blurring of assumed distinctive categories of consumption and believing.

## 5.9 *Multiplicame*: Making people more

Fernanda's sister, Sofia, took me to a workshop promoted by her multi-level marketing company *NuSkin*, called "How to make money without money." When Luisa called me to invite me, she explained, "This is part of the vision of multiplication that we learned about at the women's conference. I am multiplying myself. *Me estoy multiplicando.*" About 100 new recruits mingled about in the glitzy lobby of a Bogotá hotel, waiting for doors to the conference room to open. A group called The Center for Personal and Financial Development was hosting the workshop. The promise was to "maximize your personal *and* financial potential" with the four areas of emphasis in "personal transformation" "new beliefs" "productivity" and "prosperity." When the doors finally opened, everyone streamed into the conference room, Shakira's World Cup theme song blasting from the speakers, and the staff clapped as folks walked by, as though they were finishing a marathon.

The room was filled with excitement and expectation, and reminded me of the services of the MCI. Suddenly, the music shifted to an even more triumphant tone and everyone sat down

on cue. Andres the celebrity financial coach walked on stage to exuberant applause. After a round of some icebreaker games, Andres got down to business: “97% of Colombians are paying off their debts over fifteen years or more” he began. “And” he continued, “in Latin America, 8 out of every 10 people spend more than they earn.” The problem, Andres explained, was that Latin Americans are not financially literate, or lack financial intelligence, and people mistake credit for an increase in their income. People’s capacity for going into debt is great, but getting out of it is impossible for many. People were accumulating debt, and were not accumulating wealth. He was there to teach everyone who was willing to pay, how to make money, without money. And fast. “Do you know how to overcome poverty?” he asked everyone. “By making *the decision* to not be poor. You must assume a financial *personality*, understand the *spiritual laws of prosperity* (administration, values, sacrifice/effort), you must have the right energy and the right mind about money. You must become an *enlightened warrior* in your personal and financial life. You must be *disciplined*. Make productive decisions, and become part of the “new economy”. It’s up to you. Nobody else is responsible for your failure, and nobody else will help you with your success. You don’t want to be poor anymore! You *owe it to yourself* to become profitably educated. To become your own boss, and make your money work for you, not work for money. This information must be shared with the world; *God wants* this information to be shared with the world.” And everyone clapped.

Most of the people at the workshop were women, and the exhortation to believe in the entrepreneurial self, rather than recognize their condition as an increasingly precarious labour force, echoed the teachings of the MCI. The line-up to purchase the speaker’s DVD box set and sign-up for further workshops (all at a cost), trailed around the hotel lobby. Sofia waited patiently in line, and I stood beside her. When it was our turn to make the payment (on Sofia’s credit

card), the vendor assured us that he had been “born again” through this financial education course. Believing, in this sense, serves as a “fragmentary synthesis of real experience” (Haiven 2014, p. 13). Sofia’s conviction that the course would be the investment necessary to push ahead her business with *NuSkin* seemed to confirm this definition. “We can’t think in terms of scarcity” she explained. “I need to renew my house, multiply my ministry, and myself.”

Financial potential is tied to *personal* potential: One does not simply become financially potent. Rather, one must also become personally actualized. Finance is a question, ultimately, of subjectivity. Women in this matrix are conditioned and disciplined in their gendered performance of prosperity in a particular way, and in accordance to the social fictions that maintain economies dependent on patriarchal reproduction.

The four areas for developing financial and personal potential for the Center for Personal and Financial Development are worth noting: “personal transformation” “new beliefs” “productivity” and “prosperity.” The new economy that Andres the Financial Coach was preaching, entangles endlessly with religious overtones and embedded, primarily Christian, ideas about “the new”, “the good” and “believing.” *Becoming* the prosperous woman spills outside of the walls of the MCI, into assumedly secular spaces of entrepreneurial education, microfinancing, and broader deployments of cultural powers of control.

Women, in the MCI, in debt, in conditions of precarity, perform a particular practice of believing, embodied in a regime of practices that deploy the fictions of financializing culture beyond imagined communities of nation or state, but rather transnationally cut through barriers of access of international financing programs and disciplines of consuming—their relationships,

their identities, and their selves, all commodified and desired. The next chapter will further explore the direct sales company, and the charismatic capitalism that it embodies.

### *Taxi Cab Confessions, Part 3*

*“You believe in it?” I had been mindlessly watching out the window of the taxi racing down the Avenida de las Americas on my way to an MCI meeting. “Sorry?” I replied. “Do you believe in it? Do you believe in the miracles that that church promises?” The driver knew my destination, and assumed I was a faithful congregant. “Well” I began, “I am researching the church, and the people that believe in the promise.” “Huh” the driver kept his eyes on the road. “My sister went to that church for a while, but her husband kept on cheating on her, and her daughter got sick. She says the church just takes your money, and nothing happens. It’s a Ponzi scheme, she says.” I considered this common critique I heard from many of my friends and colleagues in Bogotá. “You know, I think people need to believe in something. Don’t you believe in anything?” I asked. “Yah. But the virgin actually grants miracles. But only if you’re a good Catholic. It doesn’t have anything to do with money.” I nodded. Fair enough. And we arrived at the doors of the MCI as the masses were lining up.*

## Chapter 6

Prosperity, modernity, and the irresistible desire to become more

*They say revolutions turn out badly. But they're constantly confusing two different things, the way revolutions turn out historically and people's revolutionary becoming. These relate to two different sets of people. Man's [sic] only hope lies in a revolutionary becoming: the only way of casting off their shame or responding to what is intolerable -*

Gilles Deleuze

*We must believe in capitalism, in the ways that the early Protestants were asked to believe in predestination.*

Arjun Appadurai

### 6.1 Financialization and Becoming

“Who here wants to make more money?” “Who wants more free time to spend with your family?” “Who wants an all-inclusive vacation?” People all around me were cheering, clapping, and vigorously waving their hands in the air. They wanted those things. And why not? Those are all things to desire. “Everyone” desires those things, universally. Don't we?

Sofia, Fernanda's sister and *Misión Carismática Internacional* faithful disciple, had invited me to the recruitment meeting of Nu Skin, a direct sales company based in Utah. The transnational company was one of the many growing direct sales companies finding fertile ground in the precarious lives of the Colombian unemployed, yet fearlessly hopeful. Sofia had invited me, explaining that what she learned at the Nu Skin meetings and what she learned at the MCI services and bible studies, reinforced each other. The Nu Skin meeting, she told me, strengthened her faith and gave her new skills to recruit new distributors for her marketing network, and the MCI cell group meetings and bible studies infused a faith-based aspiration to

her business goals and sales techniques. Direct sales and direct faith, as Peter S. Cahn coined, come to play on each other in financializing Colombia (Cahn 2011). Debt drives the discipline necessary for the success of both.

Nu Skin is a publicly traded direct sales company worth \$2.5 billion USD on the New York Stock Exchange. Nu Skin is one of the many direct sales companies that are inundating neoliberal Latin America. Direct sales companies are rapidly covering terrain of unemployment and precarious labour markets through offering a model of self-improvement through self-employment. As previously discussed (Chapter 3), structural adjustment policies (SAPs) were ushered into Latin American economies by the major financing institutions after massive debt defaults of the 1980s. These SAPs restructured the social, political, and economic fabric of most Latin American countries, including Colombia, through rolling back government spending, privatizing public industries, deregulating markets, and freezing wages.

Neoliberalism is, in part, the historical, political, and economic assemblage of consequences produced from the implementation of SAPs. The resultant shifts in policies and cultures that were necessary for the SAPs to be implemented make up a broader socio-political project that was directed from ostensibly economic interests. What is necessary to recognize, however, is that the economic interests were but one element suspended within broader structures of power. Neoliberal power, biopolitics being only one part of this (Foucault 2008; Audier 2015) is mediated by a fundamentally economic rationality. What sets neoliberal power apart from other forms of power, is the insistence of an economic rationality to manage traditionally “non-economic” realms, such as healthcare or education. Neoliberal power has reached the very interior of personhood, making the self a site of reform and realization. The



privatization of the commons and the proliferation of modes and methods of self-regulation as means of governance is fertile ground in which evangelical entrepreneurialism grows.

Prosperity-bound evangelism arises in response to what Charismatic Christians in Colombia read as a *spiritual* crisis of structural proportions. The call to save the self, prosper the self, as a vehicle of saving not only the nation, but also the *way of life* of a religious politics brings the power of financialization into new relief. Direct sales promises prosperity, but more importantly, direct sales offers a full transformation of the self, through managing the self and self-management. “I have learned to be disciplined in my sales plan, and my evangelical vision” Sofia told me. Every day she gets up and makes phone calls to three potential clients. She attempts to make at least one sales visit per day. Every week, she hopes to enlist one more recruit to her roster of distributors. In very much the same way, Sofia evangelizes and draws people into her cell group, making phone calls everyday and committing to enlisting a new convert every week. The line between business and evangelism is porous, and Sofia regularly brings Nu Skin clients to church with her. She brings Nu Skin catalogues to bible study meetings, and she suggests to as many people as she can to pick up Robert Kiyosaki’s *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* to understand how self-employment is the secret to prosperity and emancipation. Of course, not every week results in a new distributor or a new convert for the MCI community. But these are the necessary set-backs necessary for further improvement. To continue the eternal project of “becoming.”

The influx of direct sales companies into Latin America is directly tied to the process of neoliberalization (Cahn 2011). In part, this is because direct sales offer a compelling promise: become your own boss and become prosperous. This chapter parses out the problematic of “becoming” as the desire that drives financialization, and the entrepreneurialism of the self the

drives direct sales and direct faith. The focus here is the connection between the roots of prosperity thinking and the work that “becoming” does within the regimen of control that financialization produces.

## 6.2 Salvation, Confession, Becoming

Finance capital, understood at once as power bloc and a process of capitalism, as previously discussed (Chapter 1 and 2), has reframed the work of salvation into the abstruse boundaries of “becoming.” Salvation, as Michel Foucault suggested, is after all an activity, or a regime of activity and actions one performs on and of the self (Foucault 1976). “Becoming” as ethos, and as practice, precludes “being” in societies of control. These are the societies controlled by austerity, and the violence that permeates the social and political spheres in Colombia. Direct sales companies emerge as the vanguard of the prosperity movement, beyond church walls and not limited to specific programs of evangelism. To say this another way, salvation in the times of precarious prosperity has become of question of self-realization.

To explain, neoliberalism moved the populations of Latin America away from small-scale farming and feudal systems of economic governance towards wage labour and the formation of an inherently precarious and anxious middle class. Entrepreneurship became the “favoured path to an improved life” (Cahn 2011, p. 12) as millions of Latin Americans found themselves on the losing end of austerity measures enacted by governments throughout the 1980s and 1990s. With few options for steady work, a systematic program of privatization and government rollbacks in social security, “becoming one’s own boss” proved to be an attractive option for many. Direct selling, through companies like Avon, Mary Kay, and Amway, accelerated throughout the country with promises of restoring balance between family and work, the potential for limitless wealth accumulation, and notably, personal transformation through positive thinking. “In

becoming a direct seller, distributors unlearn the cynicism of adulthood and replace it with an expansive vision of unlimited success” (Cahn 2011, p. 15). Direct sales promised a kind of entrepreneurial spirit that sought to humanize neoliberal reforms. Cahn emphasizes this drive through pointing out the dual meaning of the “commission”—a monetary reward for sales, as well as a higher calling to proselytize family members and new recruits to the power of the mind in creating prosperity. Simply put, “alongside the cosmopolitan, entrepreneurial qualities encouraged by neoliberalism, direct sellers seek to return to a primordial past when humans understood how to control their own destinies without relying on anyone else” (Cahn 2011, p. 15). Direct sellers and direct believers like Sofia engage in direct sales seeking not only greater wealth and free time, but also personal and internal transformation.

Finance as a realm of internal conduct is where Nu Skin and microcredit intersect with believing practice and prosperity. While Foucault does distinguish government from political and economic subjectivation, he clarifies that to govern “an individual or a group is to act on the possibilities of action of other individuals” and is a “mode of action on the actions of others” (Foucault 2007, p. xxii). Within this framework, the work of salvation in the neoliberal epoch, is a salvation of the self—no longer reliant on the pastor or the governor, but the very conduct of conduct. Redemption and calculation. Management and morality. These are the new dimensions of financial governmentality.

### 6.3 A Force for Good

I had been attending meetings for one Nu Skin cell unit with Sofia for a number of months. For Sofia, Nu Skin offered a blurring of the lines between the sacred and the profane, and allowed a directness of relationship with a benevolent and generous God; a God that desires prosperity for all and a God Sofia can conjure up through unflinching optimism. Part of the optimism is

propped up through bi-weekly recruitment meetings that Nu Skin brokers hold across Bogotá. When Sofia wasn't at an MCI bible study or running her own discipleship cell group, she was attending a Nu Skin meeting. The meetings are held in hotel lobbies and corporate board rooms, and give the impression of corporate success covered in bland carpeting and frosted glass walls. The particular recruitment meeting we were at was reaching a fevered pitch, as potential recruits excitedly shared with each other what they would do with more money and more freedom. Sofia turned and smiled encouragingly at me, nodding and clapping; “*Te imagines???*” “Can you imagine?” I couldn't decipher if she was encouraging me to imagine becoming a Nu Skin distributor, or if she was simply inviting me into the realm of imagination—imagining a future different from the present.

The recruitment meeting for this direct sales company, also known as multi-level marketing, began with an invitation to imagine. Specializing in skin-care and cleanses for weight loss, Nu Skin's marketing focus is anti-aging technology. The recruitment meetings are actually called, “opportunity meetings” (*reuniones de oportunidad*), and everyone is invited into the opportunity that Nu Skin promotes. At this particular meeting, the area distributors—a couple who ran the presentation—were converts to Evangelical Christianity from Catholicism. They had met while in Singapore, a monk and a nun from different Catholic orders. He was Korean, and she was Colombian. “Thanks to God, to believing that I had been shown my true love and my true mission in life, when we met, I knew I needed to leave the Catholic order” Manuel, the Korean ex-monk and diamond level distributor explained. “Now we are living our dreams, and making other people's dreams come true.”

The Opportunity Meeting had a distinctly evangelical flare, and the words “faith” “belief” “conviction” were thrown around as Manuel and Maria explained how “boxes of the

mind” (*cajones de la mente*) hold people prisoner in lives they don’t want to live. “You have to break-down the boundaries of those boxes. You have to think in terms of the infinite” Maria explained, while pacing back and forth in front of the group in a pantsuit and heels. She shared her own testimony of being so excited with her first significant pay-cheques from Nu Skin sales, that after she renovated her kitchen floor with higher quality ceramic tiles, God responded with the question: “And my cut?” Maria framed her prosperity and success with Nu Skin as a result of the “pact” or “covenant” she had made with God some years previously, when she and Manuel had decided to give everything up for the new life of network marketing—and converted from Catholicism to evangelical Christianity. But, “God is a gentleman. He doesn’t push. He just reminds us, that part of our success is due to His intervention.” The notable tone of limitless possibility, endless potential, and the promise of opportunity conflated with God’s provision and the risk of the “covenant.” Going into debt, risking livelihoods in order to fully commit to the Nu Skin life were central to the opening vignettes given by various converts at the opportunity meeting. The refrain emphasized that “anyone can become a millionaire. This company makes more millionaires a year than any other [multi-level marketing company]. Nu Skin makes a millionaire every four days!”

Manuel and Maria broke down the process of achieving prosperity through 4 steps: “Tendencies” (personal goals, such as more free time or more money—the imagined future); “Associates” (the center-piece to network marketing—convincing or converting people (family members, friends, acquaintances at work) to become distributors under your franchise); “Technologies” (the “undeniable” quality and efficacy of the anti-aging products;) and “Compensation” (the promised millions). For Sofia, this formula was an obvious fit with her already well-rehearsed commitment to the G-12 Vision, of Winning, Consolidating, Discipling,

and Sending (or multiplying). The four step formula resonated on a deep level. When the four steps were explained, Sofia leaned to me and whispered, “See!? You see how what I learn here helps my Spirit vision, and how what I learn in church helps my business?!”

The rhetorical questions continued to fill the spaces between testimonies and explanation of the product: “What do you prefer: Giving 100% of your own efforts, or prospering off of 1% effort from one hundred people?” The logic lay in the obviousness that the Nu Skin product was of such high caliber that it would sell itself. In order to properly demonstrate how effective the product was, the correct marketing package had to be purchased. The phrase that contained this strategy is Nu Skin’s affirmation that they are “channeling a force for good” in the world. With a corporate social responsibility program that delivers eleven different development programs around the world, the “Force for Good” initiative and foundation forms an important dimension to the marketing of Nu Skin. Not only does the company change the lives of distributors, but also the lives of millions of children around the world—everything from agricultural sustainability projects in Malawi to public library projects in China and Korea, called “Nu Hope Libraries.” Maria posed yet another rhetorical question: “Do you want to help poor children, and get rich? You can be a force for good in the world, and your own life.” Somehow, salvation—of children millions of miles away—and the self, were entirely wrapped up in the promise of Nu Skin. In the case of Nu Skin, part of the action of and on the self is the invocation of a distant third party, an intangible sense of being a “force for good” while also fulfilling a vision of the self.

Imagining a “not yet” is part of the work of quickening the return on investment in the Nu Skin scheme and the logic of financialization more generally. Many would argue that Nu Skin is a pyramid scheme. For it is a direct descendent of the direct sales movement inspired by the prosperity thinking of the New Thought movement from the late nineteenth century, and

subsequent evolutions and offshoots into popular prosperity rhetoric (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of the “Prosperity Gospel”). The history of direct-sales companies and the related legacy of a nineteenth-century metaphysical movement, began in New England with the so-called New Thought movement (Cahn 2011; Bowler 2013). Championed by popular religious figures, like Mary Baker Eddy and Phineas Quimby, New Thought drives the narrative that thoughts have the power to shape material reality (Cahn 2011, p. 39). Advanced by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Transcendentalist philosophy, the New Thought movement claimed “God not only created humans in His image but also endowed them with divine power” (Cahn 2011, p. 41). In the beginning of the twentieth century, metaphysical writers expanded ideas of New Thought to the pursuit of wealth and the American Dream. As the United States moved towards greater industrialization and capitalist development, New Thought lost its legitimacy as a freestanding movement, and found refuge in institutions like Alcoholics Anonymous and direct sales. Direct sales start-ups relied on the central pillar of direct faith, that “the only barriers to a successful career were internal, so they exhorted their representatives to think positively” (Cahn 2011, p. 43).

Direct sales ventures, from door-to-door sales to the advent of home parties and the feminization of direct sales with companies such as Amway, Tupperware, and Mary Kay, also lay the groundwork for what would become the “Prosperity Gospel” teachings, also known as “Faith Movement” (Coleman 2000) “Name it and Claim it doctrine” (Connolly 2011) or the “Health and Wealth Gospel” (Bowler 2013).<sup>84</sup> New Thought sermons, buttressed by revival-style meetings complete with worship songs, prayers, and the ever-present mantra of “belief in the

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<sup>84</sup> Kate Bowler (2013) does a magisterial job in explaining and placing the history of the “Prosperity Gospel” giving a clear genealogy of the positive thought movement, the New Thought movement, and its role in producing today’s “Prosperity Gospel.” Prosperity as concept has been mobilized by the indefatigable optimism of constantly working on, and reforming, the self while at the same time being fully aware that the process of becoming is never complete.

self’ coloured the rise of Tupperware and Mary Kay, companies that came to rely on the housewife demographic for their growing fleet of sales representatives. Emphasizing traditional gender roles, as Mary Kay unapologetically did, the major shift in sales strategy was self-esteem and belief in the self (Cahn 2011, p. 49). Foreshadowing the Prosperity Theologies of the 1980s and 1990s, “the overtly spiritual tone of companies like Mary Kay and Home Interiors and Gifts endow the work of selling with the sanctity of helping others” (Cahn 2011, p. 50) and faith in an abundant God whose designs for humanity are prosperity, wealth, and health.

The entrepreneurial innovation of direct sales arose in the United States in the 1950s, and began by offering economically marginalized post-war housewives of the 1950s an opportunity to bring in some revenue for themselves, as well become part of enthusiastic communities of women who saw inroads to degrees of emancipation in becoming successful salespersons. Although the successful career in sales is most often exaggerated by recruiters, and these market relationships only exist within a web of social obligations as Williams and Bemiller argue, the positive thought that infused the burgeoning direct sales movement burst onto pulpits throughout the United States, then the world, starting in the 1970s and continue today.<sup>85</sup> Direct sales was designed specifically as “non-store retailing” as some manufacturers sought to keep their goods off crowded stores in the Gilded Age of industrialization in the United States. According to Cahn, the direct sales movement employed the language of direct faith from the beginning. Given the forms in which career success had been infused with the logic of positive thought—in other words, the assumptions that a successful career depended upon a set of internal barriers or openings led to imbuing the work of selling with cosmic significance.

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<sup>85</sup> For a full discussion of the entrance of direct sales into the sphere of American domesticity of the 1950s, see Williams and Bemiller 2011.



The ethnographically legible act, here, is the shared conviction that “anyone can make it.”<sup>86</sup> Anyone is capable of accumulating wealth in the new economies that make-up the emerging world. Wealth accumulation is no longer an activity reserved for the elite. Peace and prosperity, security in finances and social class, is now attainable for the masses. At least, so goes the overwhelming marketing message of banks and governments alike, in Colombia. The promise of opportunity is the currency of financialized capitalism, the brightly framed narrative that overrides any contradicting realities of debt and austerity, prosperity is the result of taking advantage of this ambiguous “opportunity” promised by financial institutions, multi-level marketing companies, and transnational Christian corporations, like “Opportunity International.”

However, this social act of “becoming” is practiced through exercises of indebtedness. It is a colonial irony: the imposition of greater forces of control and, in Colombia’s case, violent repression, accompanied by a frame of future imagining that celebrates prosperity. The “cultural” shift encompassed in transitioning an economy from cash-based to credit-based requires an equivalent yet contradicting shift in believing practices: from austerity to prosperity.

The credit industry driving financialization has promised a democratization of wealth. Everyone is eligible for credit. Just as Nu Skin “empowers people to empower themselves” the *rhetoric of access* that underwrites aspirational practices of prosperity, and that the financial turn promises, is the focus of this chapter. Submission to the regime of financial control through this commitment to “believing in the self” is reminiscent of Marie Griffith’s account of Aglow Women in North Eastern United States who saw their submission to their husbands, and their

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<sup>86</sup> Conviction, as believing, and as imagining, is interpreted through the activities and practices, through discourse, deployment of technologies (such as credit cards), and embodied performance.

Father God, as an empowering regime of practice (Griffith 1997). In this sense, the force of financial belief liberates the salespeople of Nu Skin, and the faithful of the MCI, and the indebted in the programs of Opportunity International, to construct a “not yet” that is very real. The power in this is liberating insofar as prosperity thinking creates the conditions for thinking utopias. For believing the world can be different.

The logic of universal access to prosperity holds this cultural shift from austerity to prosperity in a particularly contradictory manner. “Thinking prosperously” seems to be a curious deviation from the reality of increased precarity when observing the growing precarious class—the underside of financializing capitalism and its accompanying elaboration of austerity, scarcity, and sacrifice (of social security, of accessibility to education and legal justice systems, of entrenching inequality and concentrations of wealth in increasingly fewer institutions). However, when considering “acting prosperously” through the categories of “believing” “control” “discipline” and “multiplication” as they have been articulated throughout the chapters of this dissertation, a larger process of collective promising becomes evident—in other words, a truly political act can be traced.

The “small miracles” of health, education, a job, purchasing power—these might not seem miracles to a privileged observer because there is no need for them to be; however they are not so small to someone who has absolutely no guarantee of access to healthcare, for example. The conviction of these women that they deserve prosperity, points to a deeper politics of believing—that is the claiming of a legitimate space in the world. In a world where consumption as the activity of the “ideal human type”, the promise that everyone can achieve these is being “taken seriously” by my informants, and millions of other Colombians. Despite the apparent lack of capacity for the financial system, as it is, to deliver on this promise, Colombia’s aspirational

classes are putting into practice the belief that prosperity is also their right. The consequence, of course, of such contradictory systems is precisely what Hannah Arendt articulated as the possibility of falling into “the ever-occurring cycle of becoming” (Arendt 1958). This cycle of ambiguous becoming is what this chapter attends to.

The ethnographic observations of multi-level marketing companies, mega-church prosperity preaching, financial inclusion programs, micro-credit organizations, and credit card companies themselves—has demonstrated a common thread in the broadcasting of the promise of financialization: everyone has access to the opportunity. It is not even necessarily the “money” itself, indeed it is not, but the promise resides in having access to a possibility. It is an anti-teleology.

## 6.4 Entrepreneurialism as a Lifestyle

Sofia had invited me to accompany her to this weekly recruitment and check-in meeting held by Maria and Manuel, Blue Diamond distributors, the highest rank of Nu Skin representatives. “Sometimes I try to go to more than one meeting a week” she had told me as we waited for the doors of the conference room to open. Milling about in the hotel lobby, Sofia explained that the meetings, much like her participation in cell meetings of the MCI, “encouraged, animated, and renewed” her business activities.

However, Sofia was not the first person to invite me to a Nu Skin recruitment meeting. I had first been introduced to Nu Skin by an acquaintance who was neither a member of the MCI, nor a confessing Christian of any particular denomination. She did, however, define herself as a “believer.” “I believe in the Universe, and the good spirits, angels, and the power of the mind. I believe in myself. I’ve learned this a lot more since I joined Nu Skin” she explained to me on one

occasion. The “promise of becoming” registered on both “religious” as well as otherworldly planes. Reminiscent of what Simon Coleman has identified as “evangelical double-speak” the registers of belief connect the secular and the religious worlds in service of a particular worldview (Coleman 2005). For Sofia, the multi-level marketing language of Nu Skin was familiar discourse. The G12 Vision of the MCI operates similarly, as a “structured means for church growth and formation. The idea of the Vision is to make every member of the church an active leader in ministry. In turn, each leader will form and disciple twelve others.” This explanation of the G12 Vision is found in student handbooks from the “Destiny Training” course designed to “training committed followers of Christ” in the four-fold path of “winning, consolidating, discipling, and sending” (Castellanos 2001). Similarly, the Nu Skin recruitment process is carried out by a process of inviting friends to meetings, consolidating them as new distributors under the supervision of a “sponsor” and with an emphasis on “coachability” educating the new recruits under the rubric of “the power of duplication” and then sending out the trained distributor to recruit new distributors and repeat the process. Multi-level marketing, of course, becomes a lucrative business insofar as every addition to the distribution sequence produces profit up to the top of distribution chain. To be sure, the G12 Vision and the Nu Skin business model are not equivalents. However, the conflation of improving the self with improving the girth of one’s bank account is the feature of financializing capitalism this chapter develops: the ambiguous eschatology of monetary becoming that most probably will never arrive, in the sense that it is also anti-teleological.

## 6.5 “Our difference is demonstrated in our opportunity”

Nu Skin is Mormon owned and “the premier anti-aging company” in the world, as the franchise leaders, and the website, affirm (Lopez 2012). Their difference, the company suggests, is the very

opportunity that they offer—exactly what the “opportunity” is, whether new skin, riches, time, or success, is unclear. Nu Skin is a self-proclaimed anti-aging company, selling products that include skin creams, ointments, vitamin supplements, weight loss plans, serums, and machines that remove lines and purportedly “change the levels of elastin fibers” in the skin, and “reset genes” responsible for skin aging. Based in “AgeLoc” science, the Nu Skin promise sounds like an advertisement of dystopian future science fiction. Anti-aging skin remedies, however, are convincing marketing products. Nu Skin is now a publicly traded company on the New York Stock Exchange, one of the largest Direct Sales companies in the world, selling its products in 52 countries around the world. With total assets of over one billion dollars, the CEOs of the company based in Utah, are millionaires. The financial system has evidently served their interests—and their bank accounts.

As I sat through yet one more recruitment meeting of Nu Skin, I was struck by the emphasis on faith in the self, believing in the self, that was the main thrust of the presenters’ performances. Manuel and Maria explained how they had left the “religious life” for a “Nu Skin life.” “Nu Skin became our new lifestyle” Manuel proudly put his arm around Maria, “and we have never regretted our decision. We’re now Blue Diamond distributors, and have more free time and money to spend time with our two beautiful children.” Sofia again nudged me, channeling the excitement in the room at not only the romantic display of rebellion to the Catholic church, but also the “lifestyle” coding that Evangelical Christians in Colombia regularly use to phrase their understanding of what being a Christian is about. “Not a religion, but a lifestyle” is a regular adage heard in the Evangelical churches, and the reference to Nu Skin as such registered for the evangelical crowd. Nu Skin translated into a promise of new life, new possibilities, through selling “new skin.”

It became clear, with the shouts of “amen” that many in the room were indeed Evangelical Christians. Manuel and Maria inspired this evangelically flavoured group meeting in part because of their own story, true love and the rejection of the Catholic church, along with the affirmation that Nu Skin was more than just a business opportunity, but indeed the possibility of completely turning lives around. “From its founding in 1984, Nu Skin Enterprises’ mission has been to improve people’s lives” the website proudly boasts. The company founders refer to their enterprise as a “force for good” and the recruitment meetings relay the promise of not only an entrepreneurial opportunity, self-employment, and rejection of the 9-5 life working for “the man” in a context of increasingly precarious labour, but also an opportunity for self-improvement. Anti-aging is itself a promise of approaching the possibility of perfection and coming one step closer to an impossible immortality. The perennial quest for the fountain of youth, the stuff of Mesopotamian Kings and Egyptian papyri, medieval alchemy and colonial conquistadores, is an irresistible quest for these future distributors.<sup>87</sup>

Nu Skin recruitment meetings present the “science” behind the products, innovative technologies for reversing signs of aging, and a team of scientists, known as biogerontologists, that work out of a 22,000 square foot laboratory in Utah and a 20,000 square foot lab in Fengxian, China. Photographs of the science team are shown in recruitment meetings, including the credentials of the scientists, replete with PhDs from Ivy League universities in the United States. As much time is spent convincing the potential distributors of the quality of the product as on the benefits that becoming a distributor would offer. “Our difference is demonstrated through our opportunity. At Nu Skin, professional distributor leaders thrive as they inspire and empower

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<sup>87</sup> For a comprehensive, and fascinating, account of the genealogy of the “quest for immortality” or the “fountain of youth” see Post and Binstock 2004.

others. Distributors' lives are better today because they joined Nu Skin. We are committed to providing the best opportunity to make your dreams a reality" (Nu Skin 2014). The promise of Nu Skin is as much a promise of empowerment and improvement in personal lives, as it is a promise of monetary gain. Indeed, the "new economy" proposed here is hailed as a vehicle for personal development as much as financial development.

It is here where we see one of the more significant shifts from industrial post-Fordist capitalism towards financialized capitalism. In financialized capitalism, investment in the self is as productive as the very idea of financial investment. Finance in opposition, and even counter, to political economy, operates in a realm of profiting without producing—in part a reason for the incredible rise in multi-level marketing companies and the very logic underlying the "new economy."

What financialization offers is not only direct faith, and direct sales—but direct access. Financialization offers direct access to a promise of inclusion into the realms of the financial elite, or at the least, the middle classes. The promise, after all, is one of the two faculties of real action a human can make, according to Hannah Arendt. The act of forgiving and the act of promising are the only true faculties of action, and Arendt traces the promise back to Abraham's incessant covenanting with God, until "God was forced to make a covenant with Abraham" a similar logic to the incessant covenanting at the MCI or the weekly covenants, held promises, of micro-credit groups meeting to gather a weekly payment (Arendt 1958, p. 255).

The promise is also, however, a double-edged sword. "The power of stabilization inherent in the faculty of making promises has been known throughout our tradition" (Arendt 1958, p. 243). Writing three decades before Foucault, Arendt allows that "keeping a promise" as

in paying your debts, is the foremost practice of disciplining a “non-sovereign freedom.” Foucault would re-consider discipline in the bio-political (neoliberal) condition as sovereignty to and of the self. This neoliberal condition was necessary to create the disciplinary space of financialization. Financial promise-making, the contract made between creditor and debtor, the installation of a regime of practice specific to this relation, as it is the fundamental relation in financialized society, becomes the relation exercised in Nu Skin, the MCI, micro-credit programs, and credit card debt. The promise that unifies a society is the management of unpredictability.

Sofia excitedly called me one day, asking if I would give English lessons to her distributors with Nu Skin, who were also her disciples at the MCI. “I am really feeling my Vision developing, and now is the time for fulfilling the mission, don’t you think?” She was referring to the focus of the cell group studies with Senator/Pastor Wilches who had been emphasizing the fulfillment of the “Vision” as part of the focus for the “missioning” weeks. Every few weeks or months, the focus for the entire MCI shifts according to the inspiration Pastor Cesar receives from the Spirit. At this particular moment, between January and March 2013, Pastor Cesar had relayed to his Group of Twelve that they should all relay to their respective Groups of Twelve, and so on down the chain of command, that the focus was to be “visioning” and “fulfilling the mission.” The pastor had preached as much. “Imagine your goals. Visualize your prosperity. See what God wants for you. Then fulfill the mission to achieve what God has waiting for you.”

Prosperity Christianity responds to the unpredictability of the social, political, economic contract of financialized capitalism. Desiring wealth, desiring “freedom” and “time” are legitimate in prosperity. The space of enunciation is crucial to recognize, however (Bhahba 2004). Sofia, Ursula, Fernanda, and Remedios exist on the sidelines of modernity. Desiring wealth in a condition of exclusion is quite different than desiring, even demanding wealth, where



it is a rational demand, even an expectation of the present life. Prosperity Christianity in the spaces of exclusion, in the shadows of modernity, enunciates a different set of controls and disciplines. One manner in which Prosperity Christianity deploys this shift is through moving past the “protestant ethic” of austerity, the stoic conviction of salvation in the afterlife, and the confidence of “by faith alone” towards the ostentatious rejection of austerity (the theme of neoliberalism/financialism). Prosperity Christianity rebels against the idea that wealth maintains itself as only accessible to an elite, or *chosen* few in society. Despite this, the irrationality of continuing to “believe” in the financial system, in currencies and inflation rates, in stock market prices and interest rates, the irrationality of the system maintains its operability.

## 6.6 From discipline to control; from believing to becoming

As Foucault predicted, and Deleuze has suggested, societies embroiled in capitalism and its advance are moving away from enclosed structures of sovereignty and towards methods of “control.” The institutions that Foucault identified as creating the matrix of disciplining regimes of self-regulation and reform have become privatized and internalized. The school, the clinic, and the prison become dismantled as the defining institutions of disciplinary societies, insofar as education, healthcare, and a justice system becomes inaccessible to the masses. The factory has moved overseas, and labour has become outsourced. Indeed, in financializing capitalism, the amorphous non-institution of the market increasingly becomes the only accessible path to reform, selfhood, and prosperity. The invitation to participate in an imagined future, indeed, bet on it and make the future productive requires believing. This believing indicates doubt and uncertainty, and therefore risk, as sociologist Anthony Giddens has illustrated (Giddens and Pierson 1998). Gilles Deleuze illustrates the risk of believing as part of eternal becoming, “endless postponement” (Deleuze 1995). Whereas the “endless potential” promised by credit card

companies becomes enmeshed with the “endless postponement” of completion, believing requires the risk that becoming will never ensue, that the final result will not materialize, that prosperity is only a possibility,

That risk is what creates a miracle. What Hannah Arendt names the “new.” Arendt explains, “the new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle” (Arendt 1958, p. 178). The miracle occurs when the unbelievable becomes reality. Cancers vomited on the floor of a rural Colombian church. Surviving repeated assassination attempts. Having the capital to rent a kitchen, with a few tables, and become an entrepreneur. Becoming the pastor of millions of people, owning property in Florida, Peru, and Colombia. The different sites of ethnographic engagement of this dissertation illustrate the forms of becoming, based in credit, in emerging Colombia.

From believing we move to becoming. Believing, ultimately, is a set of practices intended to bring something about; to produce something. It is an eschatology that only partly fulfills its conclusion. For a robust reading of practices and social acts of believing, one must seek the legible practices of becoming. The arrival that will, perhaps, never come. An infinite journey of displacement of the future. To put it simply, credit cards have monetized becoming.

Finance profits from the machinations of unknown outcomes. It is the production of becoming itself for itself, that financialized capitalism motivates. Indeed, today, the financial system has ridden on the tails of this logic to the point of “trading in futures.” Future has appropriated a monetary value, is now a financial product. “Not only does the use value of money facilitate the circulation of commodities, but the future of each enters into the present

instantaneously and relentlessly. How the future and present interpenetrate is what future trading is all about” (Martin 2000, p. 47)

Deleuze was very concerned about “becoming.” Placing desire over power, Deleuze articulates a turn in critical theory to considering possibility as the motivating factor in human action. Deleuze suggests that there is no more belief; only desire in the service of capital. Human lives are no longer subject to values; they have become the value (Deleuze 1992). Believing in the self, believing in the God that can alter the self, and the processes of becoming, are the most productive activities in the economy of financialized capitalism.

“Together, we own what’s now. And we own what’s next.” This phrase from Nu Skin’s promotional material illustrates well the interpenetration of present and future time. Where financialization intersects with belief comes to clearest relief when the trope of “believing in the self” is deployed. Where a “real” economy is understood as oppressive and limiting to wage-earners, as the *NuSkin* program purports, finance claims modes of enrichment through credit cards. Whereas wages are stubbornly kept low and pensions weak, stock options and consumer credit relieve the burden on employers. There may be no right to housing, however housing loans proliferate. There is no right to education, but banks are replete with student loan options (Lazzarato 2011, p. 110) Austerity is the face of the belief-structure that allows only, and primarily, a belief in the self and continual demonstration that this self should be believed in. The forced performance of debt-worthiness in financializing economies of both the North and the South, play to a common tune of privatization and credit-wielding believers. Whereas finance has employed the Christian trope of infinity, introducing the possibility of endless growth and unstoppable wealth accumulation, it is the card carrying Christians that put into practice the believing rites of debt-creation in the service of neoliberalism financiers.

## 6.7 The New Economy: Producing the self

“Owing it to yourself” is the refrain of financialization. Producing the self is the secret of salvation in the new economy. Salvation, as Foucault states, is “the subject’s constant action on himself, which finds its reward in a certain relationship of the subject to himself when he has become inaccessible to external disorders and finds a satisfaction in himself, needing nothing but himself. In a word, let’s say that salvation is the vigilant, continuous, and completed form of the relationship to self closed in on itself” (Foucault 1990, p. 197). This is an appropriate form in which to understand being in debt to oneself, in other words, “owing it to yourself.”

The “New Economy” prophets propose strategies for becoming your own boss, managing your own business, and these have been loudly proclaimed in a large body of literature, including “Poor Father, Rich Father” by Robert Kiyosaki, “The Next Trillion” and “The Next Millionaires” by Paul Zane Pilzer, and Sam Walton’s “Made in America.” Sitting down with Martha in a coffee shop in Canada, her first question to me was “Do you want to be a Millionaire?” Martha was a Colombian living in Toronto, an evangelical Christian, who spoke admiringly about the MCI, and an AmWay distributor. AmWay, like Nu Skin, is a multi-level marketing company—perhaps the best known. Various named “network marketing” “multi-level marketing” and more critically, “pyramid schemes” AmWay is one of the original network marketing companies, now worth twelve billion dollars, and operating in over 100 countries around the world. Martha began pulling out volumes of literature that was necessary reading material if I wanted to become a millionaire. Kiyosaki, Pilzer, and the like began to pile up on the table at the coffee shop we were at. Martha explained that signing up to become an AmWay distributor would mean also signing up for a monthly subscription for the reading materials explaining the benefits of “new economic thought.”

Sofia had made very similar comments to me as we milled about the entry to one of the Nu Skin recruitment meetings: “I know you want to make more money and have more free time.” These women, both Colombian, one in Canada and one in Bogotá, began their multi-level marketing careers with the illusions and expectations of making the six figures promised in the evangelical recruitment meetings, along with the cruises, the oodles of free time, and the satisfying freedom of being your own boss. Sofia’s conviction that: “I just keep believing in God’s Promise that my finances will be resurrected, because I can never doubt that God will be faithful as long as I am” echoes Martha’s introduction to me about AmWay sales in suburban Toronto.

The internalized technologies of belief in oneself and the power of prayer, the discipline of keeping the faith in financial success, while demonstrating one’s fidelity through recruiting others to your business, is the secret of multilevel marketing’s success in a rapidly neoliberalizing country. Being one’s own boss in a context of high unemployment, minimal job security, and increasingly inaccessible benefits makes sense, particularly if your vision of an imagined economy is shared by thousands in the pews, and in the streets. And the overriding message becomes, as was stated in the first recruitment meeting I attended: “The only limit to your success is your own mind. This business is about vision and about faith. You are your own worst enemy, but you can also be your own boss.” The Subjectivity of Prosperity is entirely internalized, privatized, and spiritualized. Paul Zane Pilzer, author of “The Next Trillion” also gives us a helpful explanation. He states:

Once you realize that the amount of wealth we can create is limited only by how many people we’re willing to trade with, and that in order to trade with more people, we have to be willing to understand and trust more people, you start to cross the line from economics into theology. Because you start to realize that only some higher intelligence, some kind of benign, beneficent being or force, could have created such an unlimited economy based on such a simple yet powerful and loving

concept: our wealth is rewarded directly in proportion to the number of people with whom we are willing to share (Pilzer 2006, p. 32)

Indeed, according to Pilzer, trade is the antidote to war. This “economic alchemy” is what creates an economics of abundance. It is how we can all become millionaires. It is the way on the path towards the New Kingdom—the streets lined with gold and “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Rev. 21:4). Sofia does not make a living from Nu Skin. A few months after we had attended meetings regularly for a number of weeks, I hadn’t seen her or heard from her. When I asked if I could accompany her to some of her client meetings, she responded, “Oh, I’m not really selling at the moment. I’ve had to take a break in order to focus on my cell group.” Sofia has the advantage of being married to someone who has regular contract work. When he is out of work, Sofia returns to Nu Skin. Her enthusiasm for sales ebbs and flows, as need for extra income emerges. The process of becoming is halted, is ever incomplete, and is constantly in flux.

## 6.8 Mortgaging the future and the banality of finance

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that prosperity Christianity provides a window into understanding the politics of financialization—and indeed, the political acts of believing and becoming of those who are refusing to be “left behind.” It is a political act to claim prosperity as the prophets of globalized credit promise it, as do Sofia in her shared conviction in her vision for her Nu Skin business and her MCI ministry. Political because in Colombia, naming and claiming a right to wellbeing is defiantly challenging the status quo. Through Ursula’s efforts to bring her family together, offer them the elusive promise of “more free time” through the purchase of a car for vacationing, she rebels against the economy and society that question her “credit-worthiness” because she spent more than she has. She protests against the strictures of lower-classness, because she is doctor, and her family deserves vacation just as the family of any doctor in more

“advanced” economies does. The endless process of becoming that Fernanda consistently reminded me she was a part of, and her ceaseless covenanting, like Abraham, will perhaps one day force the hand of God in her favour. This is her conviction.

All of these women have mortgaged the present in the risk of the future. This is the risk that day traders thrive on, and it is the risk that moving from believing to becoming embodies. From the edges and underbelly of financial capitalism, arise the millions of voices that insist that they too are meritorious. Debt is not a signal of immorality or irresponsibility. Debt becomes a marker of faith and a conviction in the future. Debt, not credit, is the moral measure of the subject of finance.

What ties all this together is aspiration. The future is mortgaged through prosperous aspirations. Direct sales rely on this Christian mode of becoming, as does the very “spirit” of financial capitalism. Just as the spirit of capitalism merges contradictions inherent within it to the believing practices that maintain it, the process of becoming serves the miraculous work of constructing the “new” the utopias, perhaps, of believing subjects.

## Conclusion

*He allowed himself to be swayed by the conviction that human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them, but that life obliges them over and over again to give birth to themselves.*

Gabriel García Márquez

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We sat in the long, wooden boat pattering down the Magdalena River. Great, white egrets lazily launched into the air as we passed by. The travelling preacher and self-proclaimed miracle worker, Pastor Fredy, paused our conversation to declare that I was under attack from the spirit of a powerful witch, Maria Lionza. “At this very moment?” I asked. “Yes” the pastor nodded, “I can tell by the way you’re sweating.” I raised my eyebrows, and considered my response.

The spirit of Maria Lionza is known to inhabit the river regions along the borderlands between Colombia and Venezuela. Legend has it that Maria Lionza was born an Indigenous priestess in the territories now known as Venezuela. She is guardian of the rivers and forests, and is considered a high divinity by those who follow her. Millions of Venezuelans practice the religion of Maria Lionza, most closely associated with Santería as practiced in Brazil. Of course, these religious traditions, demarcated by political geography (Santería, Condomblé, Yoruba, Vodou) all share in common their roots in colonial Latin America, during which the afro-descendent population was enslaved and trafficked, dragged across the Atlantic; the Spirits of Yoruba accompanied them.

These religious traditions in the Americas arose, as Miguel de la Torre argues, as expressions of resistance to a totalitarian regime of dehumanization (De la Torre 2004). Four



centuries of the slave trade erected religious forms that framed regimes of practice that were direct challenges not only to the destructive forces of colonialism and conquest, but to Christianity. Witches, it would seem, can cross borders. Holding the edges of the wooden boat I could only consider Richard Shweder's "witch question" (Shweder 1984). My immediate response, however, was a terse laugh, and the ethnographic impulse to question the Pastor on who the witch was, how the symptoms of this particular kind of attack may be recognized, and how I might remedy the situation.

Scholars of religion—Catherine Bell among them—who have taken up the question of "belief" often refer back to Shweder's thought experiment (Bell 2007). In it, Shweder presents his anthropological quandary, in brief, as the moment a trusted informant declares themselves a witch. Shweder championed a position of "transcendence without superiority" to take literally "the reality-posit" in an effort to better "discover other realities within the self" (Bell 2002). In other words, if an informant declares themselves a witch, that belief is to be "taken literally." A witch they are. Yet, I do not think that Shweder would necessarily have advocated for me to seriously consider whether or not I was being attacked by a witch. Rather, the question conditions my response to Pastor Fredy. In fact, in this interaction with the Pastor, it actually mattered very little what I thought or what I "believed." What mattered was that he believed this. And my most trusted informant in the Magdalena Medio, Pastor Miguel, also believed him.

Once we had arrived to the community of El Garzal, after our arduous journey under a merciless equatorial sun, we were settled into the family homes where we would stay during our visit. Usually the small group of researchers would stay in the pastor's large house. We often shared the space with the pastor and his wife and their daughters and families. If there were some extra students tagging along, we would disperse throughout the community. This evening we

were a small team, and settled into the pastor's house. Frida, his wife, brought us *tinto* and oranges while we unpacked and visited. Pastor Miguel, Pastor Fredy, my partner, and I watched the news under the fan, while children ran around, neighbours came by with greetings, and women in the kitchen prepared the evening meal. They never let me help.

During the commercials we would chat, I would slip in questions about the economic development project that the Pentecostal community participated in, but that included broader community members who had nothing to do with the church. Indeed, some of them were Catholic, and others were members of a competing Pentecostal church. Some of my most revealing conversations in El Garzal occurred in this setting, with chickens sneaking into the house only to be shooed out with a squawk, and neighbours coming by to share greetings and a cool glass of water. Pastor Fredy continued to test out his diagnosis of my spiritual state during the evening. After dinner, during the evening miracle service, Pastor Fredy called forth members in the community who sensed they were burdened with spiritual *maldición* (hex or spell). Most of the community stepped forward, and the miracle work began.

In the wood slat church, the electric piano plunked, and the choristers—all two of them—carried their song into the dark river valley. Nothing but the church was illuminated for miles. The wailing of the repentant, the victimized, and the hurting filled the air. Pastor Fredy reminded the community that the only One who hadn't abandoned them was God. A comforting thought. Pastor Fredy came up to me directly, in the middle of the healing frenzy, as he sweated and heaved, casting out demons and illness in everyone he passed. He grabbed my arm and told me he could cast out Maria Lionza. I extracted my arm from his hand, and thanked him for the offer. He shook his head. Closed his eyes. And turned back to the center of the church where a group of women was convulsing on the floor.

The pastor went back to the circle of women, praying over them, yelling, jumping up and down, conducting a symphony of spirits. They convulsed, they wept, they vomited. It went on for another forty-five minutes. I stepped outside and pondered why Pastor Fredy would want me to participate, and why he thought that a witch was attacking me. Finding no answer in the hum of the evening jungle, I returned inside, and watched as children moved towards their parents who had fallen on the ground, exhausted from the emotional journey they had just endured. They lay on the ground, with their heads on their young children's laps. The elder children and teenagers mingled at the back of the church, and wandered in and out, flirting with each other, playing games quietly, making sure not to get caught.

After the healing was done, the individuals who had been the focus of the healing began to emerge, spent and tired, praying and singing. The music that had died down to a quiet whine, picked up again as Pastor Fredy called on his assistant, armed with a flashlight, to help him verify the miracles that had been performed. Fredy lined up the individuals who had received healing, and his assistant shone the flashlight into their open mouths. Most of the miracles performed had occurred in the mouths of the believers, and Fredy shouted out "silver" or even more jubilantly, "gold!" to share the nature of the fillings that had healed broken teeth—even if the desire had been for fertility or the healing of some other variety of affliction. "Praise the Lord!!! This one's a gold one!" A murmured response of "alleluyas" and "amens" drifted from the congregants. I wondered if those upon whom miracles had been performed would go home and verify the truth of the miracle, have their own family members shine flashlights into their mouths to confirm the placement of silver or gold fillings. I wondered how much believing might lead to illusion. I wondered if it, indeed, mattered at all. Then I wondered again if I was truly being attacked by a witch.

A few months after the visit to El Garzal when Pastor Fredy declared my soul under attack from the Venezuelan witch, our research team returned to the community. Once again I was watching the news with the pastor. In a lull during commercials, Pastor Miguel let me know that the wandering Pastor Fredy continued to pray for me, and my spiritual health. I asked him if he really believed that I was under attack from a witch. The pastor turned to me, and shrugged. “*El pastor Fredy vea cosas.*” Pastor Fredy sees things. It was an ambiguous affirmation, but an affirmation nonetheless that Fredy truly saw some sign of otherworldly attack on my person. I nodded and considered the deterritorialized nature of this witch, who had been nationalized as Venezuelan, however had power across the borderlands.

Similar to finance, Maria Lionza’s deterritorialized dimensions had power beyond strictures of political or geographic boundaries. Indeed, one of Pentecostalism’s defining characteristics is the transnational dynamics of the Spirit. The movement across borders and cultures of this religious movement speaks as much to globalization as to movement of financial capital. Unseen and “pregnant” with possibility, finance capital flits around the world on screens and in stock markets. The power of capitalism itself is always a power being made. As Pentecostalism is never satisfied with a closed definition, and is always a multiplicity, so too is capitalism. This is not to say that the two systems are somehow equivalent. This is to say, however, that the modes of being and the modes of becoming, central to both concepts, are co-constitutive.

But is any of it real? Does believing work? Is there a difference between who believes, what they believe, and how they believe? Must some believe more than others? Or has the West lost the recognition of its own believing? The more pressing question, the ethnographic question,

as I introduced in the preface of this dissertation is not *why* people believe, but rather *how* they believe, and what relation that believing has to the regulatory practices of finance.

### **Power, Desire, and Believing**

The neoclassical economists maintain that economics begins with exchange. This antiquation erases power from any equation that might consider the origins of trade, and the (im)possibility of such a thing being “free.” In the introduction of the concept, “free market spiritualities” I explained that the relations of power at work in the process of financialization work on the subject are revealed in the private and public realm of deregulated personhood—at once free and confined. Understanding economic practices, such as measurement, evaluation, and appraisal as necessarily entangled in a web of power relations aids in extricating the equation of exchange from inevitability, and certainly, refutes the possibility of a natural progression of economic development towards equality or equivalence.

Money, for Deleuze and for Lazzarato, expresses power flows. Financing in particular (and different to purchasing power, which is limited to means of payment for consumption of goods) is a power for “prescribing, ordering, that is, a set of possibilities for choices and decisions with regard to the future, which anticipate what the production, power relations, and forms of subjection will be” (Lazzarato 2011, p. 84). Indeed, money as capital—such as initial seed money deposited in order to open a bank account, the activation of a credit card, or money gifted to God—has creative and destructive powers, linking the economy once again with the metaphysical realm of the religious. In this sense, money as it is derived from debt in financialized capitalism, has its “infinite nature” defined, and the concept of “free market spiritualities” pulls our discussion back to Christian ideals of infinite debt and the deterritorialization of finance (Lazzarato 2011).

Here it is helpful to recall the discussion of *credere*, the links between believing and credit. The arguments presented by both Lazzarato and Deleuze hold that the flow of money, and most specifically, the flow of finance capital, is a power flow. I have argued throughout this dissertation that credit and believing are co-constitutive processes of financialization. Flows of power are evident in the ethnographic details. Ursula's social relations and commitment to perform her prosperity for family members demonstrates the power of believing in forging an infinite debt with banks. In a conversation with Ursula only a few months after finishing fieldwork, she assured me that she was becoming "more responsible" with her financial situation, paying her credit card debt monthly, saving money better, and taking much more care in her purchasing habits. The disciplinary power of debt was truly affecting the forms in which Ursula was paying back her debts, but she also understood her fiscal responsibility as a sign of good faith, which would allow for further prosperity. "God gives you a certain amount of wealth. If you mismanage it, He won't give you anymore. I'm learning to be more responsible so that He'll entrust me with more." The intention is not to move out of debt and never return. Rather, the power of debt disciplines Ursula's conduct, her attitude, her plans, and her work on herself in order to newly enter into a negotiated power relation with finance. Prosperity Christianity in Colombia, again, operates within the regime of power relations between individual and public, the internalized personhood that produces the financialized subject.

In southern Bogotá, Remedios remains a participant in the micro-credit program run by the Christian NGO, and remains a reluctant Christian. As mentioned already, Remedios has had to sell her restaurant. She now sells empanadas out of her house with her husband. Dreams of opening a second restaurant downtown remain unrealized, and Remedios resents her debt that will not be forgiven.

Fernanda and Sofia's aspirational practices of indebted tithing in the *Misión Carismática Internacional* illuminate a different relation between power and belief. Fernanda's story animates the move in financialized capitalism towards the financialization of non-financial economies. Introducing financial capital into the bank accounts of the church represent a shift in the relation between the supposedly secular realm of the economy and the sacred space of the house of worship. The machinations of banking in the mega-church belie this distinction between the sacred and the profane—if there ever was one.

Where financialization intersects with believing comes to clearest relief when the trope of “believing in the self” is deployed. Where a “real” economy is understood as oppressive and limiting to wage-earners, as the Nu Skin program purports, finance claims modes of enrichment through consuming on credit. Whereas wages are stubbornly kept low and pensions weak, stock options and consumer credit relieve the burden on employers. There may be no right to housing, however housing loans proliferate. There is no right to education, but banks are replete with student loan options (Lazzarato 2011, p. 110) Austerity is the face of the belief-structure that allows only, and primarily, a belief in the self and continual demonstration that this self should be believed in.

The forced performance of debt-worthiness in financializing economies of both the North and the South, play to a common tune of privatization and credit-wielding believers. Whereas finance has employed the Christian trope of infinity, introducing the possibility of endless growth and unstoppable wealth accumulation, it is the card carrying Christians that put into practice the believing rites of debt-creation in the service of a free market. Through focusing on distinct forms of prosperity Christianity in relation to finance capitalism, a fresh methodological and theoretical

window opens through which we can approach new paths of understanding what financialization is, and a deeper understanding of prosperity Christianity in relation to it.

Both of these categories, financialization and prosperity Christianity, have been problematized and queried under the light of an ethnography of everyday econo-religious practices in the prime site an emerging nation, pulling itself out of an armed conflict, through the only recipe financialized capitalism has offered: increased economic growth tied to increased consumer debt.

Neoliberal economics is far more than an economic program, as many have already elucidated. The precarity and unpredictability created by neoliberalism becomes a requirement for financialized capitalism. Adaptation to the financializing world, the cashless world, and emerging economies, rests upon the endless potential of credit. The emergence of financialization as a form of producing the self, as well as making the self productive, is a central metaphysics of the financial system; the sheer mystery and seeming endless abundance of the financial system points to an emerging rationality not yet fully revealed. Neoliberalism and financialization require the deep enchantments of the “animal spirits” that John Meynard Keynes warned of. These spirits, Keynes elaborated:

Even apart from the instability due to speculation, there is the instability due to the characteristic of human nature that a large proportion of our positive activities depend on spontaneous optimism rather than on a mathematical expectation, whether moral or hedonistic or economic. Most, probably, of our decisions to do something positive, the full consequences of which will be drawn out over many days to come, can only be taken as a result of animal spirits—of a spontaneous urge to action rather than inaction, and not as the outcome of a weighted average of quantitative benefits multiplied by quantitative probabilities. Enterprise only pretends to itself to be mainly actuated by the statements in its own prospectus, however candid and sincere. Only a little more than an expedition to the South Pole, is it based on an exact calculation of benefits to come. Thus if the animal spirits are dimmed and the spontaneous optimism falters, leaving us to depend on nothing



but a mathematical expectation, enterprise will fade and die;—though fears of loss may have a basis no more reasonable than hopes of profit had before, (Keynes 1936, p. 145).

When finance is understood as concept and disciplinary regime, we may move towards reconsidering its qualities of “disenchantment” and rationality in order to unmake its doctrine. Keynes named the risks of deregulation, warning that the economy operates not only according to a benevolent invisible hand, but rather also in accordance to human action, emotion, and “spontaneous optimism” what might be read as believing practice. In recognizing our animal spirits acting within a prescribed domain, through understanding our attachment to consumption as a regime of practice, by naming our rituals of exchange, and our indentured optimism, as components of a program that is transnational and transcendent in reach and scope, we arrive to the conclusion that believing in the structures that bind us, recreates those structures as they recreate us in their image.

Ursula, Fernanda, Sofia, and Remedios, and all the other voices that have been lifted throughout this dissertation, challenge the inevitability of the reign of financial structures. Insofar as the debt with which they live their lives points to a crack in the edifice of finance capital, and their prosperity has revealed as a program of survival within the dominion of profit, their believing operates as resistance and acquiescence at once. Witches, angels, demons, and God continue to frame a messy campaign of integration and absorption into a global unevenness of debt and power. In the end, this dissertation has queried and interrogated some of the assumptions and naturalizations of images of Colombia, the operations of prosperity Christianity, and the emergence of new ways to think with the underside of modernity, in the shadows of capital.

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