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The Body and The Bedroom: Life and Death at the Shrines of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini

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The Body and the Bedroom:
Life and Death at the Shrines of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by
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B.A., Newcomb College of Tulane University
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May 2016

For Mom and Dad

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Abstract

How do we define “sacred space”? I suggest that sacred spaces are not sacred for reasons geographers have traditionally accepted - due to connections to a religion’s creation myth, holy person, or event. Instead, places are made sacred by the negotiations of the sacred made there by visitors – mostly women – who visit sacred spaces. Through ethnographic and autoethnographic research at the shrines of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini in Washington Heights, New York City, New York and Cabrini High School, New Orleans, Louisiana, I explore what makes shrines sacred for the women who visit them and how they use these shrines to confront life and death. I also highlight the power women have in making the sacred in shrines associated with the Catholic Church, which is run by an entirely-male hierarchy. The shrines allow for a place where women can exercise power over the sacred on their own terms. This work contributes to the emerging fields of emotional geographies and autoethnography, as well as challenging the traditional ways in which geographers have explored and ignored sacred space.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE LOST ROOM

“Nature's first green is gold, Her hardest hue to hold.

Her early leaf's a flower; But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf. So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down to day. Nothing gold can stay.”

- Robert Frost's *Nothing Gold Can Stay*

“All your love, all your hate, all your memories, all your pain, it was all the same thing. It was all the same dream, a dream that you had inside a locked room, a dream about being a person.”

- Nic Pizzolato's *True Detective*, HBO

It had been months since I completed my fieldwork and since I'd completed my first round of coding my field notes. Something about the coded data didn't seem quite right. Something was missing. There was an element that kept popping up again and again, an element I perhaps was purposely overlooking. Grudgingly, I went back to my notebooks and transcriptions and started the process of coding again.

What had I ignored throughout my coding? The same thing we're all trying to ignore – death. In *The Last Messiah*, the philosopher Peter Zapffe proposes that the major human dilemma is that our species has become too evolved in regards to consciousness, which causes us angst over our existence and what our individual fates will be after we each cease to exist. To deal with this dilemma, Zapffe concluded that the majority of people become accustomed to

limiting what they consciously perceive (Zapffe 1933). We humans are trying to find a way to ignore death or subvert it. I realized that even in my coding, I was trying to control death by ignoring it. Throughout my re-coding, I realized death was the single-most common theme in my fieldwork and that many of my respondents were engaged in activities at my field sites that were attempts to process or control death by engaging with the past and hopes for an afterlife.

Death, in fact, had been the over-arching theme though out my entire experience as a PhD student. In 2010, a faculty member I respected and idolized fell from my pantheon of real-life heroes. It was a metaphorical death but one that hit me hard nonetheless and made me question whether or not I should remain in the PhD program. A year or so later, this faculty member physically died and all of the emotions of the year before hit me again. In 2012, shortly before embarking on my summer fieldwork, one of the students at the university where I was teaching full-time was abducted and murdered by a sex offender; though the abduction and murder happened in southwest Louisiana, the case ended up playing out for me around the glass-encased remains of a dead saint in New York City. In January 2014, my uncle, with whom I had always visited in the Poconos while en route to doing fieldwork at this shrine, passed away. Death was everywhere in this project just like it is in life and I was ignoring it.

In writer and former literature professor Nic Pizzolato's first season of the HBO drama *True Detective* (2014), viewers meet the nihilistic Louisiana State Police homicide detective Rust Cohle, played by Matthew McConaughey. A few days after my uncle died, I started watching the series and was instantly hooked by the physical setting and the Cohle character. I lived in Baton Rouge but commuted to my job at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. In the spring semesters, UL-L also sent me to the rural town of Eunice, Louisiana to teach a class through the LSU-E/UL-L teacher education program. I spent countless hours in my car driving through the

swamps, cane fields, and Cajun prairie of southwest Louisiana that were featured on the show.

The Cohle character introduced me to nihilism; he is always arguing with his State Police partner that life was not special and that we did not have some sort of grand purpose - we're all just "racing to a red light." Essentially, we all live and we all die. Anything more we try to make of the experience and any ways we try to trick ourselves that death isn't the end is fruitless.

I heard myself in Cohle's words. I researched nihilism and thought about the major theme of my dissertation research – death – and the deaths of my uncle, the UL-L student, advisor, friends and family members; things started to come together and take shape in a way I did not expect but that began made sense.

At the end of "The Locked Room," the third episode of *True Detective*, the Cohle character says the quote which serves as the second epigraph of this chapter. He equates life – and its meaninglessness – to being in a locked room. The only way out is death; and we're all eventually leaving through that door. These words had me thinking about my fieldwork. If life is a locked room, the shrines where I conducted my fieldwork were a way of decorating the room, a distraction from the one-way exit that leads to the end or perhaps an item in the room that claimed to contain the layout for what is on the other side of the door.

Zapffe proposed four principal strategies by which we minimize our consciousness that we will cease to exist: isolation, anchoring, distraction, and sublimation. Isolation is actively ignoring death and life's futility, while anchoring is attempting to ground ourselves and our existence in some sort of a metaphysical and perhaps institutional belief-set or beings, such as God, the saints, and religions. We distract ourselves with popular culture, current events, and the like so we do not contemplate our existence and its sure end (Zapffe 1933). Thomas Ligotti sums up the final strategy, sublimation: as "this is what thinkers and artistic types do when they

recycle the most demoralizing and unnerving aspects of life as works in which the worst fortunes of humanity are presented in a stylized manner as entertainment” (Ligotti 2010: 31). Sublimation is expressing our worst fears about death as art and entertainment; it includes everything from the zombie movies like *The Night of the Living Dead* to books such as Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* and the plethora of television shows where homicides are solved. For this project’s purposes, anchoring and sublimation are the key strategies at play in my field sites, two shrines of the Catholic saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, with anchoring as the obvious strategy that would be present at a religious shrine. Sublimation is not as obvious. However, the New York shrine, which contains the encased body-figure made of the saint’s relics is no less a work of art made of our fears about death than a zombie movie or vampire book. The body-figure at the New York shrine is a work of grotesque art that can allow us to physically see that the dead don’t really die. The shrine provides anchoring, as the body is there as proof that there must be greater forces outside of this life that have allowed this incorruptability to happen. At the other shrine, in the preserved bedroom of Mother Cabrini, we can await her return even though she is deceased. Everything is as she left it and is ready for her return. Even though the room is empty, it is still full of her presence. The term ghost may seem to have a negative connotation but it is fitting in this scenario if we think of the preservation of the room as a manner of sublimation. In this beautiful room we can connect to a spirit or a ghost.

Not all deaths are physical. We cannot go back in time to life’s golden moments – time spent with friends and family, happy memories, periods in our lives where we were more content. We cannot go back in time to redress wrongs nor to extend the moments, days, and times that were our happiest. In my field work, much of the death I saw people reconnecting to was not just dead relatives but the passing of a time in their lives to which they could not go

back. Often this time was spent with a person who is now deceased, but not always. Periods of time and the past can be mourned for just as we mourn for the dead.

To relate to each other, humans use signs, or a language made up of signs (Caesar 1999: 55). These signs help us literally be able to understand each other and convey knowledge about the world around us. In the same way language that helps us communicate about the world around us and understand it, religion helps many of us make sense of the nonsensical human experience, especially death – be it death of a person or the death of a time in the past.

Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said “Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forward” (Kierkegaard 1996: 61). This is the quintessential challenge to the human experience. We must go forward but try to make sense of what has happened in our pasts. If we think of our pasts as a book, many people set out to use religion as the reading glasses to make the words clearer. What I found through my research is that the information about the glasses people are using turns out not to be so terribly important; what’s more important is the words on those pages. St. Cabrini and her shrines seemed to be the lenses that helped clear up what was on the pages of the past and allowed people to reconnect with the past. But the past itself was more prominent than Cabrini herself. She may have served as a role model or revered person, but more often than not, the people I interviewed visited her shrines not so much to feel connected to her, but to feel connected to the past they had lost through death – literal or figurative. Somehow, in those brief moments at the shrines, one could almost return to the golden moments that Robert Frost writes of in “Nothing Gold Can Stay.” Life – as well as death - could almost be understood.

St. Cabrini is often the glue that held people and memories together, but she is not one of the bulky elements that made up the whole. She functions for many as the road to the

destination; she is neither the beginning point nor the end point for the visitors at her shrines. You will see in the coming chapters that many people who visited and were connected to her shrines in some capacity used these shrines to get in touch with and understand death and the past.

I argue that this work serves as an example of why some methods used in the geography of religion – particularly in necrogeography - pale in comparison to ethnography. Rather than counting décor of gravestone markers, looking through historical records, or examining why two different religions claim one shrine or sacred space, ethnography and autoethnography allowed something else to come to the surface in my work. Religion isn't just about religion as geographers traditionally think of "religion." It's about the experiential sense-making of death and the past that can be attained by visiting shrines and sacred spaces. It's less about an organized religion or holy/sainted person; this finding builds on the work of geographer Lily Kong, who also found this phenomena when she interviewed women at shrines in Singapore (Kong 1992; 1993).

As death began to figure so prominently in my research, one might think that what I found at these shrines was closer to "the geography of death" than "the geography of religion." But I found that people were making sense of death and understanding the past at these shrines. Making sense of the human experience – particularly death - gives us hope and comfort; we are able there to understand backwards with hope to live forward with that understanding. What I found at these shrines was that my research was not just the geography of religion or the geography of death, but what I would call the geography of hope and comfort.

Most of the visitors to the shrines and people connected to the shrine as employees and volunteers were women. Men ended up figuring far less prominently in my research, despite the

fact that my work focuses on the Catholic Church, whose power structure consists singularly of men. Yet within this male-dominated organization, women understand life and death in their own terms at sacred spaces owned by a women's religious order and which center around a woman, Saint Cabrini. This understanding comes not from sacred texts likely written and translated by men, which are then taught in homilies at mass by male priests or through rules, regulations, and traditions largely invented by men. This understanding comes from women's own lives and pasts when connected to a shrine of a woman who accomplished much in the man's world of the Catholic Church - a shrine owned by the women in the religious order she founded.

My methods include qualitative methods such as participant observation, interviews, and autoethnography. I knew from the beginning that autoethnography would be controversial; it has been criticized for being self-indulgent and narcissistic (Coffey, 1999), as well as being subjective and unreliable (Holt, 2003). However, autoethnography was inescapable for this work. I attended Cabrini High School in New Orleans, where one shrine is located and am still involved in the school's alumnae group. However, what made autoethnography so powerfully inescapable for this work was the culmination of events that took place while I was conducting fieldwork at the New York shrine. From my interviews, I gathered that many women there were visiting to understand death and the death of things past, to better be able to understand the past in the context of the present at the shrine and to live the future with the hope and comfort that comes from understanding the past. One day during my fieldwork, the past, present, and future collided in a way that in a brief moment allowed me to make sense of the most nonsensical of the human experiences, the violent death of a promising young woman.

We're all in this locked room together. Maybe there's nothing on the other side of the door we'll all exit through. Perhaps we're all in this room dreaming to be people, as Rust Cohle suggests. Dreams are the result of our brain firing off synapses when we're asleep and then our brains trying to weave these bursts into stories we can understand. Maybe some of us, as well those who dream in the locked room, are using religion to weave stories together to make a dream that makes sense. Even if that isn't what we ourselves are doing, we can observe the others in the room.

I invite you now to join me on a trip into the past, present, and future in which I seek some understanding of the human experience through an academic project. The structure of this dissertation tracks my scholar's journey into the life of Mother Cabrini and her shrines as well as a personal search to make sense of what happened along my journey. We'll start with the past – a young girl growing up in Italy who went on to become a prolific foundress of schools, hospitals, and orphanages before becoming the first American-citizen saint of the Catholic Church; the Italian diaspora; the Church's reaction to a new Catholic immigrant group; a time when the number of women religious was much higher; and a look through how geographers and other social scientists have studied shrines and sacred space. It will include analysis of recently conducted fieldwork at these shrines. In the conclusion, we will see how qualitative methods can better improve our understanding of the sacred and examine the geography of religion as a subfield that is far too limited by only examining places traditionally connected to what we conventionally think of as "religion" and often ignoring the gendered-nature of many sacred spaces.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GEOGRAPHY OF LIFE AND DEATH

Geography of Religion: Sacred Space and Landscape

Sacred space is an over-arching theme in the geography of religion and landscape analysis can be helpful to geographers of religion. It has been a central concept in cultural geography since Carl O. Sauer started advancing the idea of “landscape” in the 1920s. Sauer encouraged studying the landscape empirically to study human-environmental interaction as a way to combat prevalent ideas in geography about environmental determinism (Schein 2004: 13-14; Foote, et al. 1994: 11). This traditional form of cultural geography was often criticized for being male-centered and not producing truly objective work; in the last three decades, the new cultural geography has aimed at studying the landscape more broadly and addressing issues that new cultural geographers felt were largely ignored by traditional cultural geographers (Foote, et al. 1994: 12)

New cultural geographers have conceived of landscape as recreating cultural meanings; landscape is a “signifying system”. Geographers began to look at the ideological side of landscape; some also see it as a theatre in which the landscape is not only a stage but also a performer itself (Sharp 2004: 73). For example, Barnes and Duncan write that what is imprinted on the landscape through time is part of the stories that help people make sense of the world (Barnes and Duncan 1992: 7-8).

New cultural geographers have also looked at art as “encoded texts to be deciphered by those cognizant of the culture as a whole in which they were produced” (Daniels and Cosgrove 1988: 2). I was interested in deconstructing the landscapes of Mother Cabrini’s shrines in New York City and New Orleans. Why are certain things included? Why are some things left out? Mother Cabrini’s body or “body figure” was created out of the remains of most of Cabrini’s torso with realistic wax hands and a head based on her death mask that is displayed in a gold and glass coffin. It is not just as a relic but also as a work of art trying to pass itself off as an incorrupt body? What does this tell us about Catholicism and the order? When looking at the landscape within the shrine, other questions arise. For example, what does the body’s position under the altar table tell us? Is Mother Cabrini’s body as important or maybe more important (as it is larger and more prominent) than the body of Christ that is generally hidden away in a monstrance in the shrine?

At the New Orleans field site of Cabrini’s bedroom, similar questions present themselves about items in the room and their placement. For example, there is a small statue of black children on her desk. I know from my historical research that Cabrini’s New Orleans orphanages and schools did not serve or admit blacks until long after her death (1970s); however, the high school where the bedroom is has had a large black student population for at least three decades now. Is this an attempt to imagine a more inclusive history for Cabrini and incorporate blacks into her story? These are just a few examples of questions I plan to investigate by reading the landscape and as well as what plays out on the “theatre” of the landscape, on which I collected data via participant observation and interviews.

Historian Mircea Eliade’s book *The Sacred and The Profane* has influenced geographers of religion for decades. Geographer Edward Relph, drawing on Eliade’s work, wrote that sacred

space is “continuously differentiated” from every day or profane space. It is also “replete with symbols, sacred centers, and meaningful objects” (Relph 1976: 16). In his essay “Sacred Space: Explorations of an Idea,” geographer Yi-Fu Tuan puts forward several concepts about sacred space that I engage with in my dissertation. Tuan explores the concept of sacred space using binaries such as city/nature, power/purity, and structure/antistructure (Tuan 1977: 88-93). In modern times, Tuan writes, there has been a reversal of the way humans see nature and cities as we now consider nature to be sacred and cities to be dangerous and chaotic. I argue here that while I agree with much of what Tuan writes about sacred space, I find his assertions that all humans feel a certain way about nature to be particularly problematic. For many of us urban and suburban dwellers, nature is still dangerous, scary, chaotic, and uncomfortable. For example, when I saw a wooded area or bayou off of the interstate on my commute from Baton Rouge to Lafayette when I was working at UL, I did not think of it in terms of the sacred. I thought of the dangers presented there for me –stinging insects, alligators, snakes, coyotes, and bobcats. Yi-Fu Tuan makes an assumption that everyone feels the way he feels or perceives humanity to feel.

Some of the other binaries he sets out here I find to be far less problematic. When talking about power/purity, Tuan writes that power means that boundaries are created. These boundaries are thresholds to something beyond our world (Tuan 1977: 88). My field site in New York is in many ways a threshold to the divine. Saints are the people who occupy the threshold between humans and God in Catholicism by acting as intercessors. In this field site we have the body of one of these intercessors. Catholics who visit the shrine can therefore literally be in the corporeal presence of this intercessor. It is a threshold where people can get as close as they can to the place the saints occupy between heaven and earth, for as geographer Roger Stump writes, “saints and their relics provide a concrete link between adherents and more abstract dimensions

of faith” (Stump 2007: 166). Fences at sacred spaces are erected to keep human’s impurities out or to keep us from tainting the threshold to the sacred (Tuan 1977: 88). The New York field site is fenced in (although the gate is open during shrine hours). Since it is on school property and visitors can freely enter the gate, I have heard comments from volunteers at the shrine and sisters about the inappropriate clothes people sometimes wear when visiting the shrine. An older Italian sister would grumble her displeasure that “People today just don’t have respect. You don’t wear shorts into a holy place” whenever someone would enter the shrine in shorts. This would be an example of the impure making its way into the shrine despite attempts to fence it off from low-cut shirts, short shorts, and baseball hats.

Tuan also writes that sacred space is “both terrible and fascinating: people both fear it and feel irresistibly drawn to it” (Tuan 1977: 89). The dead body incased in glass at the shrine in New York can be pretty terrifying for some. A New Yorker I met in New Orleans who had grown up near the shrine told me his parents had taken him there as a child and “they had her (Cabrini) stuffed in there. I’m still scarred from it.” Even though there are currently thirteen canonized American saints as well as numerous beatified Americans, Mother Cabrini is only one of two saint’s body figure on display in the U.S.; the other is St. John Neumann in Philadelphia. Body figure display is uncommon, rare, and downright weird to many American Catholics, let alone non-Catholics who find their way to the shrine. My husband, who was raised in a non-denominational Evangelical Christian church where ornamentation, relics, and “preserved” dead bodies were definitely not part of devotional culture, was noticeably uncomfortable when he first visited me at the shrine while I was doing field work there. He made excuses to go to any other part of the property. He did not get within fifteen feet of the body and his eyes darted back and forth to avoid from even looking at it. I have had friends who similarly avoid the dead laid out in

their coffins at wakes to the point of staying in the back of the room or refusing to be in the room until the coffin has been closed.

With ethnography as one of my main methodological weapons, I used interviews to learn more about the experiential at the two sacred spaces I am studying. The interviewees' stories about these places are important because, as geographer Belden Lane writes, "above all else, sacred place is 'storied place.' Particular locales come to be recognized as sacred because of stories that are told about them." Lane furthermore writes that sacred space can be "ordinary place" that is "ritually made extraordinary," can be "tread upon without being entered," and that is both "centripetal and centrifugal" as well as "local and universal" (Lane 2001: 15).

Lane also writes that "to experience a place as sacred is to participate, knowingly or unknowingly, in a whole history of cultural tensions and conflicting claims" (Lane 2001: 3). My two field sites have seen changing neighborhoods and audiences (for example, Washington Heights is now primarily inhabited by Caribbean Hispanics from the Dominican Republic, Cuba, & Puerto Rico, while it was primarily Italian when the shrine was constructed), student populations (once both mostly "white" – mainly Irish and Italian, the New York high school was primarily Caribbean Hispanic, while the New Orleans school now has a sizeable black student population as well as some Hispanic students), and culture (for example, pre- and post-Vatican II as well as societal changes brought about by the women's movement). These changes cause tensions. For example, I suggest that the imagining of the black student population into Cabrini's history through the statue of black students on her desk at the high school in New Orleans is a result of tensions there and an attempt to make a claim that conflicts with historical fact in order to ease any tension. Similarly, there is a conflicting claim over the Cabrini shrine in New York. Hispanics visit and utilize the shrine most often, effectively claiming it as their own

even though legal ownership is in the hands of the Italian sisters. There are in turn conflicting claims over the space within the Catholic Church. The order owns the property, but the Church and the priest who has the shrine within his parish has claim over it as well. For example, to get married in the shrine, one has to obtain a dispensation from the pastor of St. Elizabeth Catholic Church parish.

Other geographers have classified sacred spaces in a variety of different ways. For example, William Norton categorizes sacred spaces into three kinds. The first, “mystico-religious space” is where religious occurrences happened or where a group’s beliefs are represented (Norton 2000: 293). The second category is homelands, which can be sacred to groups and individuals. The third category is historical sacred sites that a group consider sacred because of some event having happened there or being remembered there, such as cemeteries, museums, and monuments. These sites are also generally related to nationalism or ethnicity (Norton 2000: 293-294). Kenneth Foote has expanded on this idea; Foote looks at landscapes of tragedy such as the federal office building that was the site of the Oklahoma City bombing and the memorial that was later constructed. He argues that sites of tragedy can be repurposed to remember or forget (Foote 2003). For example, I argue that the New York shrine in particular with its mural that includes images from Cabrini’s “immigrant experience” (water, Statue of Liberty, smiling immigrants) is a place of imagining or remembering the “immigrant experience” that is part of American collective identity and memory. However, the shrine obviously also fits into Norton’s first category.

Another geographer who has greatly informed my research and plans for my dissertation is Lily Kong. She interviewed women and men at sacred spaces in Hong Kong and looked at the different responses from the two sexes. She found that places were sacred to women not

because of connections to religious cosmos, miracles, or important religious figures, but rather because these places allowed for connections to the past, such as reminders of places far away or deceased loved ones who perhaps they had visited these shrines with or who had talked about the shrines. Kong offers her fellow geographers a new conceptualization of sacred space – as a place where people, mainly women, connect with the past (Kong 1992, 1993, 1999). This conceptualization of sacred space implies that sacred space is therefore also gendered space. My dissertation builds upon these ideas set forth by Kong and investigates the sacred space of the Cabrini shrine in New York and Cabrini’s bedroom in New Orleans as gendered space, as most of the people at these two sites are women. As I interviewed more and more women about the shrines, I saw the recurring themes of the shrines as being places women could get in touch with the past – especially deceased family members or memories of family members – blood family or family that was created through friendships and shared experiences. To my surprise, death became an over-arching theme I saw emerge as I coded interviews. Dead family members, dead friends, dead religious sisters, the death of an era – all of these came to the forefront in the accounts I gathered through qualitative methods. Despite reading Kong’s work prior to doing fieldwork, it surprised me that death was not obvious to me before I coded my fieldwork, since some of the interviews I did were literally done in front of a corpse.

Memory and Emotion

Cultural geographers have also engaged in questions about social memory because “landscape is one of social memory’s most powerful conveyors” (DeLyser 2005: xv). Geographers have focused their inquiries into memory mainly on tourist sites, museums, and

monuments. Geographer David Lowenthal brought memory to the forefront in cultural geography over the past decades. Lowenthal's book, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, is a look at how Western societies have viewed the past during the Renaissance, the Enlightenment in France & Britain, Victorian Britain, and the 18th and 19th centuries in the United States, and the tendency to represent the past to fit present agendas (Lowenthal 1985). His article "Past Time, Present Place" looks at the west's fascination with the past and nostalgia. Present society is nostalgic for times that aren't all that far in the past; items with new technologies are made to look like older items that served the same purpose. Lowenthal argues that we keep souvenirs from the past to give us some constancy as we age. He reiterates that the past is generally represented in ways that help present-day needs (Lowenthal 1975). In 1998, Lowenthal published *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, which looks at places where this is occurring, like the Holocaust Museum in Israel. For Lowenthal, the landscape of victimization provided by the museum supports the argument for the existence of Israel, which was made necessary by the destruction of the European Jews during the Holocaust (Lowenthal 1998: 123). Lowenthal employs the work of Pierre Nora in this book, referring to Nora's assertion in his *Lieux de memoire* that we have become obsessed with commemorating and archiving almost everything, which Lowenthal calls the "heritage glut" (Ibid 11).

Nuala Johnson writes that "more recent work on social memory has emphasized its discursive role in the articulation of an identity politics and in particular the role of elite and dominant memory" (Johnson 2004: 317). Derek Alderman examines identity and commemoration in the South through streets named after Martin Luther King, Jr. (Alderman 2000) and Stephen Hanna in his article about slavery's representations in Fredericksburg (Hanna 2008). Some geographers have also relied on Maurice Halbwachs's work on memory.

Sociologist Halbwachs sees social memory as an active expression of group identity that ties the said group together (Halbwachs 1992). Geographers Mike Crang and Penny Travlou work from Halbwach's theory on memory in their article on the city and public memory (Crang and Travlou 2001) as does K.E. Till's work on national identity and Berlin's German Historical Museum (Till 2001). These geographers look at how places like the city and museum play a role in cultural identity through representations of memory and can either hide or force us to confront uncomfortable aspects of our past and make collective memory more inclusive and not just a domain where the elites write the stories.

Geographers such as Liz Bondi, Joyce Davidson and Mick Smith (2005) as well as Kay Anderson and Susan Smith (Smith and Anderson 2001) have argued that it is important to take into account the emotional aspects of space. Smith and Anderson write that because emotions are thought of as being gendered or feminine they are often seen as less important and therefore often been ignored by geographers (Anderson and Smith 2001: 7). According to Owain Jones, "remembering through place, through emotions of (remembered) place are powerful elements of emotional geographies of the self" (Jones 2005: 213). My work focuses on personal memories and emotions in women's experiences of in sacred space, building on aforementioned works by Kong, Jones, Anderson, Kay Smith, Susan Smith, Davidson and Bondi. The emotional attachments my interviewees had to the shrines and the memories evoked were obvious. It was through ethnographic methods, particularly interviews, that I gradually came to see this emotion. It is hard to translate others' emotions down into words; my hope is that through a combination of my story through autoethnography and interviewees' stories, I am able to relay the emotional geographies of the two shrines.

Death

In the 1960s, Geographer Fred Kniffen called for geographers to engage in what he termed “necrogeography” by studying deathscapes. Geographers in large part responded by writing about cemetery styles and names on cemetery markers. Wilbur Zelinksi published the most prolific work on cemeteries in the United States (2007). In the early 1970s, Donald Jeane pleaded for “the end of tombstone-style geography,” citing the many over-generalizations that counting stylistic components of cemeteries produced (Jeane 1971: 146). However, he stopped short of encouraging geographers to engage in ethnography and actually ask the people who built and visited these cemeteries why they chose certain stylistic components.

Death is an inevitable part of life. Life is a series of deaths; what we – the living – do for the dead, we really do for ourselves. The dead cannot care how they buried and what their grave markers say. What we claim to do for the dead, we do to console ourselves, to make sense of death, and to have some sort of power or control over it. Geographers have largely ignored the stories of the living that bury, cremate, care for, and visit the dead. The actual physical remains of the dead and care given to them are not popular themes in geography; the relics of Catholic saints have also been largely ignored by geographers.

Roman Catholicism was obviously influenced by the Pagan cultures of Europe, most notably the Romans. Many feast days, celebrations, rituals, and traditions from Roman Paganism were incorporated in Catholicism. In his book *Christian Mummification: An Interpretive History of the Preservation of Saints, Martyrs, and Others*, Ken Jeremiah argues that the custom of preserving bodies and body parts of the saints stems from the influence of Egyptian religious beliefs on early Christianity. He mentions that the Egyptian influence on Roman culture can still be seen today in the sheer number of obelisks that dot the Roman

landscape, including one at St. Peter's Square. Rather than being cremated in the Roman tradition, Emperor Augustus was mummified and interred in a tomb like Egyptian royalty when he died in 14 A.D. (Jeremiah 2012: 182). Resurrection was a prominent theme in Egyptian mythology, as it is in Christianity. It was not uncommon that bodies of important Egyptians would be broken into pieces and sent to multiple places so that they could be worshipped all over Egypt, similar to the breaking down of saint's bodies that are spread all over Christendom (Ibid 175). Jeremiah and other scholars have also noted the similarities between the Egyptian Isis, who was also worshipped in Rome and Greece, with Christianity's Mary (Ibid 142). The Pope's mitre hat is shaped like the hat worn by Egyptian pharaohs (Ibid 211).

According to Peter Brown, the cult of the saints became a major part of Latin Christianity during the 4th through 6th centuries. Saints, Brown argues, can occupy heaven (as they are deceased) and earth (in their physical remains), thereby bridging life and the afterlife. The cult of the saints belonged to the people; when the religious leaders realized the role of the saints in popular religion, they sought to control the saints and their relics (Brown 1981). Relics had become so important by the 8th century that at the Second Council of Nicaea, the Church declared that every church must have a relic ("Decree of Second Council of Nicaea, 787"). In 1996, Ezio Fulcheri counted a *minimum* of 315 body relics in the city of Rome alone (Fulcheri 1996).

Most of the body relics of saints were found preserved in some fashion when they were unearthed. Sometimes this was due to natural mummifying condition in the soil. Sometimes it was because the body had been so cut off from air. For example, popes have long been buried inside of three coffins – one of the lead - that fit into each other like nesting dolls, effectively sealing the body from air and decomposition (Jeremiah 2012:61). Some saints' bodies were

also prepared and treated in ways after their deaths that slowed down composition. For example, Saint Rita of Cascia was embalmed after her death. When her remains were unearthed during the canonization process in 1627, 170 years after her death, they were well-preserved, with her skin intact and not discolored. Her body had been embalmed with botanicals and her internal organs had been removed. Therefore, remains even smelled pleasant; the condition of her remains was taken as evidence of her sanctity (Jeremiah 2012: 133).

Once unearthed, incorrupt remains generally start to deteriorate if efforts are not taken to prevent it. When one views an incorrupt Roman saint, one is usually actually viewing masks and other body coverings placed on top of remains. The masks and body coverings are often made of metal or wax. Efforts are usually made to keep the remains under the masks and coverings in the best condition possible. However, in the case of Saint Claire of Assisi, her body completely deteriorated under a mask and covering. When this was discovered, a mannequin was made to replace the body (Jeremiah 2012: 117-118).

The body relics of prominent dead Catholics are not just a medieval fascination. Even today, the Church recognizes the power these relics have for their ability to bridge the here and now with the dead and gone. The Church realizes the symbolic and political power these relics can have and those in power seek to control them just as they have been doing since the early centuries of Christianity. In 1984, Ukrainian Cardinal Josef Slipyj died. Slipyj had spoken out and written against the mistreatment of Ukrainians under Soviet rule and the Soviet Union's demands that the Ukrainian Catholic Church become part of the Russian Orthodox Church. He served eighteen years doing hard labor in a Soviet gulag (No author, 9/8/1984). The Church ordered that his body be preserved for political reasons and even called in Egyptologists familiar with ancient Egyptian funerary practices (Jeremiah 2012, 137). Slipyj is interred in St. George's

Cathedral in Lviv, Ukraine and his cause for canonization has been opened for investigation (Pelikan 1990). However, his relic's political necessity seemed to have waned with the fall of the Soviet Union and the canonization in Spring 2014 of Pope John Paul II, who also challenged communism in the Soviet states and abroad.

Geopietry, Saints, Shrines and Women

Academics in fields outside of geography have also contributed to body of work on Catholic popular devotion, shrines, ethnicity, and women. Historian of religion Robert Orsi (1996) examined the shrine of St. Jude in Chicago by looking at letters from women addressed to the shrine which were answered by the fictional "Father Robert" as well as by conducting ethnographic research at the shrine itself among those who visited it, most of whom were women of Irish and Southeastern Europeans decent and who in the 20th century began to lose their otherness by becoming more educated and marrying outside of their ethnicities. St. Jude, a rather obscure saint when the shrine opened in 1929, is the cousin of Jesus and patron of lost causes. For Orsi, "marginal holy figures often serve as the protectors or guardians of socially marginalized and outcast groups" (Orsi 1998: 7). Similarly, Cabrini is not a very-well known saint, even in the places where she lived and worked. Many Catholics will readily identify Elizabeth Ann Seton as the first American saint, despite the fact that Cabrini was canonized first. Perhaps this has to do with the facts that Cabrini was a member of and served a more recently marginalized group of people – Italian-Americans, whereas Seton ministered mostly to groups that had become much more white (as opposed to an ethnic other) by the time the Italians came to American shores, such as Irish-Americans. Italians were considered racially differentiated

from white immigrant groups that had arrived in the U.S. earlier, but they were never legally forbidden from immigrating to the U.S., marrying whites, or attending white schools (Gugliemo, T. 2003: 29). As Italians intermarried with other whites and in and chose to participate within the label of white in the years since Italian immigration waned, it is easy to forget that Italians once occupied this position between the labels of black and white. In Louisiana, for example, Sicilians often worked and lived side-by-side with blacks and were identified by the region of Sicily from which they had come instead of as black or white (Scarpaci 2003: 61-68). Perhaps Cabrini's relatively small notoriety compared to that of other saints is also because the schools started by Cabrini's order are much smaller and the order's main focus in the United States aside from education is serving immigrants, a marginalized group, through the Cabrini Mission Foundation. The foundation and order's continued work with immigrants as well as Cabrini's status as patroness of immigrants attracts Hispanic immigrants today to her shrine in New York City.

In his work on St. Jude, as well as two other books, *The Madonna of 115th Street* (1988) and *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious World People Make and the Scholars who Study Them* (2005), Orsi delves into different practices of ethnic groups, focusing mostly on Italians and the cult of the saints. He tackles how the Catholic Church has at times tried desperately to convince adherents to abandon the cult of the saints and the veneration of the saints' relics as physical vehicles between humans and God (Brown 1982: 1-22) in favor of seeing the saints as symbols or models. The only saint that got a little bit of a pass was the Virgin Mary, but she too was to be seen as a role model for one's life, not so much as the queen of heaven or anything that might vaguely approach deity-status. Orsi contends that we cannot think of the cult of the saints as "premodern, modern, and postmodern but as different ways of being in the world at the same time" (Orsi 2005: 51). He tells readers that there is no sequence here. Much like in the

“multitemporal” field sites I have discussed, devotion to Mary and the saints has “endured well into the modern era and in the most modern nations, subverting this authoritative temporal grid” (Ibid, 50). For example, Cabrini exists in New Orleans, New York City, the bedroom, and the shrine, as well as in a shrine hidden away in Rome. The post-Vatican II Church “labored in memory and practice to uproot the saints...but the power of presence in things and places, and in memory, turned out to be stronger than any had anticipated” (Ibid, 9).

Disallowed from many other forms of full inclusion in official Catholic religious practices or stations due their gender, women have long been associated with devotional Catholicism. For example, Sally Cole found that in coastal Portugal, devotional Catholicism allowed women to be “active in constructing religious experience to meet their own needs,” which often do not “coincide with the goals of the parish priest” (Cole 1991:100). Again, here we see women finding their own place in a patriarchal religion through devotional Catholicism. Orsi tells us that this is despite the fact that much of the disdain for devotional Catholicism on behalf of the Church hierarchy came from the fact that women were so involved with this aspect of Catholicism: “Devotional experience, including the intimate handling of sacred objects, may be discounted, branded infantile or even insane, especially when it is associated with women. But presence persists” (Orsi 2005: 51). Furthermore, female saints, according to Orsi, evoke absent female relatives just as shrines can evoke an absent place or time (Ibid, 66). When the cult of the saints was discouraged, a place in Catholicism that traditionally belonged to women was threatened. However, as my two field sites show, women could not be convinced to forsake devotional Catholicism and be left placeless within their Church. Vatican II may have been an attempt at “denying and forgetting the saints, putting them out of memory and out of

history....closing off the past from the present,” but women at these sites keep the past, present, and future in a non-linear state of coexistence (Orsi 2005 152).

Religious studies scholar Thomas Tweed focused on transnationalism and Catholicism in his book *Our Lady of the Exile* about the Cuban shrine of Our Lady of Charity in Miami, a shrine mostly visited by Cubans as well as a few whites and members of other Hispanic groups (Tweed 1998: 58). Tweed found that while most visitors at US shrines are women, larger numbers of Cuban men visit this shrine than other Catholic shrines and churches in the US as well as in Cuba. Catholic women worldwide also attend mass and participate in parish organizations and functions in larger numbers than Catholic men (Tweed 2011). The shrine to Cuba’s patroness, with its evocative mural of images of Cuban history, the bust of a Cuban leader, the Cuban flag on display, is for men a place associated with national identity. However, for women, it is a place to take their personal concerns, as Orsi saw with his work on the shrine of St. Jude.

Tweed also brings up here the question of what he calls “geopiety,” which he defines as “an attachment to the natal landscape.... [that] involves affection for remembered traditions” (Tweed 1998: 87). I find several more comparisons here with Tweed’s site and my own New York City field site. Do the Hispanics who come to Cabrini’s shrine have a personal connection to her as the works of Orsi suggest women have to their chosen devotional figures? Or do they visit the shrine because, aside from being geographically close to their neighborhood, it evokes a sense of home with the Spanish-language ex-votos and encased relics? The body figure we see in the glass coffin is something that more closely reflects the presentation of the saints in Latin Catholicism rather than American Catholicism. If we think of US Catholicism as being largely influenced by Irish-Americans, we can also think of the Catholicism of Latin America as being largely influenced by the brand of Catholicism practiced along the Mediterranean, which is rich

in devotional practices related to relics of the saints. Are the Hispanics at the shrine visiting Mother Cabrini or visiting someplace that looks more like home? The answer I found to both in my interviews was yes.

Are we visiting another faraway place – the past – when we visit Cabrini’s shrine and bedroom? Are we not transported to a time when women religious were the public face of the church in schools and hospitals, wore habits, and cared for orphans? Are we, while standing in front of Cabrini’s body, not transported to a time before the Church tried to marginalize the cult of the saints? I argue that visiting these shrines can also be a way to connect with a place in time that no longer exists in the Catholic Church. For some, such as myself, we may only know this place through oral history stories of older Catholics, plays, movies, and books, as we were born after Vatican II. However, Catholics and ex-Catholics who experienced Pre-Vatican II Catholicism first hand or heard about it through relatives, movies, books, and the like are obsessed with this place. Orsi points to movies as well as the ever-popular Late Night Catechism plays, in which an actress dressed as a habited nun conducts a spoof of a pre-Vatican II children’s catechism class in which the audience participates as students, as proof that “if the point of such renunciation was to build a firewall against the past, it ensured the past would remain a compelling object of desire among Catholics and ex-Catholics across the religious and political spectrum...the members of no other religious community in the US return so compulsively to the past” (Orsi 2005:155).

Women religious, in particular, make up a good part of the imagined landscape of this past. The fetish value of nuns has grown to include kitsch items such as nun dolls; for example, a company in Tennessee called Nuns and Such would produces thirty dolls in the pre-Vatican II habits of different religious orders (“Nuns and Such”). We may romanticize this place in time

prior to Vatican II as an immigrant may romanticize some aspects of his or her homeland. Returning to geography, sacred spaces, according to Kong, “may embody the past and all it stands for in a personal way” (Kong 1999: 18). For some, visiting the Cabrini shrines are a way to visit the past – whether it be the era prior to Vatican II or their homeland.

Methods

Aside from more traditional research, such as going through the order’s written records in the Cabrana Room (a small archive of articles written about Cabrini and the order in the US, as well as letters and documents from the order’s early years) and reading several books about Cabrini, her order, and the communities in which she missioned, I also used other qualitative methods to assist in my fieldwork. I read the landscape of three sites, trying to deconstruct what was there and why. In the summer of 2009 and summer of 2011, I conducted fieldwork at the New York City shrine. I sat in the pews in the back and observed people as they prayed or participated in other activities in front of Cabrini’s body. I was a participant observer in the gift shop in 2009, where I inspected all of the Cabrini and Catholic paraphernalia that was for sale while watching other customers; in 2012, the sisters put me to work in the gift shop making relics to sell. I interviewed visitors to the shrine, employees, volunteers and sisters. Much of what I did in these interviews was listen. People who wanted to talk really did want to do so, and I found myself having more informal conversations than sticking to set questions.

The New Orleans site presented me with a different situation. Again, participant observation and interviews were used. I interviewed the lone MSC sister who works at Cabrini High School in New Orleans, Sr. Alice Zanon in 2009. I am a graduate of Cabrini High School

in New Orleans and that same Sister Alice was my freshman year religion teacher in 1998-1999. For four years, I heard about Mother Cabrini's life, legacy, and how we "walked on holy ground." I was one of the students who led open house tours through her bedroom and myself went on one of these tours before deciding to go to Cabrini; the saint's room and "holy ground" rhetoric influenced my decision to attend the school, as I was then trying my very best to be a good Catholic. What better way to be a good Catholic than to go to school where a saint – the ultimate good Catholic – had lived and worked?

I am still involved with Cabrini High School to the extent that I attend events and keep in touch with administrators and alumnae. In October of 2009, I was asked to speak to open house tours in the chapel at the school about how a Cabrini education helped and encouraged me in my university endeavors. During open house, I was able to sneak away and revisit what was going on in the bedroom; I found a student dressed as Mother Cabrini telling her story, just as I saw it when I was thirteen. I've volunteered at nearly every open house since and have also spoken at the school's career day. In fall 2012, I was asked to join Cabrini High's Alumnae Board and I have since attended several alumnae functions. The other alumnae board members were excited to help with my research by giving interviews as well as filling out and passing along questionnaires to other alumnae. I did not interview or work with students at the school due their ages, as Internal Review Board requirements for research on Human Subjects would mean that I would have to ask permission from their parents and treat them as a vulnerable population. My research at the New Orleans field site included participant observation, interviews, and sending out a questionnaire to alumnae via e-mail, which I will discuss in the chapter about the New Orleans field site.

After several years working on this project, I was shocked to find out there was a second body-figure in a shrine in the order's home for retired sisters in Rome. I will discuss this shrine and how I found out about it in chapter five. My methods at this shrine during I was able to take were to read the landscape and observe.

Inside Research from the Outside

At the New Orleans site, I did insider research. It is important to note that although I may be an insider because I graduated from Cabrini High School, the fact that I am doing research within the community makes me an outsider. For Kirin Narayan, being a researcher in one's own community makes one an outsider (Narayan 1993: 671-672). I have been the only researcher at alumnae events, open house, and other visits. I am made an outsider by the reason for my attending events, the work I am doing there, as well as my social science research training and education. However, telling the sisters at the New York site that I attended one of the order's schools gives me a pass to loiter around there hours observing, asking them question after question. But I was not really an insider at the New York shrine; New Orleans is a different matter. For example, as a speaker at open house, I participate in the process of creating or maintaining Mother Cabrini's memory, and inevitably, in the form that memory will ultimately take. I was asked to tell the audience what my dissertation project was, which required me to articulate my inside investigation to open house visitors– all the while partaking in creating and maintaining the memory of Mother Cabrini- meaning that I was doing something that I had actually come to study, instead of just talking about all of the support and encouragement I received from teachers at the school. Therefore, some of the qualitative research I did was

autoethnographic in nature. Robert Orsi advocates that autoethnography can contribute greatly to studies of religion as religious studies scholars have often stayed away from providing information about their religious beliefs to students, other scholars, or within their published work. Even though scholars have often prided themselves on keeping their own religious backgrounds quiet, Orsi writes that it is time for “a season of public auto-biographical self-reflection when we explore the social, psychological, and cultural grounds of our work, just as anthropologists could no longer occlude themselves in the field” (Orsi 2005: 14). Orsi’s *Between Heaven and Earth* then, is not just about unfamiliar people and the cult of the saints, but instead, also about the story of his family and their devotional saints. Orsi also addresses in this text something not often brought up in scholarly studies of religion, particularly ones for which ethnographic research is conducted: the inevitable inquiry of others into the researcher’s own religious beliefs. Orsi, who was raised Catholic but no longer practices, understood “the language” of popular devotion from his upbringing. However, he concluded that he was not exactly an insider because he no longer shared the faith of those he was interviewing. Similarly, I was raised Catholic but no longer consider myself more than a cultural Catholic. Yet, I, like many others in post-Vatican II America, cannot let go of the personal devotion to the saints, at least in the study of it and collection of devotional items.

In addition, I cannot let go of the sacredness of my field sites, which for me are sacred because they evoke personal experiences, connections with relatives and loved ones, and the past. I found my story to be one of many with common themes in intersecting narratives about the bedroom, the school, death, and the past. Just as letters, interviews, and participant observation informed Orsi’s work in *Thank You, Saint Jude*, I expect my own experiences to inform a small part of the alumnae’s collective story of the bedroom.

For years, it was standard practice for social scientists such as anthropologists and geographers to approach their research subjects from a distance clouded in the cloak of objectivity. I argue, however, that no ethnographer is ever really a complete outsider (or a complete insider, for that matter). Researchers often make friends with group members. They may participate in activities within the groups they are studying. If one spends enough time within a community, they become a part of that community. Similarly, the role of researcher, along with education level and life experiences, can set ethnographers apart from other members of their native communities that they are studying. It is not that “inside research” and “outside research” do not exist, it’s that they do not ever exist as completely one or another, but always as some combination as both. But as both are common terms within the social sciences, I will continue to use them here with the understanding that it is impossible to be either. When I say “insider research” or “outside research” from here on out I use it to mean how social scientists have generally conceptualized of the two.

For what has been generally considered insider research, scholars such as Faydra Shapiro, have acknowledged that even inside researchers are outsiders just by virtue of the researcher’s “tape-recorder, late night sessions at the computer, constant interviewing” (Shapiro 2003: 196). I am an outsider because I am a researcher, because of my education level, and in some aspects of the community, because of other parts of my identities. For example, I started this project married and childless. Almost all of the married girls with whom I graduated high school have at least one child, and seemed perplexed that I didn’t have any children since after all, I was married. This made me an “other” to them and them an “other” to me, even though we’re both in the same community.

Social scientists have often debated the merits of insider research. Pauline Rooney notes several key questions pertaining to insider research and validity (or how accurately the phenomenon studied was “reflected”): “What effect does the researcher's insider status have on the research process? Is the validity compromised? Can a researcher maintain objectivity? Is objectivity necessary for validity?” (Rooney 2005: 3). Academics began to move away from complete positivism over the past decades towards questioning or rejecting objectivity, with some such as Carolyn Ellis and A.P. Bochner arguing that objectivity never exists and that we all bring with us an understanding of the world from our backgrounds and experiences (Ellis and Bochner 2000). As ethnographers inevitably become some part of the community in which they are working, they can form biases. They can also bring biases with them from previous experiences. The same can be said for insider research, given previous experiences and long-established membership within the community. I argue that there is no bias-free researcher, whether one considers oneself an insider, outsider, or a bit of both.

Insider-researchers have the opportunity to be uniquely aware of their biases in ways that those who come into communities as outsiders may not be pressured to be. Tosh argues that the pressure on insiders to “confront this issue so openly gives them an advantage over outsiders, who may remain unaware of their own biases while interpreting data from the field” (Tosh 2001: 213). In her ethnography of women Neo-Pagans, Tosh, who herself is a witch, reflects on her concerns about the common practice of Christian-bashing within Neo-Pagan circles. She admits to immediately recognizing this issue because of its problematic nature. Neo-Pagans are often portrayed by Christians as satanic or demonic by Christians; this is something that is hurtful and infuriating to Neo-Pagans such as herself. She knows that writing about the jokes and demeaning language some Neo-Pagans tell or use about Christians could further exacerbate the

rift between them. But ultimately she decides to write about it because it is a problematic issue that grabbed her attention for this very reason (Tosh 2001: 212-213). Because insider researchers are constantly reminded by colleagues, reviewers, and perhaps even dissertation committee members that they may have biases, they are perhaps better than many at acknowledging these biases because they are forced to always be on the lookout for them. For example, Robert Orsi writes that it has long been standard practice for religious studies scholars to completely obscure themselves from their religious research and not tell readers anything about their religious background, even if they are insiders (Orsi 2005). I will be pressured to constantly reflect upon what my status as a community insider means as far as bias because my committee knows as will my readers of the finished dissertation, that I am what would be considered by most an inside researcher. There is no unbiased research whether one is an insider, outsider, or a mix of the two (as I believe all researchers are), but those considered insider researchers are constantly forced to be self-aware and confront their own biases in ways outsiders are often not.

Also, insider research can be criticized for being too authoritative. It is important to remember that one's observations and findings, especially when based on past experiences within the community, are not idiosyncratic. In her study of former members of the Sullivan Institute, Amy Siskind, who was raised in this group and belonged to it for seven years as an adult, "cross-checked all descriptive statements with those of other ex-members" (Siskind 2001: 191). She also quoted herself from transcriptions of interviews she did with others, which allowed her to approach herself as an interviewee, a technique she says "gave me the benefit of an 'outsider' impression of my own experience" (Ibid: 191). The end result was a study that does not rely completely on Siskind's recollection of being in this group but on shared

recollections of many members. Essentially, part of being an insider comes down to what I would call making sure you're getting it right. Jodie Taylor advocates asking interview subjects if one is getting it right (again, my own term) what one has recorded and interpreted: "I have found it useful as a researcher to formally seek the validation of my interpretation from those being interviewed or observed" (Taylor 2011: 14). This process not only insures that one isn't relying too much on what one has remembered, observed, and/or participated in, but also allows for helping "protect trust between the friend-researcher and friend-consultant while also affording the friend-consultant greater feeling of control over her own representation" (Ibid). This method also insures that inside researcher confront their own biases that may be apparent to others in their representations.

Another problematic part of insider research, as noted above by Taylor, are the dynamics presented by having pre-established relationships or friends within the community one studies. I argue that this eventually can become problematic for outside researchers as well, as they eventually also make friends and develop relationships with people in these communities. Insider-researchers just may have had some of these relationships and friendships before and cannot easily cut and run from them after publication as someone who entered a community as an outsider. Please note here that I am not advocating that anyone cut and run after completing his or her research, I mean to express that there is more of an expectation that friendships and relationships will remain constant during and after research to a higher degree when the ethnographer is an insider rather than an outsider at the onset of the research. Therefore, it may weigh more heavily on a researchers mind that they are getting it right when they portray others if those people are friends or people one will see again, as I surely will at alumnae events and social events in the future. People who begin research as insiders are also often pressured to

think about how accurately they are portraying people because the researchers will likely have to face them again and again. I asked consultants about what I have gathered from observing and interviewing them as well as asking them to read my work. I constantly felt pressure to make sure if I was getting it right on the part of my consultants and therefore, ask this of myself.

Another issue that can arise in insider research pertains to intimacy. Sometimes consultants may be so comfortable with an insider that they say more than they want actually want the insider to write. This is especially true of friends, “given the level of intimacy that friends share, friends are likely to divulge more to you, forgetting that you are recording and may potentially publish what they say” (Taylor 2011: 14). Again, this can be combated by giving consultants drafts of one’s writing so they can ask researchers to omit something they meant to be off-record. Occasionally throughout this project, I was asked to keep a few things “off record,” and did so at my consultant’s request.

Although being an insider offers many challenges, it also has advantages that can include the ability to have more regular contact with field sites, quicker rapport with consultants, as well as more accessible lines of communication with consultants. Furthermore, insiders are able to get into “semi-private or unpublic cultural spaces” of a community (Taylor 2011: 12); for example, I was able to gain access to the Cabriniana Room archive ultimately because of my insider status.

Just as scholars such as Orsi, Tweed, and Kong have suggested, personal experiences make these spaces sacred for me more than the belief I have in the power of a certain saint or Catholicism. *Orsi’s Between Heaven and Earth* is the story of the author’s family’s favorite saints, the story of St. Frances Cabrini in these three places is my story as well, including the experiences I have had there and the people I have experienced there. So too it is part of the stories of the other alumnae, visitors, and others encounter at these field sites.

Personal experience has been a central part of feminist work in the social sciences over the past four decades. For geographers, autoethnographies have focused mostly on the positionality of the researcher and to a lesser extent, on biography and autobiography (Valentine 1998: 305). In this work, I intended to address my positionality and also relate what makes these sites sacred for me. Essentially, I looked to ascertain answers about the sacred, personal experiences, the past, and gender at my field sites through interviews and readings.

Carolyn Ellis describes autoethnography as “research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis 2004: xix). As autoethnographers are often criticized for “doing too little fieldwork, for observing too few cultural members, for not spending enough time with (different) othersAutoethnographers are thought to not only use supposedly biased data, but are also navel-gazers and self-absorbed narcissists” (Ellis et al, 2011: 242).

I argue that there are a few ways to counteract these criticisms. First, my story will not be the only story I analyze in my dissertation. I aim to treat my story as just one of many that I encounter through fieldwork. Sherry Ortner argues that when studies cover long periods of time and deals with people who are spread out geographically, interview-based fieldwork can be enriched by drawing on one’s own “long term membership” within the group being studied (Ortner 2003: 15). Ortner studied her high school cohorts and their attitudes towards socioeconomic class. She chose to assign her subjects pseudonyms, which I offered to do for my interview participants. Ortner also, however, changes the stories of different people around to different pseudonyms, resulting in the reader’s inability to follow each participant’s narrative. In the interest of keeping the narratives true to those to whom they belong, I will not reassign parts of people’s stories to others.

Another challenge to autoethnography is to not be self-indulgent navel gazers. The challenge is to make “my story” a part of “our story” rather than just presenting “my story.” Autoethnography needs to be, according again to Pamela Moss, “self-aware or self-critical” (Moss 2001: 34). In a successful autoethnography, the autobiographical or the self, is situated within ethnography, or the larger culture (Ibid 2001: 31). I found that my story is just one of many of our stories that I encountered through my fieldwork and that common threads such as death and memories will show themselves in our stories about these sacred spaces.

An autoethnographer has to make sure his or her work deals with their experience with the subject he or she is studying. It cannot just be all about the author. For example, when geographer Robert J. Kruse used autoethnography in researching his article “Imaging Strawberry Fields as place of pilgrimage,” he did a better job of not falling into the occasionally narcissistic tangents about anything and everything pertaining to “me, me, me.” He couches his work in theory and previous works from within geography about music, place, and pilgrimage, such as Derek Alderman’s work on cultural religious heritage sites. He then gives a detailed description of the history of the name Strawberry Fields and its importance in John Lennon’s life as well as a description of Strawberry Fields in New York City. He also looked at media accounts and interviews with Lennon fans that have traveled to Strawberry Fields. He writes that as a Beatles fan, “far from being an objective observer, I offer an interpretation of the place that is coloured by my deep sentiments associated with John Lennon and the Beatles” noting that these are feelings he “share(s) with many people around the world” (Kruse 2003: 159). He gives his account of going to Strawberry Fields for the first time and notes that his experience there cannot be unique: “The referents associated with the place are available to many people worldwide and although they may be incorporated and interpreted in the particularity of individual lives, it

seems reasonable to assume some similarity with the thousands of people who visit the site” (Ibid 160).

I argue here that Kruse has hit the nail on the head about autoethnography. It’s not about me and it’s not about objectively observing you. It’s about us. I used to play the guitar as a teenager and when thinking about autoethnography and insider ethnographic research, I keep thinking about the guitar. Each note is separate and unique. But to play a song, you have to play a combination of different notes and chords, not just one note over and over again. If ethnography is the song, my story, my autoethnography, is just one note in a song. Songs flow together, or make musical sense because of how the notes flow together – it’s looking for the shared experiences autoethnographers and others have pertaining to a subject that makes the autoethnography a true ethnography. I intend for my story not to be the only story told in my work. However, I feel it would be disingenuous not to include it and give it as much merit as the information I gather from other key consultants. But I want this to be a shared story of which mine is a part, not me playing the same note over and over again hoping it will become a song.

There are also ethical considerations pertaining to autoethnography. For example, April Chatman-Carter set out to write an autoethnography about anorexia. Chatman-Carter was a recovering anorexic. She was dismayed with how much literature by former anorexics dealt with their on-going struggles and wanted to write something that would show how one could beat anorexia for good, which she thought she had done. As she read and wrote about anorexia, she found herself reverting to old anorexic habits and obsessing over controlling not just her food intake and exercise but also about controlling her writing about her own anorexia as something she had conquered and put in the past. In a meta-autoethnography (an autoethnography about her writing) published in the *Journal of Research Practice*, Chatman-Carter writes that her

reviewers could tell that she was not being honest about her continuing struggles. Sometimes they would peer through and sometimes they would not. She was worried about what colleagues would think about an anorexic college professor. Eventually she relinquished this obsession for control and wrote freely about how anorexia still plagued her and within this narrative, how writing about anorexia had made the disease louder in her head and complicated what she thought had been a full recovery (Chatman-Carter 2010). What Chatman-Carter did here was make herself vulnerable by realizing she did not need to be so obsessed with protecting herself from perceived threats of being seen as the anorexic college professor. The obsession with keeping the live disease hidden in her work had caused her to relapse. Once she was candid about her own struggles, she was protected from the disease.

Chatman-Carter's story may be more serious than most, but I suspect many autoethnographers have similar struggles. I had to confront the fact that I have my own feelings about Catholicism and Mother Cabrini that challenge church teachings (such as the Church's stances on artificial birth control, abortion, and marriage equality) even though I consider myself culturally Catholic and am understood in the community to be Catholic, just not a very good practicing one.

It was a conversation with an elderly anthropologist that made me realize this was not the case. When we met when I returned from fieldwork he asked me "Are you Catholic?" I sighed. "I was raised Catholic, but I'm not really anymore. I'm nothing now," I said, meaning to convey that I wasn't one religion or another. "Well, that's not true," he said. "You're Katie."

Autoethnography allows me to accept and address that I'm Katie, with all of the complexities and multi-identities that entails, researcher, teacher, student, alumna, community member, cultural Catholic, humanist, mother, liberal, daughter, friend, and many more. If I

want my consultants to be truthful with me and not just tell me what they may think I want to hear, I have to be honest with myself and with my audience. In doing so, I also quieted the tensions in my mind that sometimes obscured me from fully “being there” because I was so much in my own head at times during my preliminary fieldwork as I wrestled with quieting these parts of myself. If I asked consultants to show me parts of themselves, I had to do the same with myself. Since coming to the conclusion that I didn’t need to feign being a good Catholic girl to be a good researcher for this project, my inner voice has been able to stop wrestling with this dilemma. Funny thing, too, as soon as I accepted that I’m not a good Catholic girl, I’m Katie, I felt like my interviews have been better, I’m better able to recognize when I might be being biased, overly critical, or under-critical, and I feel much more at peace in my work. I felt like I can do the work without having to work on myself. Women have been more open to me in expressing feelings that may not be quite so fitting for good Catholic girls once they see (and somehow it just seems to translate) that I’m Katie, I’m not Katie feigning something I’m not. In more recent interviews, I found that if I am not afraid to ask the questions I want answered, I elicit better answers than just giving someone an open question and hoping they will be willing “to go there.”

Part of my work will also involve addressing my positionality within the Cabrini community. Lewin and Leap write that “if reflexivity demands candor about the assumptions and desires one brings to the field, then one must be open about how one manages one’s identity and how this contrasts with or resembles strategies one employs at home” (Lewin and Leap 1996: 2). In my case, I am an alumna of Cabrini High School. However, my insider status is not just complicated by my position of researcher, but also by the many things I do not have in common with many other alumnae such as my education level and being childless near age

thirty. For example, what will my identity as someone who is no longer a practicing Catholic and who is politically liberal and who stands in opposition to the Church's stances against gay marriage, abortion and birth control (but with the Church on its views of capital punishment and wealth disparity) mean to this project, if anything? I do not intend to hide or obscure these parts of myself, as I expect to find among others within the communities identities that are juxtaposed to traditional Catholic values. I am open to sharing myself and my experiences as I interview others in hopes that they will open up to me and be willing to also expose themselves in the same way. I am willing to be vulnerable because I am asking those I interview and observe to be vulnerable as well. For Ruth Behar, this results in a breaking down of the barrier between ethnography and emotion, which puts "autobiography back in its place as the handmaid of ethnography" (Behar 1996:19-20).

Others, however, critique autoethnography not just for giving personal experience too much weight (Behar 1996), but for not taking into account the relations of power in the production of meaning of experience and treating experience as "already an interpretation" (Jackson and Mazzei 2008: 304). Jackson and Mazzei want autoethnographers to deconstruct the "narrative I" by considering it to be an "experiential I," or a "conscious I" that is never settled in one interpretation or another but instead always experiencing phenomena. The "experiential I" also takes into account past interactions and anticipates future interactions (Ibid). I want my narration of my story not just to be something that has happened in the past that was analyzed and then summed up neatly in my dissertation, but something that is in the process of becoming, as I am always in the process of becoming me (Ibid: 313).

Conclusion

I invite you now to join me on this journey again to these field sites, armed with inquiries about personal experience, the past, death, loss and gender. As we have seen, sacred places are in part sacred due to the stories we learn there. I hope my dissertation will contribute to the scholarship on gender and sacred space, as well as the scholarship on women, popular devotion, and shrines. It builds upon previous work by the geography Lily Kong that expands the notion of sacred space to include places that are considered sacred by visitors, many of whom are female, due to connections people feel with the past and people from their past in these places. I intended for it to be an example of “radical” feminist geography in that I propose that my two field sites, which are gendered spaces, allow a place for women to exercise power within the patriarchal system of the Catholic Church. I seek to answer Daphne Spain’s call for more feminists to study the public religious gendered spaces and look at often-ignored emotional connections people have with places, building on the work of Anderson and Smith. It builds upon the work of Robert Orsi and helps develop the role of autoethnography as a method within Religious Studies and build upon sacred space as a connection with a lost past as described by Tweed. But first, we will need to begin by examining the history and memory of Mother Cabrini and her order.

CHAPTER THREE

REMEMBERING CABRINI

Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini and the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Saints have played an important part in promoting and sustaining the Catholic faith outside of Europe, namely in the United States and Latin America. Pope John Paul II canonized more saints during his reign than any pope before him; his successors, Benedict XVI and Francis are following his lead. According to Robert J. Barro and Rachel McCleary, this uptick in canonizations is directly correlated to the rise in Evangelical Christianity in North and Latin America. Saints from these two areas have been canonized at a rising rate in response to the growing Evangelical Christian movements in the western hemisphere over the past century (Barro and McCleary 2011: 1-18). Saints, then, for the Catholic Church, are not just dead people who are recognized for living holy lives. Saints are propaganda for the faith. This dissertation centers on one saint in particular, Frances Xavier Cabrini, known as “Mother Cabrini” to those who have attended her order’s schools or otherwise been involved with the order she founded, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Cabrini biographer Segundo Galilea (2004) writes that Maria Francesca Cabrini was the last of thirteen children born to a peasant family in San’t Angelo, Lodi, in the Lombardy region of Italy on July 15, 1850. Legend has it that doves flocked to the neighborhood in celebration of her birth. Galilea goes on to say – as do other Cabrini biographers – that Francesca finished the Italian equivalent of high school, meaning that her family was probably not of the peasant class

but something more akin to the middle class. She was a sickly child and also a devout Catholic (Galilea 2004: 11-13). Cabrini desperately wanted to become a religious sister and was refused by several orders due her poor health. With the help of the local bishop Dominico Gelmini, who recognized her desire to be a religious sister, at age thirty she founded her order, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Italy in 1880 and opened a girls' school and orphanage soon thereafter on a property Bishop Gelmini asked her to take over (Ibid, 30-42).

The sisters identify the order with "M.S.C.", an acronym for the first letters of the order's name in Italian, Missionarie del Sacro Cuor (Interview with Sr. Alice Zanon, MSC 2009).

During this time, many Italian immigrants were resettling in the New World; between 1887 and 1916, over 3.9 million Italians came to the United States and many settled in New York (Rose and Sears 1922: 25). In 1894, the U.S. Commissioner of Labor declared that one-third of the Italians living in New York lived in "deplorable" conditions (Ibid 68). The Catholic Church in New York, like many urban areas in the U.S. at the time, was under the control of Irish clergymen and religious, who were at a loss whether or how they should to mission to Italian Catholics. The few Italian clergymen in the U.S. wrote to Pope Leo XIII, requesting Italian priests and religious to work with the Italian communities. The Irish Archbishop Corrigan of New York requested that the Pope send an order of female religious to join the only religious group in New York working with the Italians, the Scalibrini priests, who needed help conducting religious instruction, caring for orphans, and educating girls. Although Mother Cabrini had always dreamed of following in the footsteps of her favorite saint, St. Frances Xavier, and doing mission work in the East, Pope Leo XIII sent her and a few of her sisters to make the voyage to New York City in March of 1889 (Galilea 2004: 57-63). It is part of Mother

Cabrini's legend, told at her memory-sites, that the Pope told her "not to the East, but to the West." This phrase blazes in gold on the wall in the chapel where her body is displayed.

Her voyage to the U.S. was not easy. She and the three nuns who accompanied her were cramped into a small, third class cabin with another woman and the journey was marked with terrible storms. One of the sisters who was with Cabrini, Sister Gabriella wrote: "We, as all the passengers, are in great trepidation" (Sullivan 1992: 63). They tried to help the Italians in steerage where "the men shouted as if crazy" and "distracted women and children cried and wandered about in a daze" (Ibid).

In New York, Cabrini found that the Scalibrini order of brothers with whom her order was supposed to work had not come through on their promises of a suitable place for the sisters to live. Nor did the Scalibrinis have funds to pay the sisters. Cabrini and the nuns walked the streets of the Italian ghettos in Little Italy looking for those who needed their help or would attend religious instruction. They also taught religious education at the Italian parishes staffed by the Scalibrinis, taught girls and young women normal education and trade classes, cared for orphans, and visited the few wealthy Italians of the city to request donations of funds or land (Galilea 2004: 53-87).

Cabrini and her nuns opened schools, orphanages, and a hospital for Italians, thereby providing places for the placeless immigrants of New York (Galilea 2004: 90). They missioned to many generations of Italians in New York as well as eventually New Yorkers as a whole as demographics in the areas of their missions changed. Until 2015, one of the New York orphanages operated as Mother Cabrini High School; the order still owns the property and it is here where her body also resides on display in the adjoining chapel. Eventually, young women from all over the city and from many different ethnic backgrounds attended Cabrini, extending

her influence to New Yorkers of many walks of life and different generations. However, today, the school draws students mainly from Washington Heights. The neighborhood it is in is heavily Hispanic and neighborhood residents often worship at the shrine and attend the adjoining school in large numbers.

Italian immigrants also came en masse to New Orleans in the 19th century. Most of these immigrants were actually from Sicily, but identify themselves as Italian, according to Joseph Maselli, the founder of the American-Italian Renaissance Foundation and the American Italian Museum in New Orleans (“American-Italian Renaissance Foundation”), and co-author of *Italians in New Orleans* (Maselli and Candeloro 2004). This sentiment is also expressed by A.V. Margavio and Jerome J. Salomone in their book *Bread and Respect: The Italians of Louisiana* (Margavio and Salomone 2002). The Italian unification process brought Sicily into the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. Sicily, like many parts of Southern Italy, was culturally and ethnically different from Northern Italy. The Austrian Hapsburgs had been the hegemonic force in the north and the region was industrialized; Sicily and southern Italy were heavily influenced by northern Africa and were highly agricultural. Sicily and Southern Italy become predominantly Catholic due to 500 plus years of Spanish rule, during which Jews and Muslims were forced to leave or convert to Catholicism. Spanish Catholicism influenced Sicilian Catholicism. Festivals honoring saints, pilgrimages to sites associated with saints or their relics, and other Spanish popular religious traditions informed Sicilian folk Catholicism. (di Leo 1997: 1-7). Sicilians so opposed unification that the kingdom imposed martial law to quell the dissent on the island until 1869 (Keahey 2011:140-146). The choice to use “Italian” versus “Sicilian” to identify oneself could be the subject of a dissertation of its own. As Sicily was part of Italy when Sicilians started to flood into New Orleans, perhaps they were identifying themselves as coming from the new

nation of Italy. Also, the immigrants sought to escape the cultural stigma attached with Sicily – that is backwards, African rather than European, controlled by organized crime - that could be avoided by citing Italians as one’s nationality rather than Sicilian (Hart 2007).

By 1910, 250,000 Italian immigrants lived in New Orleans and Italians occupied eighty percent of the French Quarter (Maselli and Candeloro 2004: 7). In fifty years, the number of Italian-born people living in New Orleans jumped from 896 in 1860 to over 8,000 in 1910 (US Census 1860 and US Census 1910). Many were involved in the citrus, fig, olive, and seafood trade in Sicily and therefore were also involved in the import-export trade between Sicily and New Orleans, making it a logical choice as a place to emigrate. Many worked in the French Market or started grocery stores and fruit stands between 1880 and 1950 (Maselli and Candeloro 2004: 13). Although New Orleans is marketed for tourism as a French city, it is really much more of an Italian city today and has been since the start of the 20th century. While the New York City metropolitan area is well known in popular culture for its large Italian population, New Orleans remains, in the imaginations of many who visit the city only through books, television, and films, a Francophone place. This misconception seems all the more strange when the ethnic backgrounds of residents of the city are examined– about 200,000 people who claim Italian ancestry reside in the New Orleans metropolitan area, making it the largest ethnic group in the area (Ibid). Yet the Italian influence on New Orleans is not widely promoted in tourism or popular culture; Italians are often forgotten in the popular memory about New Orleans. Similarly, we will see work about French women religious – mainly the Ursulines – dominates the narratives about such women in New Orleans rather than the stories of Mother Cabrini and her order, despite being the fact that she was the first person who had lived in New Orleans - as well as the first American citizen - to be canonized.

At first, New Orleans was not on Mother Cabrini's list of places to do mission work. After all, she was from Northern Italy, and New Orleans's "Italians" were mainly Sicilians. However, this all changed in 1891. At this time, corrupt Irish police chief David Hennessey ran the city (one can argue that the Irish, another large ethnic group in the New Orleans metropolitan area, are similarly often forgotten in the romanticized Francophone history of the city, despite the fact that the Irish ran much of the city and the archdiocese by the late 1800s). According to Masselli and Candeloro, when Hennessey was shot outside of his home, Italians became the scapegoats as investigators deflected attention from having to face Hennessey's unsavory associates who likely committed the crime. At this time, Italians were considered by New Orleanians to be of lower stock than even Creoles and Anglos in the city; they were often subject to the same treatment as blacks. Two hundred and fifty Italians were arrested and nineteen were indicted. Three were released after a mistrial and three others were found not guilty. The day after this not guilty verdict came down, a mob attacked the city jail, which housed the other thirteen Italians. On March 14, 1891, an angry mob overtook the jail and shot, hung, and beat to death the thirteen Italians who were still awaiting trial. Italians in New Orleans and the world were shocked, including Frances Cabrini (Maselli and Candeloro 2004: 35).

Mother Cabrini was in South America at the time of the lynching, but as soon as she heard about the killings of the Italians in New Orleans, the Cabrini myth tells us that "she knew she had" to go to the city to help (Sr. Alice 2009). Despite finding conditions harsh in New Orleans, Cabrini and her sisters opened a school in 1891 at 114 Charters Street in the French Quarter, which soon had 300 students, as well as an orphanage, school, and chapel at the Old Ursuline Convent at 817 St. Philip's Street (Margavio and Salomone 2002: 32-33). Eventually, Cabrini realized that these sites alone were too small for the needs of New Orleans' Italians'

population. Cabrini and her order were again providing place for the New Orleans Italians who were out of place due not only to their status as immigrants but also from the lynching fiasco.

After securing funds from a rich Italian sea captain named Salvatore Pizzati, the Missionary Sisters opened an orphanage and school for girls at 3400 Esplanade Avenue (“Cabrini High School”). The orphanage remained open until 1959, when the building was repurposed as part of Cabrini High School, an all-girls school which the order still owns and runs. It is here that Cabrini’s bedroom is maintained as if she will be returning at any moment. As a graduate of Cabrini High School in New Orleans, I can attest that students are told again and again that they “walk on holy ground at Cabrini,” and it is a selling point at open house for prospective students and their families. At open house, a student also dresses in the traditional habit of the Missionary Sisters and tells Mother Cabrini’s life story and emphasizes her work in New Orleans. Although she tells Cabrini’s life story, the girl narrates it not as if she is Mother Cabrini or another nun, but as a student who just simply happens to be dressed in Mother Cabrini’s habit.

Mother Cabrini opened 67 missions around the world. She died in 1917 in Chicago at the age of 67 (“Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus”), yet her memory lives on in the bedroom in New Orleans and the chapel in New York City. Cabrini became the first American citizen to be canonized 1946 (Cruz 1983: 245). To qualify for sainthood in the Catholic Church, two miracles must be attributed to a person (Woodward 1996: 84). The first miracle that was attributed to Cabrini, which qualifies a person for beatification, or to be considered “blessed” by the Church, is the healing of the eyes of an infant born in a Chicago hospital owned by the order 1922. The baby boy was blinded by an overdose of nitrite of silver. The sisters pinned a piece of St. Cabrini’s habit to the baby’s clothes and prayed continuously. Within 48 hours, the

infant's eyes were healed as if the overdose had never happened. The baby, Peter Smith, grew up to be a priest and died in 2002. In 1925, the second miracle, which would cement Cabrini's status as a saint, was the healing of a very ill member of her order, a Sister Delfina, who had stomach cancer, in 1925. The sister was given less than 24 hours to live but made a full recovery and her cancer disappeared after being told by Cabrini in a dream that she had more work to do on Earth. Mother Cabrini was originally buried on the property of one of the order's orphanages in West Park, New York that had been purchased from the Jesuits (Cruz 1983: 244). When Cabrini first saw the land, she said "I will be buried here" (Galilea 2002: 38). Pope Pius XI started the process for Cabrini's beatification, the step before being canonized as a saint, in 1931. Her body was disinterred from her resting place in West Park that same year for the official recognition of her relic by the Church, a standard practice in the canonization process in which the body is inspected to see if it is incorrupt and also to begin the practice of deriving relics from the body. The Catholic Church has recognized several saints' bodies as incorrupt, which adds greater credence to these individual's status as holy people. Although some reported that her body was incorrupt, this is not the case as it was "found to have been reduced in the normal manner" (Cruz 1983: 244-245). Two years later, her remains were relocated to the Missionary Sisters' property in Washington Heights. Instead of placing her relics in a decorative chest or casket as is often done with the bodies of saints that have begun to decompose, her remains were instead broken apart so that small parts could be sent to sites where she had lived and worked. Her heart is in Lombardy and her skull is in Rome, while her one of her humeri is in Chicago. Small bones fragments as well as hair and nails can also be found in missions she founded in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Argentina, South Africa, and Australia (Butler 2007). The bulk of her remains were placed in a "simulated figure" (Ibid) with wax hands and head as well as dressed in

the order's habit of her time, leading those who view the body figure to believe that her body is indeed incorrupt. This figure was then placed in a glass and gold coffin on the Washington Heights property. The body was eventually moved into the chapel, known as the St. Frances X. Cabrini Shrine on the property in the 1950s (Interview with Sr. Adelina, M.S.C., 2009). A second, less-known wax "simulated figure" of Cabrini's body is in Italy, along with her heart and her head. The story of the body is somewhat unclear – no one seems to want to write or talk about exactly how Cabrini's remains were divided up and repurposed. When her body was exhumed, her heart is said to have been still perfectly pink and intact. Somehow, her heart fell into the possession of a priest who cut it open, causing it to then turn black and shrivel up (Interview with Sr. Catherine Garry, M.S.C. 2011). The common reply by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart and their associates as to where Mother Cabrini's remains are is in New York City; in reality, she is everywhere and nowhere – her remains are scattered throughout the world and her complete remains are not together in any one place. The New York City shrine that holds what is commonly referred to as her body as well as the shrine containing her less-known body figure will be the subject of chapter four.

Literature Review

Several biographies of St. Cabrini exist. One of the most detailed historical accounts of her life is *Mother Cabrini: Italian Immigrant of the Century* by Sister Mary Louise Sullivan, Ph.D., M.S.C., former president of the order's college, Cabrini College, in Radnor, Pennsylvania. Sr. Mary Louise has committed her academic career to studying Mother Cabrini. At Cabrini College, she maintains a special collections room in the college's library called the Cabriniana

Room with a plethora of primary and some secondary sources about Cabrini and the order, including letters, diaries, newspaper clippings, and magazine articles. Essentially everything ever written about the Cabrini or the order in U.S. newspapers and magazines can be found here, as well as documents pertaining to her canonization.

Some of the hagiographic books about Mother Cabrini include Theodore Maynard's *Too Small A World: The Life of Francesca Cabrini* (Maynard and Bruce 1949), Pietro DiDonato's *Immigrant Saint: The Life of Mother Cabrini* (DiDonato 1960), Geogrgio C. Lorit's *Frances Cabrini* (Lorit 1970), and most recently, Segundo Galilea's *In Weakness, Strength: The Life and Missionary Activity of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini* (Galilea 2004).

There are also several books detailing the histories of Italian immigrants. Many, however, deal with Italians in the United States as a whole, such as Tomasi and Engels' *The Italian American in the United States* (1970), *Italian-American Ways* by Fred Gardaphe (1989), and *The Italians in America* by Philip Rose and Charles Hatch Sears (1922). Italians in New York City are specifically addressed in *Catholics in New York: Society, Culture, and Politics 1808-1946*, edited by Terry Golway (2008). A.V. Margavio and Jerome J. Salomone's (2002) *Bread and Respect: The Italians of Louisiana* and Joseph Maselli and Dominic Candeloro's (2004) *Italians in New Orleans* cover the history of Italians in the whole state of Louisiana and New Orleans, respectively. Tom Smith's (2007) *The Crescent City Lynchings: The Murder of Chief Hennessey, the New Orleans "Mafia" Trials, and the Parish Prison Mob* cover the event which led Mother Cabrini to come to New Orleans and do mission work. All of these sources are helpful for reconstructing the historical aspects of my project as they address the conditions and prejudices Italian immigrants encountered.

While academic books and articles on Catholic male religious orders such as the Jesuits are numerous, work on Catholic women exists in smaller amounts. For example, a J-STOR search returns 82 results for “American Sisters of Charity,” the order founded by Elizabeth Seton and the a search for “Ursulines”+“United States” returns 604 results, where as a search for “Jesuits”+“United States” returns 8,304 results. A search for “Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus” returns eight results, most of which are book reviews; a search for the order’s counterpart in missioning to Italian men, “Scalibrinis”+“United States” returns 412 results.

Given my experience with difficulty gaining admittance to do research in the Cabriniana Room, I wonder if this disparity is due not to a conundrum among academics of where to place women who operated within a patriarchy but perhaps also in part due to the differences in the archives of male and female religious groups, particularly those that arrived in the U.S. or were formed in more recent years. Had I not been a Cabrini High alumna who contacted Mother Superior, Sr. Pietrina Raccuglia, I doubt I would ever have been able to access the Cabriniana Room; in 2012, when I returned to the northeast to do fieldwork, I was unable to gain access to the room (or even get a reply from Sister Mary Louise despite repeated attempts) – this will be discussed more in chapter four. If one is studying the Congregation of the Holy Cross (the order that owns Notre Dame University), much of the order’s archives can be accessed online. I have to ask if the lack of attention paid to the Cabrini sisters is because they are not a particularly easy order to study. Their archives are not online but holed up in one small room in a library in a small liberal arts college off of the Mainline outside of Philadelphia and can only be access by appointment; appointments - I can attest, that are difficult to come by.

The Ursulines’ archives, by contrast, are located at Ursuline College in Pepper Pike, Ohio, but scholars can fill out remote requests online for copies of items to be mailed to them.

There is no such system for the Cabrini Room. There are also Ursuline Archives that contain duplicates of much of the information in the Ursuline College Archives spread out throughout North America in cities where Ursuline convents exist, including St. Louis, Quebec City, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Dallas, New Rochelle (suburban New York City), Cincinnati, Dedham (in suburban Boston), as well as both archives and museums in New Orleans and Great Falls, Montana. Doing archival research on the Ursulines, therefore, is considerably easier logistically than doing archival research on Cabrini's order. The Ursulines also have a considerably longer of a time frame for social scientists to work with, having been founded more than three centuries before the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Ursulines have come to dominate scholarship on women religious, particularly women religious in New Orleans, with the publication of numerous works by Tulane historian Emily Clark, as well as earlier works such as Harriet T. Kane's *The Ursulines: Nuns of Adventure- The Story of the New Orleans Community*, and Jean Frances Heaney's *A Century of Pioneering: The Ursulines in New Orleans 1727-1827*. More recently, the domination of the Ursulines at the top of the paradigm of New Orleans women religious has been challenged by scholars studying black women religious in the city, with the New Orleans Sisters of the Holy Family and the order's foundress, Henriette DeLille, getting most of the attention in recent years. DeLille's order and Philip Hannan, the then-archbishop of New Orleans requested that the Vatican start an inquest into her canonization in 1988; DeLille is still in the first steps of the process, as she is considered "venerable" because the inquest into her canonization has been made but two miracles have not yet been attributed to her ("Sisters of the Holy Family Canonization Process"). In the years since DeLille's canonization inquest began and became she became more popularly known, scholarship about her and her order has boomed, including Charlotte and James Hall's 1998 book *A Legacy of*

Caring: The Impassioned Mission of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Edward Brett's 2012 book *The New Orleans Sisters of the Holy Family: African American Missionaries to the Garifuna of Belize*, William Kelley's 2003 *A Servant of Slaves: The Life of Henriette DeLille*, Virginia Gould's 1998 *Henriette DeLille: Servant of Slaves*, among many other books and articles, the vast majority of which were published in the 1990s and early 2000s. The number of scholarly works about the DeLille and her order greatly outnumbers scholarly work on Cabrini and her order, yet Cabrini's order is older and has more missions across the globe and DeLille still remains stalled at beginning stages of qualification for sainthood, while Cabrini was the U.S.'s first citizen to be named a saint.

Perhaps the plethora of work about the Ursulines and DeLille exist because they fit so well with how New Orleans is often portrayed – French, Creole, and/or African. Historian William Williams argues that tourism is based on difference – and these differences are often based on stereotypes (Williams 2010:153). What differences do tourists expect to find when they come to New Orleans? If New Orleans has been seen in popular culture, such as films, as French (or even Cajun) and Creole (I use the New Orleans area understanding of “Creole” or “Creole of color” here – people of African and French or Spanish ancestry), then doesn't New Orleans have to play up its French and Creole heritage? The main tourist area – the French Quarter – is littered with restaurants selling Creole food, French doughnuts called beignets, and stores selling voodoo dolls. There are even Cajun restaurants and stores selling books about the Cajuns – even though Louisiana's Cajun population is mainly found about 130 miles west of New Orleans in southwest Louisiana's Acadiana parishes; yet film characters from New Orleans who spoke with Cajun accents and other media misrepresentations have made it logical that “Cajunness” will be sold to tourists, just like the French and Creole history of the city obscure

the histories of the Italians and Irish, among others, from being represented to tourists and locals (such as schoolchildren on field trips) who visit tourist attractions. Stereotypical New Orleans is mainly French and Creole, and ethnicities that do not fit into this representation of the city are marginalized. The American Italian Cultural Center and Museum, for example, sits on the other side of Poydras from the large tourist area, hidden in the central business district and obscured from view by Harrah's Casino's Fulton Street complex and office and warehouse buildings. The little-known nearby Piazza d'Italia, which was built in 1978 by the Italian community to commemorate the group's contributions to the city, is a plaza that is little visited except by the homeless for sleeping spots. The Ursulines and the Sisters of the Holy Family fit in with the portrayal of New Orleans by the city's tourism industry and popular culture; the Ursulines were composed of mainly French women and the Sisters of the Holy Family were free Creole people of color.

Although an Italian woman, Saint Angela Merici, founded the Ursulines in 1535, they quickly became a primarily French order. By the 1570s, the Ursuline congregations of Paris and Bordeaux had become the most influential congregations within the order. Most of the Ursulines who came to North America were French or German; most of those who came to New Orleans were French. The Ursulines arrived in New Orleans in 1727; they opened a boarding and day school for bourgeois white girls as well as teaching free day classes to slave girls, free girls who were Creoles of color, and Native Americans, and opened one of the city's first hospitals ("The Ursulines" Catholic Encyclopedia). For centuries, the Ursulines had the market on education of women in the city as well as a good part of the city's health care. The Ursulines were well established as a respected and revered part of the city's historical fabric by the time the newer ethnic groups of New Orleans - Italian, Irish, and German - men and women religious came to

the city in larger numbers in the mid-19th century. The Ursulines, therefore, remain entrenched with the imagined New Orleans that is French and Creole, before ethnic white groups came to the city en masse.

The Sisters of the Holy Family were founded in New Orleans by a free Creole of color named Henriette DeLille in 1836. DeLille's story is even one that fits into the romanticized version of the placage system that is often depicted in books about New Orleans in the 19th century, a system in which young wealthy, white men would form the equivalent of a common-law marriage with a free Creole woman of color. Henriette was being groomed to meet an eligible man and enter into such agreement; she, however, had other plans. Along with two other free women of color, she founded one of the first orders of black women religious (Copeland 2009:13-34).

Have academics who study women religious in New Orleans perhaps researched what people expect them to study as scholars of New Orleans – meaning the French and Creole of color orders? Why do Italian, Irish, and German orders get little attention from academics just as the Italian, Irish, and German history of New Orleans gets overlooked in depictions of the city in popular culture? When I told a historian that I was studying an order of women religious that came to New Orleans to help Italian immigrants, she responded to me with “well, you must be reading a lot about the Ursulines,” as if the words “women religious” and “New Orleans” were synonymous with “Ursulines,” or that the Ursulines were the only women religious to have ever worked in New Orleans or to have ever mattered in New Orleans. One of the aims of this dissertation is to bring about a greater awareness of a lesser-known religious order in New Orleans (and the United States). Studying the Ursulines seems to be a traditional standard; studying the Sisters of the Holy Family seems to be sexy. Cabrini and her order are left

somewhere in between, lost between the Francophone and the Creole, much like Italians as a whole are in the rhetoric of the history of New Orleans.

Similarly, there are far more scholarly and academic books that have been written about Elizabeth Ann Seton than Mother Cabrini. Seton is Cabrini's rival when it comes to U.S. sainthood primacy. I cannot count the number of times I have told someone that Mother Cabrini was the first U.S. citizen to be canonized and have been met with the response "Oh, I thought Elizabeth Ann Seton was the first American saint." Seton was the first American-born person to be canonized, however she wasn't canonized until 1975, over thirty years after Mother Cabrini had been canonized; Cabrini was an American citizen at the time of her death. However, it seems that Seton is remembered by American Catholics as the first American saint. Cardinal Spellman of New York wrote of her: "Elizabeth Ann Seton is a saint. *St. Elizabeth Ann Seton is an American*. All of us say this with special joy, and with the intention of honoring the land and the nation from which she sprang forth as the first flower in the calendar of the saints. Elizabeth Ann Seton was *wholly American!* Rejoice for your glorious daughter. Be proud of her. And know how to preserve her fruitful heritage" ("Pope's Address on the Canonization of Elizabeth Ann Seton").

Was Cardinal Spellman implying that Mother Cabrini was not "wholly American" despite being American citizen because she was an immigrant? Or was it because she was not just an immigrant (albeit one who gained citizenship) but an Italian in the American Catholic Church, which has long been controlled by Irish-American clergy (Abbot, Matt C., 2010); in fact, Cardinal Spellman was of Irish descent himself (Bayor and Meagher, *The New York Irish* 419).

Perhaps Elizabeth Ann Seton is so well known because her story fits so well into the narrative of white native-born America. She was born in 1774 to a wealthy, Episcopalian New York protestant family; she was a descendant of some of the first European settlers of New York. She married a wealthy businessman with whom she had five children before he died. After his death, she converted to Catholicism and later started Catholic schools and the religious order to be founded in the United States, the Sisters of Charity (“Sisters of Chairty - Elizabeth Seton.”)

Seton is everything the Catholic Church, a church that has been defined for generations by immigrants - Irish and German, then Italian and Polish, and more recently Hispanic - could hope for as an advertisement for the church to white, Protestant Americans. She was wealthy, a convert, the descendant of a founding family of one of the original thirteen colonies, and unquestionably white. There was no need to question her “Americanness” – she was a WASP who just happened to convert to Catholicism, proving there is nothing un-American or unsettlingly ethnic about the religion. Mother Cabrini, on the other hand, was not born in the U.S. Although she gained citizenship as millions of immigrants to the U.S. did during her lifetime, she remains an other – not just an immigrant, but an Italian one at that. Stereotypes of Italian-Americans as less desirable members of American society persist – they are seen as gangsters, lovable fools (Cavallero 2004), or portrayed as the loud, promiscuous, hard-partying, prone to violence self-proclaimed “guidos/guidettes” of MTV’s *Jersey Shore* and similar Italian-American personalities on reality shows like *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* and *Jerseylicious*. In 2010, the president of the Order of the Sons of Italy in America wrote a scathing letter to members of the organization about the stereotypical portrayal of Italian-Americans in the media in which he wrote “never in my 27 years of fighting bias, bigotry and defamation of Italians and Italian Americans, have I seen the proliferation of negative stereotyping as we have all experienced

these past few months” (“Order of the Sons of Italy”).

If Italian-Americans have long been - and continue to be – portrayed negatively, why wouldn't so many people have been led to believe the first American saint was indeed Elizabeth Ann Seton? She is certainly no Snooki or Teresa from *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*; Mother Cabrini seems questionable in this regard. Seton was a safe, non-descript Anglo white lady whose family had been long established in the U.S. For a church that has long-been an immigrant church made up of white ethnic groups in the U.S., it's strange to think that so many – I'd dare even say most – American Catholics would probably name Seton as the first American saint rather than Cabrini.

There is a large misconception that the first American saint isn't an immigrant like so many members of the Church throughout U.S. history, but rather an Anglo white protestant convert. The fact that Cabrini's order still does much work with immigration, particularly with Hispanic immigrants in the U.S., is another reason why Seton might be pushed to the forefront as the quintessential American saint. Given that illegal immigration is a hot button issue in white America, Seton's order's work in education and hospitals is politically much safer for the Catholic Church.

In his book *The Missionary Position*, Christopher Hitchens writes that Mother Teresa was a great advertisement for Catholicism to non-Catholics and that she helped form a Catholic-Protestant Evangelical right wing alliance against abortion, and thereby bring Catholics and Protestants on the right closer together and promoting more acceptance of Catholics among American Evangelicals (Hitchens 1997: 3-13). In many ways, Seton as the unofficial “wholly American” does much the same – she was a former Protestant, she was Anglo, she was not an immigrant, and her order does not aide immigrants. Seton is a safer alternative to Cabrini as an

advertisement for American Catholicism. Since Mother Seton dubiously occupies the American Catholic imagination as the first American saint, it is no wonder that both scholars and writers of popular works have chosen to examine Seton's life over Cabrini's.

One of the goals of this dissertation is to add to the little literature about the first American-citizen saint, her order, and the lesser-known legacy she left behind in New Orleans and New York City. For the thousands of graduates of Cabrini High School in New Orleans, those who have visited her shrines, been ill at the order's hospitals, or come to know about Frances Cabrini in some other way, it matters little how well she is known to American Catholics or how many scholarly articles have been written about her or her order; what matters is that "Mother Cabrini" is known to them. Let's enter Mother Cabrini's bedroom in New Orleans now and see what it holds.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SCHOOL BEDROOM

Tucked away in the corner of a second floor of a one hundred-plus year old building in the Esplanade Ridge neighborhood of New Orleans, a saint's bedroom awaits her return. Her bed is neatly made and papers, writing instruments, glasses and her desk are waiting to be used. Pictures are hung on the walls. A near-life size statue of this woman who died over eighty years ago, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, startles visitors for a second, until they realize that she is indeed a statue. Cabrini is not here, but everything in the room awaits her return; what is present here is her absence.

As a student at Cabrini High from 1998-2001, I was required to learn many facts about Cabrini's life and I do not recall the event that brought her to New Orleans – the lynchings of Italians discussed in the previous chapter - ever being mentioned. It was not until I interviewed Sister Alice Zanon in June of 2009 that I learned about the connection with Mother Cabrini's arrival in New Orleans and the lynchings. I was shocked that despite taking Louisiana history as an eighth grader, it was the first time I'd ever heard of the lynchings. I taught about them in my Geography of Louisiana class at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette when we covered the chapter on different ethnic groups that came to Louisiana; my students – especially those from New Orleans – were generally surprised by this revelation and hear about it for the first time in my class. I'm still surprised that many Louisiana students – including myself – manage to get through K-12 education and in some cases, college, without learning that the largest mass

lynching in U.S. history occurred in New Orleans and that Italians – not African-Americans – were the victims of that lynching (Tedesco 3/14/91).

In 1891, Cabrini and her sisters arrived in New Orleans and opened a school at 114 Chartres Street in the French Quarter, which soon had 300 students, as well as an orphanage, school, and chapel at the Old Ursuline Convent at 817 St. Philip's Street (Margavio and Salomone 2002: 32-33). Eventually, Cabrini realized that these sites alone were too small for the needs of New Orleans' Italian population. A rich Italian sea captain named Salvatore Pizzati donated money to sisters to enable them to open an orphanage and school for girls at 3400 Esplanade Avenue ("Cabrini High School"). For four years as a student at Cabrini High, I heard from faculty and staff on campus about Mother Cabrini's life, legacy, and how we (Cabrini High students) "walked on holy ground." As a student, I led open house tours through her bedroom and myself went on one of these tours before deciding to go to Cabrini; the saint's room and "holy ground" intrigued me, as I was then trying my very best to be a good Catholic. What better way to try to follow in a saint's footsteps than by attending a school on ground where she had walked and in buildings where she had worked? As a student, I was fiercely proud that I "walked on holy ground."

I led prospective students through Mother Cabrini's preserved bedroom on tours during Open House each year. To understand why Cabrini High has an Open House and why it is important, it is necessary to understand the culture of Catholic education in New Orleans. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, about 40% of Orleans Parish K-12 students attended Catholic school and by 2006, 79% of Catholic school students in the parish had returned to these schools (Hill and Hannaway 2006: 1). In 2012, Louisiana ranked 3rd nationally in private school enrollment, with much of this driven by Catholic schools; that same year, 36.6% of K-12 students in Jefferson

Parish, a parish in the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area and the biggest bedroom community for New Orleans proper, attended private schools, the majority of which are Catholic Schools. Jefferson Parish also ranked as the county or parish equivalent with the second-largest percentage of its students in Catholic school (Ross 5/6/12).

While there are 61 Catholic schools in Jefferson Parish, only 4 of them are high schools, meaning that the majority of Jefferson Parish high school students who attend Catholic school commute to one of the thirteen Catholic high schools located in New Orleans. Seven of these Catholic high schools in the city are all-girls schools, five are all-boys schools, and two are co-educational. One of the co-educations schools specializes in serving students with learning disabilities. (“Office of Catholic Schools – Archdiocese of New Orleans”). In 2012, Jefferson Parish’s public school system was ranked 42nd among the 71 public school districts in Louisiana (Waller 10/22/12). While Louisiana’s overall high school graduation rate was the fifth lowest in the country in 2012 with around a 70% graduation rate (Sanchez 10/26/12), 99% of Catholic high school students graduate and 95% go on to college (“St. Mary’s Academy New Orleans”).

Since Hurricane Katrina, enrollment in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New Orleans has dropped about 25% due to population losses, more choices for parents with new public magnet charter schools opening, and economic concerns (Associated Press, 2/25/13). Cabrini High, however, has not been impacted by this decline. In fact, it has grown in the years since Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the economic downturn of 2008. Cabrini had around 420 students enrolled in grades 8-12 when I graduated in 2001. The school expects to have nearly 600 students enrolled in the 2016-2017 academic year. Cabrini High’s tuition has also risen. When I graduated in 2001, it was around \$4200 per year; it is now \$8,200, putting it in the mid-range category among the New Orleans’ all-girls Catholic schools in terms of tuition

(“JesuitNOLA Tuition Comparisons”). Cabrini High offers students academic scholarships as well as a work-study program to help pay their tuition expenses; most parents finance the school’s tuition through 10 to 11 month bank loans with interest rates under 10%. One might hear about all of the private schools in the New Orleans area and incorrectly assume that there are a great deal of wealthy people in the area who are choosing to send their children to private school. In contrast, there are many middle class (lower and upper middle class) and working class families who are financing private school via bank loans, scholarships, and other programs, as well as making sacrifices. For example, my friend Donna lives in Jefferson Parish. She is a graduate of Cabrini High. Her daughter attends kindergarten at the local parochial school at a cost of around \$500 per month, which Donna and her husband pay for via a bank loan. They also drove one car after their second car was flooded and their daughter started Pre-K-3 at the parochial school. They had to choose between a car note or a tuition loan note. Despite the inconvenience of having only one car in a home with two working adults and a small child, they could not afford both bills. Much of their home aside from the bedrooms has cement floors, as they could not afford to put down new carpet or flooring after the floors had to be torn up when mold was found in their home and pay their daughter’s tuition payment. They knew they wanted to have two children but waited until their daughter was four to have their second child, a boy. They spaced their children out with four years in between purposely so they would not have two Catholic high school tuition payments (which are more expensive than elementary school) to make at the same time. They do not plan on having any more children because they could not afford to send all of them to Catholic school if they had more than two. From my experience growing up in the greater New Orleans area and now having friends who live in the area that have school-aged children, I can attest that it is a cultural norm for people to plan their lives and

base many of their economic choices around the cost of Catholic school tuition for their children when it comes from everything to deciding whether or not to put a new, badly-needed roof on one's home to planning how many children to have. My goddaughter, now eleven, has attended Catholic school since age three; although her mother told me when my goddaughter was an infant that she wanted to have one more child, it was not long after my godchild entered Catholic school that her mother expressed to me that her daughter would be an only child due to how expensive tuition was. My own parents bought one new car throughout the thirteen years I was in Catholic school. We did not go on vacation every year and we did not have cable television. At one point, my mom even cancelled caller ID and call waiting on our phone to cut expenses. I received a \$3,000 per year scholarship to Cabrini High that was given by New Orleans businessman Louis Roussell in honor of his grandmother and great aunt, who volunteered with the sisters at the Cabrini orphanage, but I still knew that the other costs of attending Cabrini like the rest of the tuition and fees, as well as uniforms and the like, were something my family sacrificed greatly to pay. To give a better picture of the financial situation of many of the families of my friends at Cabrini and my own family, let me say that almost all of my classmates and I qualified for federal Pell Grants when we received our financial aid offers from the colleges to which we'd been accepted. Pell Grants are given to students from low-income families; typically, 70% of Pell Grant recipients come from families making less than \$30,000 per year (Center for American Progress 2012) and for the academic year 2001-2002 – when my high school classmates and I were college freshmen - 100% of Pell Grant recipients' families had an income of \$60,000 or less (U.S. Department of Education 2002). I did not even know until I got to college that Pell Grants were grants for poor people – I just thought everyone got them unless a family was super wealthy because the father was a doctor or something - because so

many of my friends at the private school I attended also received them. They seemed to be the norm. I knew my parents and many of my friends' parents weren't exactly swimming in money, but I don't think I would have considered any of us low-income because we were all able to attend private school. The U.S. government, however, did see us as low income. I think about it now and realize how bizarre it is when I picture my friends and me sitting at our lunch table at the private school that our parents were paying \$400 or so a month in bank loans to send us to discussing how we had been offered these grants that were, unbeknownst to us, for students from low income families. I say all of this to make it clear – it is not just the wealthy or even the upper middle class (and in some cases, not even the middle class), who send their children to private Catholic schools in New Orleans. When I attended Cabrini, it felt much more “working class” or “lower middle class” in a lot of ways than some of longer established girls' schools in the city. Cabrini did not attract the children of the elite whites of the city. There were only a handful of students from the Uptown neighborhood of New Orleans, where many of the city's white elites live. If a girl's father was a doctor, high-powered lawyer, or politician, she probably attended the most expensive Catholic girls' school in the area, the Academy of the Sacred Heart. In 2003, less than 10% of the Academy of the Sacred Heart's families paid for their daughters' tuitions via bank loans, opting instead to pay the full tuition amount in one lump payment (Graves 9/30/03), whereas most of the families of the girls I knew at Cabrini took out tuition bank loans. Mount Carmel Academy and St. Mary's Dominican High School also attracted the affluent and elite girls, but these schools also had a good mix of middle and working class students from all over the metro area. At Cabrini High, most of my classmates were from the suburbs. A few girls were from the Lakeview area of New Orleans, but most girls came from Jefferson Parish and St. Bernard Parish. While many girls were from Metairie, a middle class

area of Jefferson Parish, some were from Kenner and communities on the Westbank of Jefferson Parish that are considered by New Orleanians to be more working class. St. Bernard Parish had about 66,000 residents prior to Hurricane Katrina and was a mostly working class community where many people worked in the local oil refineries or in the commercial fishing industry (Gray 9/6/05).

While most of my white classmates were largely from less than affluent families and middle and working class suburbs, many of my black classmates were from elite black families in the city. The nieces of then-mayor Ray Nagin attended high school with me, as did the daughter of a prominent state legislator who later became a judge. My black friends' parents were more likely to be better educated and had glamorous (and often better paying) jobs as politicians, lawyers, high-ranking members of the New Orleans Police Department, and chemists while the parents of my closest group of white friends' worked as a linewoman for Bell South, a video gaming machinery repairman, a mechanic, a fireman, an enlisted member of the Coast Guard, a cleaning lady, and a garbage collector. Many of my black friends' parents picked them up in luxury vehicles while my white friends from the Westbank and I rode waited for my mom to come get us in her old Ford Explorer with its wooden passenger door handle my dad had attached when the original one broke, or my friend Ashley's dad's old pick-up truck. This was especially notable to me when I chose Cabrini High as a prospective student as many of the parents of my friends with whom I attended grammar school expressed shock that my parents were going to allow me to go to a school with "so many black girls." About a quarter of the students currently at Cabrini are black. The elementary school I attended had no black students in my grade and less than a handful of blacks enrolled at all. The diversity was one of the things that attracted me to Cabrini; but for some of my friends' parents, it was a turn-off. Those friends

ended up at some of the “whiter” Catholic girls’ schools. Even at 14, it struck me how crazy it was that a white secretary and Sears employee would object to their daughter attending school with girls whose parents were lawyers, politicians, and well-educated and elite members of their communities simply because they were black. I will forever be grateful that race was a non-issue for my family when I told them I wanted to attend Cabrini. Many parents saw sending their daughter to Catholic school as a way to keep her away from black men. When a teen girl who lived down the street from me who had attended public school got pregnant by her black boyfriend, I remember a mother on our street saying “Well, what do you expect when you send them to public school? They’ll date black guys.” Another friend’s parent explained to me that her daughter couldn’t attend Cabrini because there were too many black girls there but that it wasn’t because of the black girls they’d meet at Cabrini “but the black guys the black girls know.” Once, when I complained that Cabrini High did not have a brother school – an all-boys school with whom to have dances and get-togethers, as some of the other schools did – a parent of a friend whose daughter did not attend Cabrini told me “No boys’ school wants to be your brother school because you have all of those black girls.”

Cabrini High was one of the first all-girls Catholic high schools in the archdiocese to desegregate. When the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart decided that they would admit black students, the many in the archdiocese advised the sisters against it. These people blamed the recent closing of St. Joseph’s Academy, an all-girls school in the city, on the fact that the school had lost many students after it was integrated in recent years. Sr. Catherine Garry, who was then a teacher and administrator at Cabrini High, said that this attitude did not discourage the sisters. According to Sr. Catherine, the sisters were not dissuaded by objecting voices in the archdiocese because “it was a social justice issue. We were going to integrate” (Interview with

Sr. Catherine Garry, 2012). The first black student was admitted to Cabrini in the early 1970s. The fact that although the archdiocese was publicly selling desegregation with the archbishop frequently asserting that segregation was morally wrong, desegregation in the archdiocese schools was largely moving at a snail's pace throughout the 1960s and early 1970s (Ibid), when the Cabrini sisters were still being cautioned by some within the archdiocese that integration would lead to their school's demise. The dominant discourse in the archdiocese may have been integration, but there was definitely still an undercurrent that encouraged schools to hold out as long as possible from integrating. Since public school integration began in New Orleans, Catholic and other private schools also became a way for de-facto segregation to exist. Integrating the school meant that Cabrini might lose students whose parents placed them in Catholic school mainly so that they would be in an all-white school.

Cabrini High has faced issues concerning race since the sisters made it clear they *were* going to integrate the school. How many other girls had wanted to attend Cabrini but were disallowed, because their parents, like the parents of some of my friends, had deemed Cabrini "too black" for their white daughters? What effect did it have on how the larger Catholic community viewed Cabrini? Was that why we never had a dance with a boys' school when I was a student there? Was that why the elites of the city would not send their daughters to Cabrini, which also meant that Cabrini would not receive the kind of financial gifts these parents and alumna were able to make? At one point in Cabrini High's history, parents and alumnae were worried that the school would have to close. In the early 1990s, the black population of the student body grew greatly and fewer white girls applied to Cabrini. A white alumna related to me that her daughter was enrolled in the school at the time and "there was some worry that we wouldn't get enough white girls and we'd have to close. We wouldn't have enough girls total in

the school to keep it open.” The sisters did not even acknowledge this as a problem. There was no campaign waged to attract more white students or fewer black students. The problem just seemed to work itself out, and in subsequent years, the numbers of whites applying to the school recovered.

Who are the students and alumnae of Cabrini High? Cabrini students generally are not the daughters of old-money Catholic New Orleans families or elite whites. They aren’t all Italian or part Italian; even the first few graduating classes at Cabrini were largely composed of girls who were of Irish, French and German descent in addition to some of Italian descent. They aren’t mainly girls from Uptown but more likely girls from working class suburbs. If they are the children of the elite, they are often the children of the city’s black elites. Cabrini High has always had to try harder than the elite, whiter, and longer-established cities in the school to attract students and grow its student body. Cabrini High, however, has something that the other schools did not – a bedroom that the nation’s saint slept in on a campus where she had worked.



Figure 1. Sacred Heart Orphan Asylum, Cabrini High School, New Orleans, LA

The majority of days, Cabrini's bedroom is not visited by a great number of people. During the school year, it is open to students, faculty, and staff at the high school; visitors can obtain a visitor's pass from the school office and visit the bedroom. Since the school has to take into account their student's safety, it is not openly accessible to the public, making it a quasi-public space most days of the year.

However, there is one day in particular that the bedroom is packed with people. This is usually the first Thursday in October, when Cabrini High hosts its open house for prospective students and their families. New Orleans has about 200 private schools in total, most of which are Catholic schools ("Local School Directory – New Orleans, LA"). Jefferson Parish, a large suburban parish surrounding New Orleans holds the national record for the largest percentage of students attending private schools with forty percent enrolled in these schools (Roberts 2005). Of these 200 private schools, there are thirteen Catholic high schools that girls can attend in the greater metropolitan area. As elementary schools are generally smaller in size, they constitute the majority of the 200 private schools in the area ("Catholic High Schools in the Archdiocese of New Orleans"). These schools hold annual open houses in the fall to help prospective students and parents choose which school is best for them.

In fall of 2009 and fall 2010, Cabrini High held its open house as usual in October. As I mentioned before, I was an alumna volunteer at this event and was told at the end of the night that the estimated attendance was around 1,000 people. As all who go on open house tours are taken through the bedroom, around 1,000 people from the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area visit the room at this event annually, meaning that any given year, 1,000 additional people learn of St. Cabrini in this room and incorporate her into their memory of New Orleans's history.

A junior or senior is generally chosen to dress as Mother Cabrini; she is always a girl with an A or B GPA (the alumna I interviewed was her class's valedictorian), high extracurricular involvement, and a good behavior record. She is also not very tall. As Cabrini herself was less than five feet tall, the student chosen is usually no taller than 5'3". The same costume, the traditional black, lacy-looking habit that Cabrini and her order once wore (MSC sisters today typically wear modest clothing rather than a habit, although a small number of older sisters wear a long grey skirt, white button-down collared blouse, and a grey habit) is used each year and tailored to fit someone of small stature. This habit also harkens back to the pre-Vatican II time when all sisters wore habits; seeing a nun in habit can evoke a certain sense of nostalgia for some ("A Nuns Life"). Personally, I know that when I spent time in Granada, Spain in the summer of 2005, I would be overcome with a strong feeling when I saw groups of sisters in habits, as it is a rare site to see one sister in habit in the U.S., let alone several together. Perhaps for some, like me, the rarity of sisters in habits makes it a novelty that is pleasant to encounter.

I will discuss open house as well as career day and Bayou Bash at length later in this paper; first I will provide more description of Cabrini High and its school community. Both men and women teach at Cabrini, although female teachers do outnumber their male counterparts by about 4:1 from my estimations from the faculty listing ("Cabrini High School"). However, the school's president is male. When I was a student, there were several teachers who were not Catholic. We were required to say a prayer at the beginning of each class; some teachers went with the traditional "Hail Mary," while others, like my Seventh Day Adventist chemistry teacher, read out of a Christian daily devotional that was not geared specifically for any particular denomination. Other non-Catholic teachers would stick with the Lord's Prayer or ask for volunteers from the class to lead prayers. In every class, we did end whatever prayer was

conducted with “Mother Cabrini, pray for us.” I cannot recall any teacher not doing so every class. We also said prayers at the beginning of the school day and said the Angelus before lunch, both of which were also ended with this refrain. Students did not have to participate in prayers; they could always remain silent and just be respectful. When I was a student at Cabrini, there were several students who belonged to other Christian denominations or non-denominational churches; there were also two Jewish students and one Muslim student. I recall that these students usually just stayed silent and respectful during prayers as although teachers were required to make sure prayers were said in some capacity, no one was forced to pray. The same was true for monthly masses. We were all expected to be present and respectful, but no students or teachers were required to say the refrains, pray aloud, or take communion. Once a year, each theology class would be taken to the chapel for confessions, but confessing was strictly by choice. Non-Catholics were encouraged to participate by just talking with the priest and not actually receiving the sacrament of reconciliation. However, I recall that very few students – even the Catholics - went to confession or talked with the priest and don’t remember any of us ever being reprimanded. Non-Catholic teachers and students were encouraged to share about their faiths. As we had students from many different backgrounds, we were taught in the seven semesters of theology classes we had to take to graduate that all religions were holy and that Catholic wasn’t the only “correct” religion.

Aside from the required theology classes, mass attendance monthly, and the prayers, the education I received at Cabrini was quite secular. I learned about evolution in science classes without anyone raising an issue of God’s involvement in the matter, openly debated abortion rights in AP Government class, and I even recall the Church’s views on artificial birth control in Catholicism being treated as somewhat of a non-issue, even in theology class. We learned what

the Church's stance was on artificial birth control; then we went on to learn about all of the different types of artificial birth control and we were never told "don't use these." I graduated with the impression that the Church's stance against birth control should just be ignored. We were taught about STDs and pregnancy and ways to prevent them.

The Bedroom

All of the relics in Mother Cabrini's bedroom in New Orleans are second class relics. The Catholic Church breaks down relics into three classes. First class relics are the actual physical remains of a saint, while second-class relics are items that a saint touched during his or her life. This can also include objects of torture used against a martyr. Third class relics are items – usually small pieces of cloth – that are touched against a first or second-class relic ("Types of Holy Relics").

When entering the bedroom, visitors first see a near life-size statue of Cabrini standing next to her small bed. As Cabrini was less than five feet tall, the bed is very short. Her dresser and mirror, as well as her desk, are behind the bed. This area is roped off so that the items cannot be touched or accidentally damaged. There is a kneeler on the other side of the rope so that one may pray (see figure 2). On the opposite wall, visitors find a glassed-in bookcase full of more second class relics, including her eye glasses, letters, and religious statues (see figure 3).



Figure 2. Mother Cabrini's Bedroom, Cabrini High School, New Orleans, LA

What catches my eye here are the items in the room that are not second class relics, particularly the items on Cabrini's desk, which is in the bedroom because it doubled as her office. A statue of Cabrini with two black children immediately grabs my attention (see figure 4). The saint worked almost exclusively with Italian-Americans in New Orleans (and at her other missions around the globe), yet here we see her with blacks. This statue of Mother Cabrini with black children is a way to allude to the school's connection with the black community of New Orleans over the past 40 years as well as incorporate the black community into this imagined Cabrinian community.



Figure 3. Second Class Relics in Bedroom, Cabrini High School, New Orleans, LA



Figure 4. St. Cabrini's Desk, Cabrini High School, New Orleans, LA

A boat made of woven basketry material is also on Cabrini's desk (see figure 4). This boat is holding little toy sisters dressed in the order's traditional habit as well as faux-violets. This alludes to part of the "Cabrini myth." Cabrini High students are told repeatedly that as a child, the devout Cabrini would pick violets, place them in boats made from leaves, and put them in a stream near her home, playing that she was sending missionaries to China. Cabrini originally wanted to go to the orient and follow in the footsteps of her favorite saint, Saint Francis Xavier, whose name she took as her own when she professed her vows. One day, the young Cabrini, who could not swim, fell into the stream and almost drowned until she felt strong arms pull her back onto dry land. When she looked around, no one was there. Although she had been miraculously rescued, she maintained a lifelong fear of water, adding amazement to the fact that she crossed the ocean over one hundred times in her lifetime.

The myth has been more ingrained in Cabrini High's culture, if you will, since I graduated. Recently, I received a copy of the magazine the school sends out bi-annually to alumnae, parents, and donors, *The Crescent*, and was surprised to learn that the class symbols had been changed to accommodate the Cabrini myth. Class symbols may seem like a strange concept, so please allow me to explain. From what I recall from the different open house tours I attended of the Catholic high schools in New Orleans, it is common (and actually, I don't remember one school that didn't do this from those tours) for each class to have a mascot. At some schools, the mascots were set and rotated. After a senior class graduated, the incoming freshmen the next academic year would receive their mascot. The Catholic girls high schools (from what I recall, all of them) had a day called "Intramurals," in which the grade levels would compete against each other in sports, dance, games, and other performances. From what I recall, it solidified classes as communities, as we all were given roles and had to work together for our

class. It also meant you might end up working on a project for intramurals with someone you didn't know very well and have an opportunity to know her better. Sometimes, class mascots were incorporated into intramural themes. Class mascots were definitely used for decorating the halls that held our lockers – senior hall, junior hall, and so on – as lockers and the halls that housed them were segregated by class.

The windows of the cafeteria would be painted at different times for different school events such as open house, homecoming, and Bayou Bash, and classes would win bragging rights as the windows were judged by faculty. The window decorations would almost always incorporate the class's mascot. When I attended Cabrini High, freshmen chose their class mascot a few weeks after the start of the school year. That mascot followed them until graduation and the senior sweater – a sweater chosen by the senior class, approved by the faculty as still matching the uniform, and approved to only be worn by seniors – also generally had the class mascot embroidered on it.

My class voted our mascot to be “2001 Dalmations” and we all bought up, decorated with, and loved anything to do with Disney's 101 Dalmations for the next four years. We had been cautioned to pick something we could all stomach until graduation. A previous class had chosen Treasure Trolls as their mascot and ended up despising it as the troll craze died out. Disney mascots were all the rage when I was a student at Cabrini, ranging from the Mickey Mouses of 2000 (with mouse ears forming two of the 0s in 2000), Tigers are Great in '98 (with that particularly Tiger being Tigger from Disney's Winne the Pooh), and Winnie the Poohs of 2002, and of course, my class's choice of 2001 Dalmations.

In 2003, the faculty of Cabrini High decided that the mascots should be more Cabrini-specific and incorporate elements of the Cabrini myth and other items connected to Cabrini.

The faculty and a few students formed a committee to choose the new symbols and settled upon angels, stars, violets, doves, and hearts. According to *The Crescent*, the relevance of each can be traced back to Mother Cabrini. The angels refer to the guardian angel that Cabrini told her family saved her from drowning when she was playing in the stream by her uncle's home and fell in. Violets refer to the violets she'd put in leaves and pretend to send to China as missionaries during this playtime at the stream. Doves refer to the doves that flocked to her hometown the morning she was born. The stars and hearts are less related to the myth and more to Cabrini, her work, and her order. Hearts are an obvious choice as Cabrini was devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and incorporated it into the name of her order. Stars, or more specifically, the name of the Blessed Mother of Our Lady, Star of the Sea, in Latin is the name of the part of the order, or province that oversees its work in the U.S., Southern Africa, the Philippines, and Australia, Stella Maris Province. Cabrini wrote that during overseas voyages, she and her sisters would pray by singing the song "Ave Stella Maris" to ask for protection during the harsh passage. Both the Sacred Heart and a star shining above water are part of the order's seal, which in turn is part of Cabrini High School's seal, which is on all official paperwork, the school's main buildings, and on the pocket of the blazers students are required to wear to masses, special assemblies, or when representing the school in public, such as at open house (*The Crescent*).

I first noticed at open house in fall of 2009 that one of the classes had violets as their mascot. I had assumed they had chosen it and thought it was lovely. I did not know, even with the amount of time I had spent at the school, that these symbols had become mandatory. I noticed another class had chosen angels, but again I didn't even connect it with Mother Cabrini. I was surprised to learn that this was the new policy (and had been for some time) but it was a

pleasant surprise. While I'll always smile when I see Disney's Dalmatian merchandise somewhere, I think these symbols give Cabrini High graduates something special that is more connected to the school's history than a random Disney character. These new symbols were also much more feminine than the male Disney characters – Mickey Mouse (why had they not chosen Minnie?), Tigger, Winnie the Pooh, and the mostly male Dalmatians, which I personally liked but could also see some being put off by how ultra-feminine angels, doves, hearts, violets, and even stars are. I was also surprised to learn that the school had created a list of the symbols retroactively so that graduates could see what their “new” symbol was. As I scanned through looking for my graduation year, I was a freshman again in the Cabrini High gym waiting to hear if 2001 Dalmatians had won the vote and would be our class symbol. This time, I admittedly was hoping for violets, as I am a big fan of the color purple and the violets in boats part of the Cabrini myth has always been my favorite. I let out an audible “aww” to discover that my class symbol was now the heart. But after reading more of the article in *The Crescent*, my lack of enthusiasm began to change. As I read “Mother Cabrini believed that a ‘whole’ education included education of the mind and the heart. Students must be informed by knowledge but choose to use that knowledge as guided by the heart,” my opinion changed. I felt this symbol was more connected to the Cabrinian education I received and to the beliefs of a woman who said one of my favorite quotes that emblazons one of my coffee mugs from Cabrini High, “the greatest heritage to a girl is a good education.”

The campus is decorated with angels, hearts, stars, doves, and violets representing the different classes. When the public visits the campus at open house and other events, they may ask questions about the symbols or be told about the reasons for these symbols by their student tour guide or others, thus spreading pieces of the Cabrini myth to the local population.

The collection of Cabrinian relics in the bedroom are a small museum to her memory. This museum, however, is not like a traditional museum such as the New Orleans Museum of Art or the D-Day Museum. There is no entrance fee or requested donation. The upkeep is provided through maintenance of the school and by the religious education coordinator or “campus minister.” The current campus minister, Willie Leonard, came to Cabrini this academic year and inherited the bedroom in its current condition and with its collection. There is no funding provided by the school or order with which to acquire more relics. In future work, I hope to make contact with prior campus ministers who might be able to provide me with more information about the bedroom, particularly the wicker boat and statue of Cabrini with black children on her desk. However, it is clear from what I have learned that this museum is similar to a community museum like the House of Dance and Feathers in New Orleans. Ronald Lewis maintains this museum on his private property and is its curator (Lewis 2009). Much in the same way, Mr. Leonard is responsible for running the bedroom museum, which is also on private property owned by the order, and neither museum answers to a board of directors.

Cabrini’s life story is told by a student dressed as Cabrini at open house. A former “Mother Cabrini” has expressed to me in interviews that to be chosen as Mother Cabrini one had to “have good grades, be a Eucharistic Minister and be on retreat team” (Interview with Holly Thoede 4/15/2010). They were given a set of bullet points about Cabrini’s life story and time in New Orleans and could add things in as they chose, as long as they were positive. The most important thing, however, was to emphasize that a “saint lived and worked at Cabrini (High),” that Cabrini students “walk on holy ground,” and that it is the “only school with a saint,” which is surely a hard marketing ploy to beat for Catholic school recruitment (Interview with Holly Thoede 4/15/2010). When the perspective families visit the bedroom each year, one thousand or

so people from the Greater New Orleans community incorporate Cabrini's story into their story as New Orleanians.

Career Day and Bayou Bash

Similarly, career day speakers are also taught about St. Cabrini. Speakers receive an information packet about Cabrini that includes the same booklet that perspective students receive. This booklet, entitled "Expect More: Cabrini High School," devotes much of its first page to St. Cabrini and the school: "For fifty years the young women have emulated their patron, Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini," followed by her life story and the all-important "holy ground" mantra: "When you walk on the campus of Cabrini High School, you walk on Holy Ground. You walk in the footsteps of a saint. St. Frances Xavier Cabrini lived and worked in the New Orleans community. When you walk the campus of Cabrini, you walk on the grounds of the only school in the South where a saint lived" ("Expect More: Cabrini High School"). Career day speakers also leave Cabrini with her story as part of New Orleans's identity and history as a community, even if they chose not to visit Cabrini's bedroom, which is open to them.

Another day that the campus was open to the public was Bayou Bash. Bayou Bash was Cabrini High's annual fair fundraiser held that was held on Palm Sunday for decades until the school decided it was no longer profitable in 2014. It began with an Easter egg hunt for small children and some years, a 5K race. Rock-climbing, funnel cakes, sno-balls, raffles, and all the standard fair diversions were set up in the faculty parking lot at the center of the campus. Patrons had to park on the street and walk, meaning they would walk through one side of the campus to enter the fair. All across the campus, there were numerous statues and pictures of St.

Cabrini. Her gaze could barely be escaped. If entering through the Moss Street side of campus, one was met by an outside statue facing the bayou (see figure 5), a statue immediately entering the Moss Street building, a picture a little farther in, and one last statue by a garden and fish pond as one exited into the parking lot (see figure 6), where a statue of Cabrini also resides. Entering from Esplanade Avenue, one passed Cabrini statues only twice, because the Esplanade Building was locked. This is one day that the bedroom was not open, as no one was available to keep constant watch over it during the fair.

Among the funnel cakes, Cabrini High t-shirts, hot dogs, and beer, “Cabrini-bilia” was sold. The school bookstore operated a booth that sold Cabrini gym clothes, t-shirts, book covers, pencil cases, pens, as well as third-class relics and holy cards. Fair-goers could buy their piece of Cabrini memory in New Orleans at Bayou Bash. Even though her room was not open, participants could still learn about Cabrini in this way. Cabrini High also hosted a middle-school cheerleading competition in the school gym on the day of Bayou Bash, which brought more people to the fair but also acted as a recruitment tool for girls who might want to become Cabrini cheerleaders, as the cheer squad judged at and performed at the competition. It also brought more students and parents to know about Mother Cabrini via the “Cabrini-bilia” and the presence of St. Cabrini’s gazing eyes in statues and pictures all over the campus.



Figure 5. Statue of St. Cabrini in front of Moss Street building, Cabrini High School, New Orleans, LA



Figure 6. Cabrini Statue near Garden/Fish Pond, Cabrini High School, New Orleans, LA

I asked members of the Cabrini alumnae board and others who were on the alumnae office's contact list to complete a small questionnaire about Cabrini High and Mother Cabrini's room. The questionnaire was distributed via email with the help of the alumnae board president Cat Fleuriet and alumnae director Amelia Hathaway. The questions included:

- 1.) Name:
Graduation year:
Do you prefer for me to use your real name in lieu of a pseudonym?
- 2.) When you attended Cabrini, did you have access to Mother Cabrini's bedroom? If so, what memories & experiences do you have of/in the bedroom?
- 3.) What makes Cabrini High special to you?
- 4.) When you step foot on Cabrini's campus today (or imagine stepping foot on it), what or who comes to mind (what memories, people, etc)?
- 5.) What are your favorite memories of Cabrini High?
- 6.) What kind of relationship (if any) did you have with the Cabrini sisters while attending the school?
- 7.) How have Cabrini High & the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart shaped your life?
- 8.) Are you still involved with Cabrini High School in anyway? If so, why have you stayed involved or why not?
- 9.) In much of my research about Mother Cabrini and New Orleans, I have noticed that her work & life in the city have often been overlooked by scholars and popular culture, while information about others such as the Ursulines, Jesuits, Father Seelos, & Henriette DeLille is prevalent. Why do you think the history of Mother Cabrini & her order's work in the city is not as well-known as other similar religious figures & orders who lived & worked in New Orleans?

I sent out 200 questionnaires and received 111 back. In the answers, I saw that the theme of death or connecting to the dead came up several times. It was a consistent theme among respondents for the early graduating classes, especially remembering the now-deceased sisters who had opened and ran the school during its early years. Mother Aloysius Alemrico, a New Orleans native, founded the school when the orphanage closed. I had often heard the graduates

of the early classes reminisce about Mother Aloysius during alumnae events. Mother Aloysius wasn't just a mother as a religious title; she served as a mother to them and to the school in many ways. Pam Delord, a member of an early graduating class of Cabrini, remembered that prior to prom, Sr. Aloysius wanted the girls to bring their Prom dresses to school under the guise of making sure they were "appropriate." The girls realized, though, that Mother Aloysius, who was not attending the off-campus Prom, just wanted to see "her girls" in their Prom dresses. She even wanted them to come to the convent on campus with their dates on their ways to Prom. Just as girls and boys take pictures at each set of parents' homes in their Prom outfits prior to the dance, Mother Aloysius wanted her girls and their dates to stop by so she could see them off before this teenage rite of passage, like a parent.

Sr. Aloysius, the now deceased school mother to the first two plus decades of Cabrini High students, and other sisters who taught and worked at the school were mentioned several times by respondents. Pam Delord, a graduate of the class of 1963, responded to question number four (When you step foot on Cabrini's campus today, what or who comes to mind?) by writing that "Mother Aloysius, founding principal is the first person I think of then, Mother Consiglia...there were many Italian nuns (some did not speak a word of English) who greeted us in the morning, as we walked through the driveway into the school yard, some were starting to prepare the lunch (snapping peas, etc.) for the girls who purchased their lunch at school. It was like eating a home-cooked meal. Our 'cafeteria' had tables with either a tablecloth or placemats, along with dinner plates, cloth napkins, and we were treated more like guests, than students." Ms. Delord also wrote that she maintained a relationship with Mother Aloysius until she passed away, keeping in touch through phone calls and letters until the sister's death.

Many other respondents, such as Kathy Schmitt Ferrage, also responded to question four with memories of Mother Aloysius. She recalls that she could “go speak to Mother (Aloysius) anytime I had a problem and she would welcome me with open arms.” Melanie Rose D’Antonio Siebert, member of the first graduating class in 1963, wrote that “Each and every day, I find myself in words and actions applying the PRINCIPLES gifted from a loving, caring, PRINCIPAL,” referring to Mother Aloysius.



Figure 7. Mother Aloysius Almerico MSC with a Cabrini student in the late 1970s; courtesy of Mary Beth Schneider Ciaccio, Class of 1978

Other alumnae told me “off the record” that although the other sisters that were at Cabrini High during its early decades were motherly, they were also strict. However, their strictness could be melted – as almost any mother’s heart could – by a girl who was in a difficult situation. Alumnae of the early years related that a girl in their class had gotten pregnant senior year. Rather than kicking the student out, as would have been the norm in Catholic high schools in that era, the sisters worked with the girl to make sure she graduated on time, as they believed it was in the best interest of the girl and her child for her to receive her high school diploma. The sisters clearly cared about the girls who attended the school and their best interest, even when it came down to choosing their girls over the social pressures of the time. I can recall in my own life a time when girls were kicked out of Catholic high schools for having children. By the time I

arrived at Cabrini High, the widely accepted practice among schools in the archdiocese was for pregnant girls to attend a special school, St. Gerard Majella Alternative School in New Orleans, for the duration of their pregnancies and return to their own schools after having the baby as long as they did not promote teen motherhood among their peers. The Cabrini sisters were decades ahead of many of the Catholic high schools in New Orleans when it came to determining that expectant mothers should not be expelled from high school and that their future and that of their babies would be much better with a high school diploma. In the 1960s and 1970s, this must have been a much harder stand for the sisters to make. It was likely even risky for the continued existence and growth of the school and the order for the sisters to help pregnant students, but the sisters did so anyway, expressing the selflessness of a parent doing what is best for his or her child. The girls, as one respondent put it, “were like daughters” to the Cabrini sisters. The fact that even today, when almost half of first-born children in the U.S. are born to unwed mothers (Castillo 2013) and illegitimate children are no longer the scandal they once were, the alumnae who told me these stories did so in the hushed tones of secrecy and in confidence that I would not name names or class years, is very telling. If it is still scandalous to repeat in 2016, how much more scandalous it must have been in the 1960s! The Cabrini sisters were surely taking a huge risk by helping a pregnant student rather than ostracizing and expelling her. The women of that graduating class never mentioned the pregnant girl’s name; even today, they keep the “family secret” just as their “mothers” the sisters did.

Recent graduates who attended Cabrini High when the number of sisters on campus dwindled wrote of thinking of friends (some deceased), teachers (some deceased), and family members (again, some deceased) with whom they had enjoyed special memories at Cabrini High. One respondent replied that her father had been out of work for months. She took him to

Mother Cabrini's room where he prayed to find a job. Within the next few weeks, he was hired. For this respondent, Mother Cabrini's room and Cabrini High reminded her not only of her old friends at Cabrini but also of her father, who is now deceased. For some members of the class of 2004 and the years directly after and before, the one person they think about when they think "Cabrini" or come to Cabrini High School is Monica Jones-Falgoust. Monica was a member of that class but never got to graduate. She died in a car accident in November of 2003. Her classmates placed a sign next to the school chapel in honor of Monica, the friend who will forever be a high school student in the memories of her classmates and teachers. Just as Mother Cabrini's room waits for the return of a saint that cannot be, Monica's memory remains frozen in time on the campus. There, the gym where she did sports, the classrooms she learned in, and the halls she walked in wait for Monica and --- to return, a return that can never be.

In 2006, Cabrini class of 2009 member in her freshman year, Ashley Richelle Newell, was killed. The first half of her freshman year was spent away from Cabrini due to her Hurricane Katrina, but she returned when the school reopened in January of 2006. Ashley's family had lost their home in the Gentilly neighborhood in the storm and had spent months in Texas before returning to a new home in the Algiers neighborhood. She shot and killed Ashley, Ashley's disabled adult brother, and herself. Friends and relatives reported that they never saw such a tragedy coming; Ashley's mom even volunteered to help out with Cabrini's dance team, of which Ashley was a member. Her father, who was at work during the murders, was an active member of the Cabrini Dad's Club. Ashley's family asked in her obituary notice that "in lieu of flowers, please send donations to Cabrini High School (in memory of Ashley)" (Newell Funeral Notice, 16 April 2006). My father, who is still a member of and volunteers with the Cabrini Dad's Club, reported that only a few weeks after the death of his wife, son, and daughter, Mr.

Newell showed up to volunteer with the dads as they parked cars on campus for the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. While many people in the same situation would not have been able to get out of their beds a few weeks after their wife killed herself and their children, Mr. Newell was returning to his daughter's school to volunteer. I suggest that perhaps Mr. Newell found solace in being at place where he had memories of Ashley. Ashley, like Monica, will forever be frozen in time as a teenaged high school student. How better to engage with her memory than to spend time the high school she attended? Similar to the class of 2004, Cabrini High elicits memories of Ashley. Class of 2009's salutatorian Alejandra Bran wrote that "I believe that she (Ashley Newell) along with the rest of us, were meant to be part of" Cabrini's class of 2009 (*The Crescent* Fall 2009). An anonymous respondent wrote "Cabrini is where I learned about death and how to work through it. Ashley was the first person I knew who died."

In 2006, a member of my graduating class, Vanessa Wolff, also passed away. Vanessa and a friend were killed in a car accident in Boca Raton, Florida, where she was living after having recently graduated from Lynn University. The driver of the other car was intoxicated. Two years later, four members of the class of 2001 who had been good friends with Vanessa – Jennifer "Jenna" Dodd Shorts, Mary Noel Olivio, Angela Miller, and Ann Tucker – established a fund for an endowed scholarship in Vanessa's memory to Cabrini High School. To date, the fund has raised over \$23,000. A \$500 scholarship is awarded each school year; applicants must write a two to three page essay about the dangers of drunk driving. The purpose of the Vanessa Lauren Wolff Scholarship (or the "VLW" scholarship) is not only to remember Vanessa, but also to educate Cabrini students about the dangers of drinking and driving.

In 2012, the women who founded the VLW scholarship decided that their mission needed to expand. Angela was now living in Washington, D.C., but the other three founders decided to

get involved in educating not just Cabrini High students but the New Orleans area community about drinking and driving. The New Orleans chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving had been dormant for years. Jenna, Ann, and Mary – along with Vanessa’s mother Charlesy Wolff, decided to help get a new chapter up and running in New Orleans. All of these women were already leading very busy lives in addition to their work with the VLW scholarship fund at Cabrini. Mrs. Wolff is a successful attorney with her own practice, teaches at Loyola University Law School, and does pro-bono work for Louisiana Workers’ Advocates. Jenna works two jobs and has two young children. Mary has two sons, one of whom was born prematurely at only 27 weeks; her son, Liam, weighed only 15 ounces at birth. After his birth, Mary quit her job so that someone could be there when Liam had to go to doctor’s appointments or therapy. She is also very involved with the local March of Dimes and other groups that support parents of preemies in the area. Ann has a busy career as the communications director for Odyssey House New Orleans, a non-profit substance abuse treatment center. Starting a new chapter of MADD would prove to be a lot of extra work, but the women didn’t just stop there. They also planned to do a fundraiser walk for MADD in April of 2013. Despite none of them having any experience coordinating a fundraising walk, at this time, the women – and a handful of other women who joined the new MADD chapter in the months after – have successfully planned and executed MADD walk fundraisers in Metairie’s LaSalle Park.

For the women involved in the VLW scholarship and MADD, their work with both has allows them to be “helping others deal with their own stories” in the face of Vanessa’s “sad and unnecessary” death,” according to Jenna Dodd-Shorts. Jenna also said that Vanessa “was a friend and sister to me in all the ways anyone could ask for.” Death and family – the family one makes – again show up in the class of 2001’s stories about Vanessa and Cabrini.

Vanessa was one of two Jewish students enrolled at Cabrini High while I was a student there. The fact that four Catholic girls started scholarship to a Catholic high school in honor of a Jewish alumna might seem out of the ordinary, but I have never given it a second thought and neither had any of my fellow alumnae who I asked about it. It might seem strange to some, but it never seemed strange to Cabrini alumnae. Vanessa was a fellow student – a member of this family who had walked the same “holy ground” as Mother Cabrini. What the religion of our sister Vanessa matter? Many women in the Cabrini community support the VLW scholarship and the founders’ endeavors with the local MADD chapter.

For many women in my class, Vanessa is a central part of who and what they think of when they go to or think about the school. People from the past, particularly the deceased, were the people respondents often replied were the people they thought of when they went to or thought of Cabrini High.

Conclusion

Today, the role of Mother Cabrini’s memory in New Orleans is primarily to lure prospective students. A by-product of this role is that it also introduces her story to more than 1,000 people from the New Orleans area each year that then incorporate her into their memory of the history of the city, especially on open house night, when the room is truly a public space.

Cabrini High is a comparatively small school and has only been in existence for the past fifty years. This small, relatively young institution is carrying on the task of incorporating St. Cabrini into the collective memory of the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area, even if doing so somewhat unknowingly. The tools the school uses for recruitment and to present itself to the larger community also allow New Orleanians to embrace St. Cabrini and her history in New

Orleans as a part of New Orleans's history. Her position as the patroness of immigrants can easily help imagine ties within the community as with the exception of Native Americans and African-Americans who did not come by choice, are not all New Orleanians descendants of immigrants? The African-American element is incorporated into this collective memory with the statue of Cabrini and black children in her bedroom as well as the black students who attend the school. It seems thus far that Native Americans do not constitute a big enough population of the New Orleans population that they need to be encompassed in this memory. But as New Orleanians that are black, white, brown, or any ethnicity, we share her. She is our New Orleans saint and part of our New Orleans collective memory due to what we learn from Cabrini High School, whether we attend the school, see the bedroom at open house, read material about her, or see her depictions all over the campus. She is someone and something around which we can identify what it means to be a New Orleanian and share in New Orleans's memory. Similarly, there is a shrine in New York and lesser known shrine in Rome that wait to tell us more about Mother Cabrini's memory and the meanings women make at these shrines.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BODY AND THE HIDDEN BODY

I was seventeen. I entered the chapel slowly, annoyed with its 1950s' modern architecture and unsure of what else I would find there. As I walked in closer, I saw it. There she was under the short white cloth covering the altar table, encased in glass with gold around the edges.

"Wow," my dad murmured. I immediately wanted him to go away; I wanted to be alone with her.

It didn't feel real and she certainly didn't look real. Dad got right up close to her, but I took a seat in the front aisle and half-prayed in my head, thoughts interrupting as the voice in my head trotted through a Hail Mary. The interruptions told me "something isn't right," "this isn't what a dead body looks like," "she doesn't look old enough," and "she doesn't look very much like her photos." I felt disconnected and out of place and I felt the same way about her.

My dad's side of the family lives in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, a perfect excuse for exploring New York City anytime we went to visit them; we also drove up along to Hudson Highway up to Washington Heights to go to the shrine on each trip. Returning to the chapel a little over a year later, I felt better. I was much more prepared for what I was going to see. I walked in and did not feel the same confusion, suspicion and out-of-placeness. I felt nothing. *Nothing*. I realized that the first time I was here, I wanted to feel, but couldn't. This time, I wasn't even going to try.

I would return to this site, the St. Frances Xavier Cabrini Shrine in the Washington Heights section of New York City, one more time before it became my field site. It was less than a month after September 11. This time, I felt this nothing again, but it was a feeling I expected and embraced. But I realized, as I looked around at the ex-votos and a few women praying fervently in the pews, that for others, this wasn't a place of nothingness for all.

I would visit the shrine again in 2009 for preliminary observations for fieldwork for my dissertation and again in the summer of 2012 for more intense fieldwork. In 2009, I found an environment close to what I remembered seeing eight years prior; in 2012, things had changed somewhat at the shrine due to a shake-up of employees and volunteers at the shrine.

Initially, I was concerned about what role autoethnography would play in my research at the shrine. Part of my history with the shrine my story of initially visiting the shrine as a Cabrini High School New Orleans student and recent graduate who found the shrine empty, strange, and uninviting. I felt no connection to what was around me – people who had forged relationships with others at the shrine, with the shrine itself, and with the strange body laying “Snow White style” in the gold and glass coffin under the altar. I was an insider at my New Orleans field site but I couldn't have felt like more of an outsider at the shrine in New York. Yet the tragic, the bittersweet, the mysterious, the strange, and the comforting all came together. The possibility of incorporating autoethnography at the New York shrine was more strongly evoked than I would ever have been able to predict or imagine. It became, as I told a fellow graduate student, “autoethnography on a whole different level.” After hearing my story, the graduate student looked back at me and said incredulously, “Katie, shit just got real.”

In fact, the reality of what happened there made me put off writing this chapter for months after I had returned and analyzed the data I had collected there. I wondered for a long

time if I should even write about the overarching experience I had at the shrine that summer or simply write about my lack of feeling of a connected experience there at other times and focus on the experience of others who I had interviewed, worked with, observed, and whose ex-votos I had spent days photographing, reading, and re-reading. I struggled with whether or not leaving out this story would truly be engaging in autoethnography. I struggled with how to include the miraculous and my own ambivalence towards it into the larger narrative at the shrine and how to write about this academically. I thought of all the people at the shrine who had shared openly with me; I owed it to them to do the same in writing this chapter. At one point during my research over the past years, I started focusing on what was or was not *real*, and was unable to see anything past categorizing real versus unreal. An anthropologist freed me from this by telling me, “If it’s real to them, then it’s real” (“them” meaning people at the shrine). I was then able to see what I had been missing in my constant categorizing, which was everything else. When debating whether or not and how to write about what happened in summer 2012 at the New York shrine, I thought of that anthropologist’s words again. What happened, in the moment it happened, was real to me then.

The New York Shrine of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini

The Cabrini Shrine is attached to Mother Cabrini High School on its eastern side. The shrine boasts 1950’s modern architecture. Built in the late 1950s, the shrine itself, inside and out, is one of the almost arena-like style of Catholic churches built leading up to and after Vatican II, when focus shifted from the ornate imagery of the church and decadence of the Latin mass to listening to the word as well as hearing and understanding the mass (Richardson 2003:

108-111). However, Mother Cabrini's body under the altar table lays in opposition to these Vatican II changes, as well as the ornate mural surrounding the altar. The focus in this chapel is clearly not on the word or even on transubstantiation. In fact, the focus of the chapel is not on Jesus or God, but on Cabrini.

When I first entered the chapel and viewed it from the outside, I was disappointed to see the architectural style in which it had been built. It seemed incongruent to when she lived and the places in which she worked. Chapels and churches surely did not look this way in her lifetime; the time in which she is remembered is the 1950s or 1960s, as entering this shrine puts one in that era of architecture. This incongruence aside, the shrine does its best to tell Cabrini's life story to those who did not have to memorize it for tests in Theology class in high school, or at least tells it the way the order wants it told, which was also what I learned.

The chapel mural starts on the left to tell the official memory of her life the order tells visitors. First, we see Cabrini as a child being taught by her older sister Rosa, who wanted to be a nun, but could not as she had to help care for the other Cabrini children, and the saint making her first communion. We also see a young Cabrini putting pretend boats in water at the top, which I recognize as Cabrini playing that she was sending missionaries to China, part of what I learned in high school.



Figure 8. Cabrini Shrine Mural, New York, NY

Next, we see Cabrini in Rome, kneeling at the feet of the pontiff and then the words “not to the east, but to the west,” coming out of the Vatican, referring to Pius sending Cabrini to the New World. Then, we see immigrant parents and children, as well as the statue of liberty.



Figure 9. Cabrini Shrine Mural, New York, NY

Moving farther right, we see buildings that one can assume are various missions Cabrini started, as well as Cabrini with children, one in a wheel chair and the other with a crutch, perhaps alluding to the hospitals the order started, or maybe showing that she took in infirm or hurt children at the order's schools and orphanages. It also shows two healthy children holding school books.



Figure 10. Cabrini Shrine Mural, New York, NY

Finally, we see Cabrini in heaven, surrounded by angels, clouds and a dove with the words, “Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, Pray for Us.” We are told here that Cabrini died, went to heaven, and became a saint, which is obvious by the intercession blazing across the bottom.



Figure 11. Cabrini Shrine Mural, New York, NY

Did Cabrini really pretend to send missionaries to China as a child? Was she really pleased to give up her childhood dream of doing mission work in China because it was the will of the head of the Catholic Church? These are all parts of her legend that make a nice, saintly story that we cannot really verify or deny, a story that is particularly nice for putting the life of a saint into a short tale that would certainly be attractive to donors to the order and its foundation, the Cabrini Mission Foundation, which collects funds for Cabrini institutions around the world. This story is essentially echoed, though with more detail of the different places where Cabrini worked, on the Cabrini Mission Foundation's website ("Cabrini Mission Foundation").

We do not see the difficulties of Cabrini's voyage to the United States that her sister documented and were discussed in chapter two, nor do we see the struggles she encountered

when she arrived in New York only to find that the place to stay and monetary support she had been told the Scalibrinis would provide were non-existent. Cabrini contracted malaria in South America and it ultimately led to her death and she was in the legend, sickly since childhood (“Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus”), yet we do not see a sickly Cabrini on the mural, nor do we see at her last moments in her deathbed in the order’s Chicago Hospital. Her history, on this mural, has been cleaned up, perhaps even sanctified. This presents a more saintly image. We know there had to be hardships, yet all we see is the saint breezing through them so easily that they need not be mentioned. What an impressive saint! What an ideal legend to propagate to raise funds as well as spread this legend of Cabrini from visitors to others, so that they will be aware of her, and perhaps, her order and the Cabrini Missionary Foundation.



Figure 12. Altar of Cabrini Shrine, New York, NY

The big-ticket item in the chapel, however, is the body. It is more prominent than the statue of Jesus and crucifix behind it, again emphasizing Cabrini over Jesus. When I first saw the body, I, like many visitors to the shrine, thought it was the actual body of the saint. I

remembered hearing somewhere along in my thirteen years of Catholic education as well as reading a children's book of saints I treasured as a child that saints don't decompose. I was still suspicious, because it didn't look right – she didn't have enough lines on her face to be 67, she didn't seem to have eyelashes (but I wasn't sure if incorrupt bodies necessarily had to have hair), and she sure didn't look like my friend's grandmother did in her coffin at the wake I had attended.

The summer before I was to start my freshman year at Cabrini High New Orleans, I received a mailing of information for incoming students. Within that mailing was a green piece of paper with facts to memorize about Mother Cabrini's life on which Cabrini freshman would be tested during the fall – facts like her birthday and birthplace, the number of missions she opened around the world, and where she was buried. The fact sheet said that her body was located in New York City. This was repeated throughout theology classes, retreats, and the like at Cabrini High. I went through my high school years believing that Mother Cabrini's body was located in a shrine in New York City. No one at the school ever offered more information than that. Cabrini High students knew that her body was in the shrine there in glass. No one ever questioned - that I can remember - why her body hadn't decayed. I, and other Cabrini students I graduated with whom I have talked to, all remember not questioning it because we were all under the assumption from grammar school, books about saints, and the like, that saints' bodies often did not decompose. None of us remembers explicitly being told this at Cabrini High. Since most of us went to Catholic grammar school and/or Sunday Catechism classes, this was something we had accepted since a young age and felt no reason to question as high school students.

It wasn't until I saw the odd looking body in the shrine that I questioned this. I knew that body didn't look like corpses I'd seen at wakes. It looked...funny. Something about the eyes and lips looked off and unreal. The skin seemed too thick. It just didn't "feel" right. It wasn't until I was an undergraduate that I found out – via internet searches – that the body wasn't her body. It was a wax body figure, meaning it was a wax head and hands with her torso somehow inside of the body figure underneath the habit in which it was dressed. I remember being so upset that someone would do that to *my* saint. I was similarly incensed years later when doing research for this project and coming across her wishes that she be buried in West Park, New York. Washington Heights is quite a ways from West Park, and she hadn't stayed buried at all. She had been diced up and sent all over – with a large portion of the remains in this body figure at the shrine.

In 2009, I flat-out asked one of the sisters at the shrine about the body figure. She more or less blew off my concerns, telling me, "Oh, that's just something the Church used to do." In 2012, I noticed a sign on the altar to the side of the body that explained that the body was a simulated figure that housed her relics. Either the sign wasn't there in the past or I had somehow missed it. In all the times I spent at the shrine, I never heard a sister or volunteer try to pass the body off as "real" when asked about it. The party line was simply to say something along the lines of "The head and the hands are wax. Her head is in Rome." No one claimed Mother Cabrini's body to be incorrupt or that what was housed in the glass coffin on the altar was indeed her body. But if one missed the sign and did not ask, that was certainly the impression one would get.

After getting over the fact that the body wasn't "real," I was able to see that for many, it *was* "real." For people who came to ask for help with immigration concerns, help graduating

college, or to seek comfort, it didn't matter whether or not the body was incorrupt or even a whole body at all. What I'd come to find out that mattered would be the fact that she represented family (mostly female family members) and help.

The shrine is attached to Mother Cabrini High School, which was started in 1899 by Mother Cabrini as a residential school for girls on 190th and Ft Washington (“History of Washington Heights”) and operated as a high school for girls until closing in 2015 due to lack of funding. During its final years, the majority of students at the high school were girls from the neighborhood who attended on need-based scholarships; the order could simply no longer afford to keep the school open without enough students whose families could pay tuition. Washington Heights is now mainly a Hispanic neighborhood with many residents from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. These immigrants have co-opted – or adopted, depending on how one views it – Mother Cabrini. The writing on most of the ex-votos left at her shrine is in Spanish and the majority of the visitors to the shrine were of Hispanic descent. The volunteer in the shrine's gift shop is bilingual.



Figure 13. Bilingual Sign for Gift Shop, Cabrini Shrine, New York City, NY



Figure 14. Ex-Voto with Spanish Writing at Cabrini Shrine, New York City, NY

The ex-votos are housed in a museum-like room with glass walls in the back of the chapel. The room remains locked. When I observed in 2012, Sr. Maria Loretta, a sister from Italy who had lived and worked at the order's missions in Nicaragua for years and is therefore fluent in Spanish, had taken over at the shrine. She accompanied visitors to the shrine and offered information about Mother Cabrini's life. She would ask them if they'd like to see the museum at the back of the chapel. She'd then unlock the doors to the glass room, and watch as visitors read through the ex-votos encased in glass display cases as well as viewing more of the belongings of Mother Cabrini that would not fit in the hall near the shrine's bookstore. In previous visits before Sr. Maria Loretta's assignment at the shrine, I had seen visitors enter and leave on their own, with little explanation about Cabrini's life and work and no access to the back room without request. Any information they received about Cabrini they would get if they exited or entered through the gift store and engaged a volunteer worker in discussion.

I came to see Sr. Maria Loretta as a part of the shrine that had been missing in my previous visits. She was like a part of the museum and shrine itself – a small, tough but sweet, generous religious sister who had come from Italy to work in the New World; she was also like the student who dressed as Mother Cabrini in the New Orleans bedroom during Open House. Watching her show a young Dominican woman and two young Dominican men who had heard there was a saint who could help with immigration concerns around the museum and talk of Mother Cabrini’s life, I realized she was the presence I felt was missing from the shrine housing Mother Cabrini’s body. The body figure in the glass coffin may not be a “real” body of an Italian sister who came to work in the New World who had a reputation for being demanding and giving, but that person was in the shrine now – and that person was Sister Maria Loretta. She brought Mother Cabrini’s story to life; she was a walking biography of Mother Cabrini and the shrine, able to fill in blanks left by the mural and museum items. She watched visitors like a hawk, following them around, making sure they didn’t get too close to the coffin (a big change since my last visit in 2009 – at which time I observed several Hispanics kneeling right next to and often touching the coffin, leaving behind smear marks on the glass) as well as providing answers to questions one might have about Mother Cabrini before one even got the chance to ask. She was intimidating at first, until one could see that she wasn’t just there to prevent smudges on the coffin’s glass panels or make sure no one stole anything, but because she really wanted people to act respectfully in the shrine and also for them to know Mother Cabrini’s story beyond what could be pieced together from the mural and the museum.

Another big change since 2009 was the hiring of Patricia as the director of the gift shop. Patricia ordered top quality items for the gift store that had previously been unavailable. Items had been overpriced and somewhat outdated (made years before but had not sold) when I had

previously visited. Patricia ordered new items that had “neat” qualities to them – including a small golden globe with Mother Cabrini’s face on it. I had to buy this item as soon as I saw it – although made to represent Mother Cabrini’s world travels and her order’s presence all over the globe, the idea of a geographer who studied Cabrini shrines having a globe with the saint’s face on it made it a must-buy item. Patricia had ordered new Cabrini statues with more pleasant faces than the older ones; as well as new magnets and other items. She had also included items that were not Cabrini-centric but were Catholic gifts for children, godchildren, and candidates for the sacraments such as First Communion, Confirmation, Baptism, and Marriage. Small cards with meanings of names and a bible verse are sold; as are high quality rosaries and medals. Prayer cards not only with Cabrini on them but with other popular saints as well are available. Incense is sold as are third-class relics in different forms. Some are medals, some are prayer cards, and some are made by volunteers (and some were made by me) by taking a quarter-sized picture of Mother Cabrini on paper, a small black strip of fabric that is a second class relic (a shred of clothing worn by Cabrini), two sheets of plastic and sewing these all together with colorful thread and affixing a ribbon of the same color a top it so it might hang off of something. On slow days, Sr. Maria Loretta put me to work making these relics by myself or with another volunteer. Another popular item sold in the gift store is holy water.



Figure 15. Relics made by the author at Cabrini Shrine in 2012, New York City, NY

Holy Water

Day after day, I noticed that the most popular item bought in the gift store was holy water. At least three times per day, women – I never saw men come get holy water – came to get it. A large metal basin-like dispenser marked with a cross sits centered against the back wall of the gift shop. Some would bring their own containers but many used the small, plastic semi-transparent containers that I estimated contain about 6 ounces that are available in the gift store. Holy water containers are sold at the gift store for \$1.00. All of the women I observed coming in to for holy water were Hispanic; all of them spoke Spanish with the bilingual staff or volunteers. Based on observations when Spanish-speaking volunteers and staff were not in when women came to get holy water, it often appeared that the women knew little to no English, communicating on by pointing or gesturing or simply saying “holy water” but not engaging in any other conversation with monolingual volunteers. These women were generally in and out of the gift store quickly. I never saw a woman who got holy water also go into the chapel. I never saw them buy anything in addition to holy water. It was several different women who came to get holy water, not the same ones over and over again. The speed with which they moved in and out of the gift store made it difficult to interview them. By the time I could put down the incense I was helping to separate and bag or small relics I was making, they were gone. “What do you think they use the holy water for?” I asked one of the volunteers.

“I don’t know,” she replied. “But we sell a lot of the containers.” Then the topic of conversation quickly changed. The holy water remains a mystery. Why weren’t men getting it, only women? Why were these women in and out so quickly? Why did it seem to be more recent immigrants (who spoke little or no English) who mainly came to get the holy water? Why did it

seem to be something of little concern to the staff at the shrine? Carol Weiss found that one of the main materials used by female Dominican Voodoo healers in folk healing Northern Manhattan is holy water (1992). There is even a botánica in Washington Heights named Bótanica Cabrini; it is located on West 207th Street near Vermylea Avenue, about 1.4 miles or about a 30 minute walk from the Cabrini shrine. There are botánicas closer to the shrine; the botánica named after Cabrini seems relatively far away from the shrine compared to the others. Candles and other necessary items for Voodoo/Santeria are also available at the closest grocery store to the shrine. Cabrini does not represent any of the orishas or dieties, known as the “21 divisiones” in the Dominican version of Voodoo; but holy water from Catholic churches and shrines are used in Afro-Caribbean syncretic religious rituals. Tweed writes of that at the shrine of Our Lady of Charity in Miami, holy water is available as it is in most Catholic churches. However, he writes, “because Cubans are involved” the presence and availability of the holy water, used in many rituals, “the situation at the shrine is filled with ambiguity and tension” (1997: 50). The shrine’s staff is aware that people may be getting the holy water to use in Sanetria rituals “but they usually oblige the pilgrims’ requests to fill their bottles, not always able to tell why visitors want the holy water or how they might use it” (Ibid). This is the same situation I encountered at the Cabrini shrine. At times, there seemed to be tension between volunteers and women who came seeking holy water in the silence as they filled their containers. Their quick departures only added to this tension. The heavy, silent apprehension that filled the room made clear a pact between the women who worked in the shrine and the women who came for holy water – we won’t ask and you won’t tell us what purpose the holy water serves. No one was asking anything; no one was offering up any information. I felt locked in silence, unable to catch up to one of the women to ask them outside of the confines of the shrine why they came for

holy water. Even if I had managed to catch up to them as they left the shrine, I was unsure if I should ask the questions that the shrine's staff was not asking. As I watched the women come for and depart with the holy water from my position near the shrine volunteers and workers, I felt that I had already entered the pact to not speak aloud about the holy water.

Sacred Space, Volunteers, and Visitors

With ethnography as one of my main methodological tools, I used interviews to learn more about the experiential at the shrine. The interviewees' stories about these places are important because, as geographer Belden Lane writes, "above all else, sacred place is 'storied place.' Particular locales come to be recognized as sacred because of stories that are told about them" (Lane 2001: 15). Lane furthermore writes that sacred space can be "ordinary place" that is "ritually made extraordinary," can be "tread upon without being entered," and that is both "centripetal and centrifugal" as well as "local and universal." I found that among the volunteers, the shrine was associated with absent or unavailable family or family members. Geographer Lily Kong interviewed women and men at sacred spaces in Hong Kong and looked at the different responses from the two sexes. She found that the places were sacred to women not because of connections to religious cosmos, miracles, or important religious figures, but rather because these places allowed for connections to the past, such as reminders of far away or deceased loved ones. Kong offers her fellow geographers a new conceptualization of sacred space – as a place where people, mainly women, connect with the past (Kong 1999). This conceptualization of sacred space implies that sacred space is therefore also gendered space. Similar to Kong's findings, all of the volunteers at the Cabrini shrine are women and the majority of visitors to the

shrine are women; added to the fact that a women's religious order owns and operates the shrine - with Sr. Maria Loretta at the helm – the shrine is definitely a gendered space. I argue that it is further gendered because unlike most Catholic churches where Jesus (in the form of a crucifix, statue, stained-glass window or the like) is the central figure the eye is drawn to, Mother Cabrini's body is the dominant visual feature of the shrine.

Volunteers provide much of the workforce at the shrine; they mainly work in the bookstore, making relics, manning the cash register, replenishing the shelves, and answering questions should Sr. Maria Loretta be unavailable. All of the volunteers in the summer of 2012 were retired women. One I will call Denise. Denise is a white practicing Catholic who lived all over the country as her husband was relocated often for work. When her husband retired, the couple decided to move to New York to be close to their grandchildren. They moved into the same apartment complex as her son and daughter-in-law. Looking for ways to fill her days while her grandchildren were in school or camp in the summer, Denise started volunteering at the shrine. She had started attending church at the shrine on Sundays shortly after they moved to New York due to its proximity to her apartment. She lamented to me how she wished her children and grandchildren would return and become Catholic. Her son and his wife had become Unitarian Universalists and she wished they'd come back to the Church and bring their children with them. She had raised her children Catholic. It became clear to me that for Denise, family and the Church were intrinsically tied. Part of raising children, to Denise, was bringing them up in Catholicism. The Church had been a part of her family when her children were younger. Now she had two families – her children and grandchildren on one hand, and the Church on the other. She occupies herself by volunteering at the shrine when her biological family is unavailable; the shrine and the usual people in it are her fictive family when her biological family isn't around.

When questioned about her ties to Mother Cabrini or the sisters, she brought the conversation back around to explaining that she volunteered at the shrine to fill her days when her children and grandchildren didn't need her help. It was something to do. Denise did not express any particular devotion to Mother Cabrini, any experience with the sisters outside of knowing the ones that worked at the shrine or school, or any miracle or favor granted by Mother Cabrini. Mother Cabrini's shrine's proximity to her home and her desire for something to fill her days had brought Denise to the decision to volunteer there. For her, shrine was family in the absence of family.

Another volunteer I often came into contact with was Lupe, a woman from Nicaragua who had volunteered at the shrine since her husband died. She spoke little English. It was seldom that she spoke at all. She showed me how to make the relics out of paper, fabric, plastic, ribbon, and thread. Even though she was quiet, she always had a welcoming smile on her face. If Sr. Maria Loretta was busy, eating lunch, or out on an errand, Lupe would be called upon to speak to Spanish-language visitors with questions or help them shop in the bookstore. Aside from that, she was very quiet. When the shrine was not busy, she would ask Sr. Maria Loretta if she could pray in the shrine. She'd quietly go off in the shrine, sit in one of the first few pews, and say the rosary. When I asked her why she volunteered at the shrine, she told me she had volunteered there since her husband died. Although Lupe was an immigrant, she never mentioned Mother Cabrini's status as Patroness of Immigrants or that Mother Cabrini had helped her with an immigration-related request. Like Denise, Lupe seemed to be looking for family at the shrine. Sitting in the front rows with her rosary, it occurred to me that Lupe probably had more to say to Mother Cabrini, Mary, Jesus, or God than to any of us in gift store. The family

she was engaging with seemed to be in the shrine itself, whereas Denise spent most of her time in the gift store.

Previously, in 2009, I spent the day in the gift shop with a volunteer named Caridad, a woman born in New York to parents from Curaçao. I asked her how she had come to volunteer in the shrine and what the shrine meant to her. She told me that she had grown up in the area. Her mother had become ill in recent years and could no longer make it “down the hill” to the local parish church. The shrine is located atop a hill that runs between 190th Street and Bennett Avenue. The parish church, St. Elizabeth’s, is located on Wadsworth Avenue and 186th Street near the bottom of the hill, and requires people walking from the immediate area around the shrine to walk down a hill with a staircase of over 100 steps built into it, which tired me out as a then-29 year-old in good health who would run a couple of miles in hilly Fort Tryon Park next to the shrine after closing with little problem. Elderly people, people with limited ranges of motion, people who simply don’t want to make the trek up or down the hill (including myself after doing it just one time) and those who live at the top of the hill often attend mass at the shrine. Masses are said at the shrine on Sundays at 9:00 am and 11:00 am by a priest from St. Elizabeth’s Parish.

Caridad took her mother to mass there every weekend. Her mother even had a stroke during mass at the shrine one Sunday. She also spoke of good times she had bringing her mother to mass and praying with her at the shrine. Although Caridad came from a family of immigrants, she did not mention Mother Cabrini as Patroness of Immigrants or the like. Her stories about the shrine all circled back to her mother. For Caridad, like Lupe and Denise, the shrine was a way to engage with family members made unavailable by death or other circumstances. By the time I returned in 2012, Caridad had parlayed her volunteerism in the shrine into a part-time job working in the office of the shrine, where she took care of paperwork and I rarely saw her.

Visitors to the shrine vary from day to day; on days in August when the temperatures reach into the 90s, there may only be ten or so visitors per day. On nicer summer days, there could be up to fifty. Most of the visitors I observed were women. Some were women pushing strollers who I surmised were on their way to or from neighboring Ft. Tryon Park had come looking for a bathroom; Sr. Maria Loretta used their curiosity about what was in the shrine as a chance to explain Mother Cabrini's story to them. In fact, so many visitors came primarily for the bathroom, that on my last day at the shrine in August 2012, Sr. Maria Loretta decided to close the shrine when the plumbing broke and the bathrooms were unusable. "That's what most people come for anyway," she explained to me as she posted a sign detailing the closure on the entrance to the shrine.

A very small number of visitors admitted to me that they came because they heard there was a dead body inside and wanted to see it. Interestingly, all of them were men. A young man in his late 20s was visiting a relative who lived nearby and who told him about the shrine with the body in it. "I'm not Catholic," he told me. "But my uncle told me about a saint's body in here and I was like 'no way.' I had to come see that. It's pretty cool." One afternoon, a group of three black teenaged boys, one of whom was carrying a basketball, came into the shrine gift store. Denise and I were working. Sr. Maria Loretta was out to lunch. Considering that the vast majority of the visitors were women and few were unaccompanied teenagers, and that they had the basketball with them, they stuck out as they walked into the gift store. Before they entered, I heard one of them say "they said they have a body in here – a dead body."

These people have come to see the macabre; they've come to see death. Philip R. Stone calls this phenomenon "dark tourism" and writes that sites of dark tourism, while they have long existed, have become ubiquitous on the modern landscape. He writes that western society's

“apparent contemporary fascination with death, real or fictional, media inspired or otherwise,” is the force behind the pervasiveness of dark tourism and its increase over the last century (Stone 2006: 147). Stone sets out seven shades of a dark tourism “spectrum” ranging from the lightest at number one – “dark fun factories” such as the family-friendly London Dungeon – and the darkest at number seven – genocide camps (Ibid 152-157). In the middle of this spectrum at number four, he includes “dark resting places,” or tourism sites that involve a grave or cemetery (Ibid 155). Most of these places, he writes, exist to promote conservation of architecture through maintaining graves, mausoleums, and the like. I argue that Cabrini’s shrine exists to propagate her order and the Catholic Church and to preserve both as well. While he does not address such places where a body or body-figure might be on display, I suggest that this might deepen the “darkness” of such a place, making it an even more attractive destination for someone seeking the darker shades of dark tourism. For some visitors to the shrine, it’s not religiosity or a desire to connect to another time but an interest in the macabre that brings them there. For some, the shrine is a “dark tourism” site where one can see a dead body on display in a glass coffin. That’s what had brought the boys to the shrine that day.

I looked up from the relic I was making. Denise’s eyes were fixed on the door as they walked in. She made a point to tell them hello as they walked by. “I guess I better go with them,” she said and she followed them into the shrine. I heard her explaining much of what Sr. Maria Loretta usually said about Cabrini’s life, but without the offer to see the museum. She reminded them to please be reverent. They exited through the gift store, thanking us. Denise, like me, had seen they were coming for the “freak factor” of the dead body in the other room.

“That was weird,” I said to Denise after she left. I was referring to the fact that it was the first time I’d seen a group of teenaged boys come into the shrine. “Well, I didn’t know if we

were about to get robbed or what,” she said. “But one of them was Catholic, or at least he made the sign of the cross.”

I immediately felt uncomfortable. I had thought Denise had followed them to explain about Mother Cabrini so they wouldn't just oooh and aaah at the dead body and leave with stories about seeing a dead lady. Now I wasn't so sure if she had followed them because they were teenaged boys or black teenaged boys. Several of the shrine's visitors were black Hispanic women. Maybe it was because they were young and male? It was pretty clear to me from hearing their discussion outside why they'd come to the shrine. It was also clear to me they were coming from or going to play basketball and that it's hardly typical for robbers to bring a basketball with them to commit a robbery. I'm still not sure why Denise followed them or what exactly she seemed to be saying, but I was glad she had followed them simply so she could explain more about that body under the altar and who that lady was besides something to go see for the “freak factor.” Tuan also writes that sacred space is “both terrible and fascinating: people both fear it and feel irresistibly drawn to it” (Tuan 1977: 89). What is more terrible – and perhaps fascinating – than literally confronting death in the form of a dead body? For some, the terrible, the dark, and the macabre are reasons to come to this sacred space.

Most women I talked to at the shrine visited for one of two reasons: 1) in connection to a favor (to ask for one or to give thanks because one had been received) or 2) because the shrine reminded them of people connected to the past. Most who came because of a favor came because Mother Cabrini had granted a favor for a friend or family member and they had heard of her help through this friend or family member. Most favors had to do with immigration. Asking for help passing citizenship tests was common. Other favors often had to do with education. A smaller number had to do with illness. Most people asked for favors for themselves, but a few

women asked for favors for their family members. This lines up with Orsi's work at the shrine of St. Jude. Here, too, he found that most who came seeking St. Jude's help were women, many of whom asked for favors for family members and themselves (Orsi 1998: 201-202).

Although Cabrini is the Patroness of Immigrants, she is more well-known among those seeking her help in immigration matters as "alguien que puede ayudar" (a person who can help) in immigration matters. I never heard anyone mention they had come to ask her for help because she was the Patroness of Immigrants. However, some did mention that she would help because she knew and understood their plight as immigrants – "ella fue inmigrante" (she was an immigrant). In fact, Cabrini's notoriety as someone who can help with immigration concerns is so well-known from word of mouth that she receives letters and ex-votos declaring thanks from as far away as the Dominican Republic and South America. Word of mouth has spread from the immigrant community in New York to other continents. What appears to matter is that she has helped others and word of mouth spreading that she can help. Her official title from the Church hierarchy as Patroness of Immigrants seems to have little to do with making her a trusted person who can help with matters related to immigration.

The few people who asked for cures for illness that I talked to never asked for themselves; usually it was for a family member or friend. Sometimes it was an additional request to help with one's own immigration matters, such as "also, please help grandma with her arthritis." It generally was a person's second request they'd mention to me. Another second request would be help with school, particularly helping a child finish college or some sort of training program.

The ex-votos on display in the hall adjoining the gift store and shrine as well as the museum in the back of the chapel generally follow the same line as the requests visitors voiced

to me but in the form of thanksgiving for the receipt of these favors. The ex-votos in the museum pertaining to this were many in number, but most appeared to thank Mother Cabrini for helping people finish some sort of post-secondary schooling. I did not encounter anyone asking for help with school for themselves in summer 2012, but perhaps that is because it was summer. Several photocopied and framed images of diplomas from college or training schools such as cosmetology schools with a thank you to Mother Cabrini written on them are on display. A very small number of ex-votos thank Mother Cabrini for helping ill family members regain their health. It seems that while word of mouth about her help with immigration matters and apparently educational pursuits had spread, asking her help in aiding the sick was either not as successful or not as well known. Many ex-votos also are non-descript: “thank you for a favor received;” it is impossible to know what favor Mother Cabrini granted.

The second reason visitors expressed to me for visiting the shrine had to do with connections to family members. “My mother used to bring me here,” a young woman pushing a stroller told me. “So I bring my daughter here because my mother cannot.” Her mother was deceased. Another woman in her 40s told me she had also gone there with her grandmother and mother, both of whom were deceased. Like Caridad, several women came to the shrine because of time spent there in the past with their relatives, most of which were female and now deceased. For the woman with the stroller, it seemed to be a way of introducing her daughter to her grandmother. I listened quietly as I heard her tell her toddler daughter about going there with her own mommy when she was a child. There was no grandmother’s house for this child to visit; but memories of the grandmother could be visited in the shrine, enabling the little girl to meet her grandmother through these memories. Some came to pray for relatives far away in lands they

had left behind. “I always remember to pray for my family back in the Dominican Republic,” a Dominican woman in her 30s told me.

The Hispanics I observed seemed much more relaxed in the shrine than the whites. Whites tended to sit in the middle to back pews, while Hispanics often sat in the first pew. Whites rarely prayed at the kneelers and railing along the altar and if they did, they did so quickly. Hispanics would stay there for tens of minutes if not nearly an hour. Whites would generally sit or knelt quietly, with heads bowed and hands folded. Hispanics knelt, hands generally also folded, but with heads up towards the altar. Sometimes their eyes would be closed, but sometimes not, and they’d appear to stare at the body, while whites seemed to stare at the floor or their laps.

Before Sr. Maria Loretta arrived and kept visitors from getting too close to the coffin, in 2009, I observed several Hispanics touch it while praying. Similarly, I witnessed the end of a meeting of incoming freshman from the adjoined high school in the chapel in 2009. After the meeting ended, the girls – all of whom were Hispanic - rushed to the altar to take pictures *with - not of -* the glass coffin. They got down on the floor of the altar with it, crouched down to eye level with the body, or sat next to it while other girls took their pictures with digital cameras or cell phones. I could not even imagine getting close enough to the body to reach out and touch it, let alone actually touch it, that I was startled by how corporeal the girls’ actions were with the body. I was also startled that none of them seemed the least bit scared of the dead body, which is the impression I got from some of the more stand-offish white visitors. These young Hispanic girls were so comfortable with the body. It would take me four more years to work up the nerve to get that close to a saint’s body figure, and even then, it wouldn’t be Mother Cabrini’s body to which I’d dare to be so close.

I talked to Patricia, who works part-time managing the bookstore as well as part-time as a Spanish instructor at a local college, about the different ways Hispanics and whites acted around the body. I had long thought that the body and the shrine “translate” better to Mediterranean and Latin American Catholicism. White American Catholics, even if they were the descendants of Italians or others who practiced Mediterranean Catholicism, were so far removed from that brand of Catholicism now. The American Catholic Church, at the time of Mother Cabrini’s life and still today, has been highly influenced by Irish Catholicism. By 1920, two-thirds of American bishops were Irish; this number was even greater in the northeast, where up to three-quarters of the bishops were Irish (Barrett 2012: 28-30). Half of all U.S. priests in the 1960s and 1970s were Irish and as recently as 2000, four out of ten U.S. priests claimed Irish ancestry (Rigert 2008: 30). While there is no shortage of body figures of saints on display in countries along the Mediterranean such as France, Italy, and Spain, no body figures of saints are on display in glass or see-through containers in Ireland or Northern Ireland. In fact, the only large body parts of saints on display in glass cases are those of St. Valentine (his skull) in Dublin, which was given to a Carmelite priest who had received it as a gift from Pope Gregory XVI in 1835, and the head of Saint Oliver Plunkett in Droedgha, Ireland. Plunkett was hanged, drawn, and quartered by Henry VIII of England. His head was put on display here after his canonization in 1975. Most of the other first class relics in Ireland are small bone fragments on display or larger body parts that are in opaque boxes (“The Catholic Travel Guide – Ireland”). Viewing death, it seems, is not part of the Irish Catholic tradition as it is for Mediterranean Catholics. Since Irish have long dominated the clergy of the American Catholic Church –as well as much of the laity – American Catholicism has a distinctively Irish flavor to it. Irish Catholicism is devoid of body figures, but I found a plethora of them when I visited Italy. Therefore, it makes sense that Hispanic

Catholics would not be as stand-offish as white American Catholics in front of Mother Cabrini's body figure, since Hispanic or Latin American Catholicism is deeply rooted in Mediterranean Catholicism brought by the Spanish to the New World, which is rooted in 17th century "Baroque emphasis on symbol, ritual, celebration, & on Christian exuberance" (Badillo 2006: iv).

Hispanics do not shy away from the symbol of the dead Cabrini (the body figure), the ritual of touching and approaching the coffin, the corporeal celebration and show of their presence. What could be a more "exuberant" experience than praying in front of a saint's body? Therefore, Hispanics engaged with the body in a way that was much more corporeal. "We are always touching everybody," Patricia said. "We get close to you when we talk. Americans will step away when you get close to them. They have personal space. Latins don't have personal space." Patricia is from Colombia. A friend told her about seeking Mother Cabrini's help with the citizenship test and she began coming to the chapel regularly after passing it. She eventually got the job overseeing the bookstore. Patricia suggested that the way Hispanics interacted with the body was how they act with people. Mother Cabrini was after all, "a person who could help" with immigration and other concerns. They interacted with Cabrini in the ways they'd interact with other people, as Patricia described. In American Catholicism, where reverence is important, and American culture that entails personal space boundaries, white Americans interactions with the body also make sense.

Women who visited the shrine mainly had two main reasons for visiting – to ask a favor, usually pertaining to immigration but sometimes also to education and health or to engage with the memories of a deceased or unavailable female family member. For Patricia and Caridad, the reasons that brought them to the shrine also led them to employment there. Inside of the shrine, Hispanics and whites behaved differently. These behaviors can be placed in the larger context of

cultural differences regarding personal space and differing “flavors” of Catholicism in Latin America and the United States.

Observing in the shrine, one can be in Latin America – watching as a woman, ignoring the ropes warning not to get too close to the coffin, slips flowers down on the ground next to it. She kneels behind the rope, next to the casket, touching its corner with one hand, eyes closed, and lips moving in prayer. One can also be in the United States when one turns back around, observing the white woman in the back row kneeling on a kneeler with her head lowered in prayer.

Secrets that Aren't Secret

Just when I started to think I knew everything about the shrine and the body that one could, I found out I really had no clue about some things. As I was discussing mass schedules with Sister Maria Loretta and later, Denise, both made it known that the when the priests from St. Elizabeth's Parish came to say mass at the shrine twice on Sundays, they took money collected in the collection baskets during mass back down the hill with them to their parish. The sisters and the shrine saw none of that money and from what I saw of the baskets as they were passed around during mass, there was a good deal of money in them.

“Most people don't know that,” Denise lamented. “They think they're giving to the shrine and to the sisters but they're not.”

In fact, the sisters had previously even considered having to close the shrine. Although the shrine still struggles, Patricia's success at the gift store had brought in more revenue; Sr. Maria Loretta's explanations and mini-tours also seemed to help word of mouth spread and more

visitors come in than before she was assigned to work at the shrine. More visitors mean more people who might make donations or purchase items from the bookstore. Patricia also came up with the idea of selling days where a candle would be lit for one special intention. For the suggested donation of \$10, one can pay for their intention to sit next to the candle all day in the shrine. This idea has been a success as well.

One Sunday, my dad, husband, and I all attended mass together. I watched in a state of almost horror as my dad placed a \$100 bill in the collection basket and I was helpless to stop him. I wanted to say something or grab the bill out of the basket. I knew he thought he was giving it to the shrine or at least to the sisters. My parents had stopped giving their usual monthly donation or any money at all to their local parish years ago in the wake of the sex scandal. "I only give my money to the nuns," my mother said when she told me about this decision; I hardly believed he intended for that money to go to the local parish. I couldn't very well grab the money out of the collection basket in a packed mass (I counted around 100 attendees that Sunday) – who knows if someone would try to stop me or even try to have me arrested. I would have difficulty having a conversation with my dad about where the money went in the middle of the offering song and by the time I explained it, the basket would be rows away and too late for him to go retrieve his money without someone thinking he was stealing.

After mass, my dad remarked about how the priest liked Mother Cabrini, as he had mentioned her in his homily. I then told him about the collection money going to the local parish and not the shrine or sisters. My dad was outraged. He had indeed intended that \$100 for the sisters and the shrine. Upset that the priests walked away with the money collected during mass at the shrine, my dad made another \$100 donation, this time to the shrine, and he and my mom

started sending monthly donations to the shrine, in support of the sisters and as well as in protest of where Sunday's collection monies ended up.

How much money do the sisters lose that is intended for the shrine but goes back down the hill to the parish, part of which ultimately goes to the Church hierarchy in Rome? How much money intended for women religious ends up in the hands of the male hierarchy and local priests? It's impossible to say. But it's enough that it's a source of conflict for the sisters and volunteers, who grieve the loss of that money by hoping innovative petition sales and neat items in the gift shop will fund the shrine in that money's absence.

The sisters are in a spot where they cannot outwardly complain about the collection money going to the parish. The local parish pastor has jurisdiction over all Catholic churches and chapels within his parish's boundaries. For example, if one wants to get married at the Cabrini shrine chapel, one has to ask the local parish priest to issue a dispensation to allow the wedding to occur in the chapel rather than the parish church ("New Advent – Dispensation"). He makes final decisions about the shrine's chapel. He could decide not only that no priest from his parish would say mass at the shrine, but that mass could not be said at all in the shrine, leaving those who cannot make it down the hill without a place to go to mass. He could decide that no religious services at all be held in the chapel. He could also decide that the Eucharist could not be on display in the chapel. With the tabernacle light off and no masses or religious services in the chapel, is it really even still a chapel? Would it lose some of its prestige? Would people eventually forget about the shrine if no one ever attended mass there? The sisters don't dare risk complaining or even mentioning the collection basket issue for fear it may be seen as complaining and that they will be hit with retribution from the parish priest or others in the archdiocese or hierarchy.

The second secret I uncovered in summer 2012 was that of the original chapel that held Cabrini's body. In the years between her disinterment and construction of the shrine in 1957, her body figure was housed in a considerably smaller, more traditional chapel within the school halls. It is now the school's library. Although this is no secret to girls who attend the school and those who work there, most visitors to the shrine do not see the old chapel, mainly due to the fact that it is the school library. It's located within the school complex and when the school was open, it would not only be disruptive to have visitors coming in and out of the library and halls during school hours, but it would also pose a security threat with unknown persons gaining easy access into the school.

I spent an entire afternoon in the old chapel, marveling at the large stone engraved with Cabrini's name indicating her remains were located on what was the altar. The stone stood there unassumingly, with a bookcase partially touching it. It would hardly have been noticeable if it was not so much lighter in color and larger in size than the other pieces of the floor. Ornate stained glass windows decorated both sides of the library. It was much smaller than the newer chapel, but seemed much more in line design-wise with what churches and chapels would have looked like when Mother Cabrini was alive. Framed newspaper articles from the 1950s and 1940s told of visitors to the shrine, masses said at the shrine, and showed students in the shrine. Most of the students had Irish names, a fact that wasn't lost on me since I had read that many of the first women to join Cabrini's order had been of Irish descent. I also noted that in six or seven decades, the school had gone from a student body full of Irish surnames to one of mostly Hispanic surnames. Pictures of women in the shrine with their heads covered by hats and small veils, as well as high school girls in beanies and sisters in the completely covering habit laid bare a pre-Vatican II history that was absent in the modern, amphitheater-like new shrine. It was if

pre-Vatican II Catholicism was being hidden here. The only telltale sign of it in the new chapel was perhaps the body itself.

Sr. Maria Loretta let me into the library after I had asked a question about a picture on the wall of the hall connecting the bathrooms and the shrine. It was a picture of Mother Cabrini's body. It wasn't in the new chapel. I asked her if it was the old chapel. "No, that's the other body in Rome" she answered. "Do you want to see the old chapel? It's the library now."

Discussion quickly turned to the old chapel and I didn't ask any questions about the other body in Rome. I remembered Sr. Catherine Garry, past principal of Cabrini High New Orleans, when I interviewed her while she was visiting New Orleans, responding to a question about a similar picture in Mother Cabrini's bedroom the same way. I asked if a picture that looked much like the one in New York I had asked Sr. Maria Loretta about was taken in the old chapel. "No, that's Rome," she said and continued discussing other pictures in the room. I wasn't sure then if she meant that there was another body in Rome or that the body had been in Rome for Cabrini's canonization or some other official reason. But in New York, I put it together. It wasn't just Mother Cabrini's head and heart that were in Rome. There was another body....and no one seemed to want to talk about it without prodding. It wasn't until months later after countless hours of internet searches over the past few months that I eventually resorted to googling in Italian with the help of my knowledge of another romance language and an Italian-English dictionary, that I would even find the location of the body beyond just "Rome." It was easy to find that Mother Cabrini's heart was located at the order's motherhouse in Rome. It was harder to find that the other body was located there as well.

I got the impression that while it was kosher to say that her heart and head were in Rome, discussion of the other body was not so welcome. The sisters seemed completely uninterested in

engaging in conversation about it. I loved spending time in the library of Mother Cabrini High School in New York and seeing what was the old chapel, but I wondered if it was a diversionary tactic to avoid discussion the other body. Several sisters, including the provincial director and Mother Cabrini's biographer, knew of my project because I had corresponded with them or spoken to them face to face. They knew the body played a pivotal part in my research in New York, yet none of them offered this information about the other body. My friends and I were told at Cabrini High that Mother Cabrini's body was in New York. No one ever mentioned another body, although I suppose that would be hard to explain to high school students. Apparently it's hard to explain to a PhD student. Maybe it's hard to explain to anyone. Perhaps one body figure can be explained in the twenty-first century as "something the church used to do" but two body figures? That becomes much more difficult to explain away. I also wonder if the sisters at the New York shrine and sisters in the U.S. don't mention the body in Rome because it may somehow lessen the importance of the American body. A body in Rome certainly seems more official and saintly than one in Washington Heights, yet how could the body of the Patroness of Immigrants and first American-citizen to be canonized be anywhere else besides New York City?

Women, Agency, and Authorship

The Cabrini shrine is a gendered space; it is owned, run, and operated by women and most of those who visit it are women. This, then, brings us to the concept of gendered space. "Places are made," according to Linda McDowell, "through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial" (McDowell 1999:

4). We can see power relations between the sexes in gendered spaces, which according to Daphne Spain, “separate women from knowledge used by men to produce and reproduce power and privilege” (Spain 1992: 3); conversely, it can be argued that women’s separate spaces are arenas where women can share their knowledge and power. For example, sociologist Fatima Mernissi makes a compelling argument in her memoir *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1994), that while the women of her family were relegated to the home and disallowed from being full participants in public life, the domestic harem was also a space where her mother, grandmother, aunts, and other female relatives could exercise female power and knowledge in male-dominated Morocco.

It is true that the local parish priest has jurisdiction over the shrine owned by the sisters, ran by the sisters, staffed by women employees and volunteers, and mostly visited by women. It’s also true that money collected at Sunday masses go to this priest’s parish. However, do not be fooled into thinking the priest is in any way running the show at the shrine. He is free to collect the money from collection baskets; the sisters and workers will find other ways to support the shrine and are doing so. He is barely needed at all; only for masses and blessing oil and holy water. For everything else, women can do and are doing them at the shrine for themselves. The shrine is a center of female power within a patriarchal Catholic Church.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the availability of educational, reproductive, and career opportunities for women in secular society in the second half of the 21st century altered the roles of women in the American Catholic Church. Prior to Vatican II and the 1960s, Catholic women had two Church-endorsed choices: become religious sisters/nuns or get married and have children. The changes mandated by the council as well as the broadening of opportunities for women in American society in the second half of the 20th century challenged

these two traditional Catholic women's life choices. However, prior to and after Vatican II, women - lay as well as sisters/nuns - challenged Church patriarchal power by asserting power within Catholic devotional culture.

According to sociologist Helen Rose Ebaugh, "women maximize resources within patriarchal systems through various types of strategies" (Ebaugh 1993: 400). One such strategy was participation in devotional Catholicism. Official positions and realms of power within the Church were and are reserved for men. This allows women with the ability to create and embrace "unofficial" realms of power through devotional Catholicism, such as the cult of the saints.

Devotional Catholicism is gendered; it is a form of Catholicism more closely associated with the female. For example, shrines are gendered spaces where mostly women can be found. Although Tweed recounts seeing many men in the Shrine of Our Lady of Charity, he acknowledges that shrines elsewhere are mostly populated with women and that the same number of men cannot be found at shrines elsewhere; he chalks this up to this particular shrine's association with nationalism (Tweed 60-63). As I have stated before, most of the visitors at the Cabrini shrine are female. The fact that devotional Catholicism can be practiced outside of a Church and in the private sphere also makes it gendered. If the domestic sphere is the female sphere, then devotional Catholicism is also female in this regard, as the rosary was said in the home and women were charged with the upkeep of home altars in Pre-Vatican II America (Keller and Reuher 2006: 149). While the Christian trinity offers no female member, there is a pantheon of female saints. Female saints and Madonnas often "evoked absent relatives....especially absent women" (Orsi 2005: 66). For immigrants who had left their mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and other female relatives behind when they came to America,

these saints were stand-ins; at the Cabrini shrine, I found that Mother Cabrini's offered to many a connection to memories of deceased or far away female family members.

Catholic Americans educated in Catholic schools learned of the saints from the women religious who staffed the schools. While women religious do not hold positions of power within the ordained Church hierarchy, they did and still do have power within devotional Catholicism. When it comes to this form of popular Catholicism, "Catholic priests, sisters, and brothers have rarely experienced any questioning of their authority" over devotional practices (McNamara 1992:9). In what other part or form of Catholicism would sisters be considered to have the same authority as priests and brothers? The answer is none. Women religious play an integral part in the continued existence of the cult of the saints; the propagation of Cabrini's cult is essentially maintained through her order's Mission Foundation, schools, missions, and shrines.

Vatican II's Decree on Religious Life called upon religious orders to have greater contact with lay institutions and organizations, encouraged sisters to live together in smaller groups and in apartments rather than convents, called for job positions to be based on personal desires, and encouraged social service occupations outside of the traditional fields of teaching and nursing (Norr and Schweickert 1976: 121). Vatican II also opened up opportunities for women religious within the Church by increasing the autonomy of religious orders (Wallace 1988: 24). It also allowed sisters/nuns not just to shed their habits for modest clothing but also for them to be better educated, work in fields of their choosing, and expand their work outside of schools and hospitals. Yet, as the opportunities for women religious expanded out of their traditional realms, the numbers of women religious diminished. They were no longer relegated to schools and hospitals, yet their realm seemed to disappear rather than broaden due to fewer women choosing religious life.

At the same time, women in the United States were agitating for greater inclusion in higher education and the labor market. This, along with the availability of the prescription birth control pill to prevent pregnancy in 1960, meant that American women – including Catholics – had more choices for how they would live their lives rather than just as wife or religious sister/nun. Although artificial birth control is prohibited by the Catholic Church, a 2009 Guttmacher Institute study concluded that 98% of Catholic women aged 19-35 have used artificial birth control (Guttmacher Institute); therefore, I argue it is necessary to include the advent of availability of the birth control pill as one of the societal changes impacting Catholic women and their choices relating to religious life and careers. Women could now escape the hard work, health problems, and likely poverty incurred by having several children without entering a chaste religious order. Within the Church, the laity – male and female -, were given more opportunities to participate by becoming Eucharistic ministers, lectors, parish administrators, directors of Catholic charities, and the like (Wallace 1988: 24). From the 1960s on, the new opportunities women could choose to take advantage of affected religious orders' sizes. Catholic women became a greater part of the labor force, received college educations, and participated in the Women's Movement and had choices of service organizations such as the Peace Corps if they wanted to serve their fellow humans. The number of Catholic women religious shrunk by 40% in the years between 1966 and 1981 (Ibid, 27-28).

This left Catholic women “placeless,” or without a seemingly viable and thriving place for women within the Church structure, since the realm of religious sisters/nuns – schools and hospitals – were no longer occupied mostly or perhaps even at all – by women religious. Pre-Vatican II, Catholic women had one specific “place” within the Church hierarchy, as women religious. Prior to Vatican II, women religious had limited official power, but they still had

power and were powerful in number. Even though Vatican II gave religious orders more autonomy, as these orders declined in size, their relevance in American Catholicism has also somewhat declined. Even with more opportunities for women religious outside of education and health care professions, Catholic women were no longer joining religious orders in significant numbers. As the orders declined, so did their places of power – they no longer taught most of the classes at Catholic schools, offered Catechism classes, or nursed in Catholic hospitals. However, many have managed to maintain their power over devotional Catholicism particular to their order through ownership and oversight of shrines, such as the Cabrini Shrine in New York City, which is owned and operated by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the Shrine of Our Lady of Prompt Succor in New Orleans, which is owned and operated by the Ursulines. The sisters lost many of their places of power, such as schools and hospitals, but if they owned shrines, have managed to keep them and assert power and control over them, thereby also asserting power over the devotions related to the shrines, by such things as commissioning or choosing prayer cards and statues, which embody “sacred presence” and allow the shrine to be taken home with visitors (Orsi 2005: 18), among other ways. Those who retain roles in schools and hospitals may use these as a platform for propagating the cult of the order’s founder or patron saint.

Devotional Catholicism, like sisters in habits who teach school and work in hospitals, is often associated with pre-Vatican II Catholicism. Vatican II sought to turn away from saints and devotional practices to a more intellectual faith (Orsi 1996: 32-33). Yet, women have still kept devotional Catholicism alive. Just as Orsi found at the Shrine of St. Jude in Chicago (Orsi 1996), one will find more women at shrines and openly engaged in devotional Catholicism, as I found at the Cabrini shrine. Catholic women have always used devotional Catholicism as a place where

they can have agency within their patriarchal religion. Orsi argues that the Church was unsuccessful in ridding itself of devotions to the saints because women kept these devotions alive, such as what he found at the St. Jude Shrine (Orsi 2005: 152). In this way, women involved in devotional Catholicism – whether they be lay or women religious - have kept alive a link to the past, a past where women had clear (although limited) respected positions within the Church as sisters/nuns who were numerous and visible and where links to family members and memories persist through popular devotions such as the cult of the saints. Orsi writes that “devotional experience...may be discounted, branded infantile, or even insane, especially when it is associated with women. But presence persists” (Orsi 2005: 51). In anthropologist Sally Cole’s fieldwork in coastal Portugal, she found that women found their place in the patriarchal Catholic religion through their devotional Catholicism which allowed women to be “active in constructing religious experience to meet their own needs,” which often do not “coincide with the goals of the parish priest” (Cole 1991: 100). At the shrine, women are able to exert power and control in ways they are not able to do within the Catholic Church as a whole. Aside from the women who keep the shrine operating, the women who visit the shrine do so with little need for a priest to be active there or do something to attract them there. Also, if the women who come for the holy water are using it as curanderas or folk healers, they are engaging in something women in the Catholic Church are unable to do – exercise power through rituals. Thus, holy water at the shrine, when picked up women as I observed, allows women a chance to engage in rituals in which they can exercise agency that is disallowed of them within official Catholicism.

The shrine is a place for women to participate in devotional Catholicism – a form of Catholicism in which the clergy becomes unnecessary. I argue that the sacred presence within devotional Catholicism persists mainly because of women, lay and members of religious orders,

despite Vatican II because it offers these women the chance to be authors of their own stories within the greater Catholic community and cult of the saints, authors of the story of their favorite saint, ways to exercise power outside of patriarchy, and ways to confront absence with presence that a priest, bishop, or even the pope cannot provide.

Whether women are leaving ex-votos to add to the story of Saint Cabrini as well as their own story and the story of the larger community of Cabrini's cult, engaging with memories of absent loved ones who are dead or far removed by distance, or figuring out what items will sell best to be able to fund the shrine's electric bill, the shrine is a bastion of women's power in a male-dominated organization. The women here together confront absence reflected in the motionless body figure of Cabrini – absence of hierarchical power, absence of loved ones, absence of legal status in the U.S., absence of a homeland, and other absences with their physical presence and the presence of ex-votos. They were confronting other absences and deaths. But we confronted these absences in solidarity in front of the ultimate absence – a lifeless body. The body prone in the glass coffin only looks like it's asleep. Maybe even the parish priest thinks it truly dead. But in reality, is alive and powerful if you look closely enough at the women in the pews, women working in the gift shop, and women praying next to the body. Their presence makes it alive. It looks unassuming even though around it is centered a space that is a silent fortress of female power. Really, it may just be the Catholic Church male hierarchy that's unassuming rather than the gracefully sleeping lady in the glass coffin, as the hierarchy ignores this and other spaces of women's power that exist within devotional Catholicism. The body of women exercising agency at the shrine is far from asleep.

The Other Body

The other body is much more pleasant. Mother Cabrini's wax mask looks softer and kinder. In the summer of 2013, I briefly traveled to Rome. I walked up to the Cabrini Motherhouse in the Eternal City early one morning. I tried to open the doors to what appeared to be the chapel; they were locked. I followed a woman inside the doors to the building. In broken Italian, I asked to see Mother Cabrini's body and to speak with a sister. I had previously emailed the motherhouse asking permission to come see the body and received a welcoming e-mail. Sister Pietrina, a small, elderly Italian sister, appeared from out of an office. She had worked and lived in New Orleans in the 1960s and was excited that a graduate from the New Orleans school was there. She took me by my arm lovingly and led me to chapel, explaining to me that the rest of the building was mostly used for retired sisters who were elderly and infirm. Given how advanced in years the still-working Sister Pietrina was, I can only assume that the other residents are also quite elderly. Sister was proud to bring me to the chapel, which was the plainest Cabrini chapel I've ever been in and by far the plainest chapel or church I saw in Rome. I was shocked, in fact, by how plain it was. In a city where there's a church at every turn that boasts amazing artwork, the plain white walls were shocking.

Mother Cabrini's body wasn't on the altar but to the right side of the first few pews. The coffin was gorgeous, glass and gold. It was the only decorative art in the chapel. Her wax mask looked much more life-like, kinder, and welcoming. She looked more like Mother Cabrini I had seen in photographs. I had to chuckle to myself that here I was comparing Mother Cabrini's face in Rome to her face in New York City. Her head and heart, Sister explained, were in *this* body. Sister hugged me many times and left me alone "to pray," which actually consisted much more

of staring at the body and coffin, taking pictures, and sitting down to look at the chapel and try to take in what story it had to tell.

Rome's churches are so grand, that even the smaller ones, can seem overwhelming with their ornate artwork and collections of relics. There is hardly a place for the eye to rest in many. One doesn't know where to start to look when one enters and within a few hours of touring churches, one can become less and less impressed by another great work of art, fragment of bone, skull, or golden chalice. In stark contrast to the other churches and chapels of Rome, as well as the chapels at Cabrini High School New Orleans and New York, the Motherhouse's chapel was quite barren. It is white and bright; most of the chapels and churches of Rome are quite dark. Small stained glass windows tell the story of Mother Cabrini's life, much like the mural in New York City, yet far less grand. A large painting of Mother Cabrini with immigrants and Jesus with His Sacred Heart behind her decorates the back of the chapel. A simple mosaic of angels crowning the area where Cabrini's head lays in the glass coffin decorates the area where her body lays. The altar is plain, off-white marble with minimal decorations. An alcove in its center displays a large wooden statue of a risen Jesus, with cross in hand, whereas most Catholic churches I have been in have a crucifix rather than the risen Jesus. I suppose when one is close to death, the risen Jesus is a much more comforting image. This image must also be of more comfort than the crucifix when the body of the dead is on display in the same room. While other Roman churches are dark and death is everywhere (burials, relics, and images of the crucifixion and martyrdoms), this chapel's focus, even with the dead body it holds, is life – life on Earth and Mother Cabrini's works, but also life after death, with a risen Jesus and a peacefully sleeping, pleasant-faced Mother Cabrini. Here, there seems to be an attempt to control death or have some power over it – to show that the end is not the end.

The chapel at the Roman Motherhouse is only open to the public once per week for mass, which is sparsely attended except for the Sisters and some locals who work for or are otherwise involved with the Sisters. The official party line from the order – what students are taught, what appears most on the internet, what is listed in texts about the saint – is that her body is in New York City. Very few know about the body in Rome. Rather than advertising Mother Cabrini's body's presence to tourists or Romans, the sisters did not promote it. It is in short walking distance from tourist sites such as the grand Piazza de la Republica, the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels and Martyrs, the Villa Borghese, the Four Fountains, the Planetarium and Astronomical Museum, and the small church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, which houses Bernini's sculpture of St. Teresa in Ecstasy. The chapel could certainly become a small tourist destination if the body was advertised. The body, I realized as I sat in the chapel that was only open to the public once per week, was the private body for the sisters at the Motherhouse. Many of the sisters who lived there were in their final years of life.



Figure 16. Close-up of Body of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini in the Chapel at the MSC Motherhouse, Rome, Italy

The sisters had within the chapel in their own home, their saint's body - the foundress of their organization, the mother of the sisters, and a sister herself. Saints function in Catholicism to "bridge the gap between this world and the next" and due to this, it is "although the saints are not really dead" (Jeremiah 2012: 96). The bodies of saints make physical the bridge "between this world and the next" (Ibid). The elderly sisters in this home in Rome are about to cross that bridge. Within their own home is their own private relic to serve as a physical manifestation that death can be overcome. Mother Cabrini is still physically in the Motherhouse (or at least appears to be) and her order and mission continues all over the world. The work these sisters did – educating, nursing, social work, and more – is continued by the order. They live on in the metaphorical sense; the body offers a physical manifestation of this. Lourdes spent time at the Cabrini Chapel in New York City because it reminded her of her deceased mother, as did others who came there because it reminded them of the past and deceased loved ones.

Mother Cabrini's displayed bodies allow people to view a death that does not die. The body remains visually unchanged. It is always on display, never moved and hidden, buried, or cremated. It is constant and visible. It makes death present in a way that does not decay, degenerate, or disappear. Loved ones who have been buried deep in the ground and surely no longer look as pleasant as Mother Cabrini's bodies, have been cremated, or have been left behind in faraway places cannot be physically seen. They are in a realm that the living are not yet a part of and cannot perceive. But we can see Mother Cabrini, seemingly undecayed and beautifully at peace, a constant in the chapels that house her bodies for those who seek her. We cannot see our departed loved ones. But we can see Mother Cabrini. And in seeing her, perhaps, we can try to

understand and face death. Perhaps we may even become recipients of miracles, as I thought perhaps I was in the summer of 2012 at the New York shrine.



Figure 17. Body of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, Chapel at the MSC Motherhouse, Rome, Italy.



Figure 18. The Author at the Door of the MSC Motherhouse, Rome, Italy, May 2013.

CHAPTER SIX

MURDER AND MIRACLES: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF LIFE AND DEATH

It Gets Real: Autoethnography Taken to a “Whole Other Level”

In August of 2010, I answered an email looking for adjunct instructors to teach geography at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette; a UL geography professor who was fighting cancer would not be able to return for the start of the semester. I sent in my CV and an email introductory letter and received word back in a few hours that I had been hired to teach two classes. The following academic year, the professor passed away. I was hired full time in the fall of 2011. I had been teaching part-time at multiple schools since 2008. This was my first full-time job; I was 28. I was also thrilled to be teaching at UL. I quickly fell in love with the university and campus community. I found in Lafayette and the people there – including my students – an atmosphere much like my native New Orleans. The Cajuns of Lafayette appreciated the *joie de vivre*, the same way New Orleanians did. I was excited to be a full-time employee at UL. Students and faculty are encouraged to wear red on Fridays in support of UL pride as part of a campaign called “Wear Red on Friday.” I amassed red UL shirts in the form of polos, t-shirts, fleeces, and more to wear on Fridays. I attended the New Orleans Bowl in 2011 when UL went to their first bowl game in decades and teared up a little when the team that is perpetually forgotten about due to LSU football’s dominance won. Before or after class, I often ran in Girard Park, which is across the street from UL’s campus or along the UL bike path, which connects a neighborhood called the Saints Streets (due to the fact that most streets there

are named after saints), which connects the main campus to north campus, where the student recreation center, football field, the Cajundome arena, sorority and fraternity row, and other campus buildings are located. Even though I lived in Baton Rouge and made an hour commute each way, UL was more than just where I worked. UL and the community became a big part of my life.

In the early morning hours of May 19, 2012, the UL community turned upside down. I wouldn't find out about it until Sunday, May 20, 2012. I woke up that morning and checked Facebook from my phone as I lay in my bed. A friend had posted a missing flier as her status – a UL student was missing. She had last been seen leaving a friend's home on her bike after a concert. I jumped out of bed and went downstairs to my computer to see what news I could find. I will admit that I have been a true crime reader since I followed Elizabeth Smart's kidnapping and recovery as an undergraduate, although I suppose I really started paying attention to true crime when Derrick Todd Lee, the Baton Rouge Serial Killer, was on the loose in the early 2000s, while I was an undergraduate living alone 75 miles away from Baton Rouge. True crime is one of my favorite genres of books and film. It's likely I would have followed this story even if it hadn't been a UL student that went missing. But it was, and that made it more than just a hobby for me. I lived and breathed this story for weeks and months. It wasn't just that a UL student had gone missing. We'd come to find out she went missing right off of campus in the Saints Streets neighborhood. She was likely riding her bike to the UL bike path. This was the same area where I often ran and that many students and faculty frequented. Michaela "Mickey" Shunick was a 21 year-old senior who was majoring in anthropology at UL. On the evening of Friday, May 20, 2012, she attended a concert at Atmosphere, a local bar/restaurant. Afterwards, she and a friend went to Taco Bell. Mickey left her friend's home near campus in the early

morning hours of Saturday, May 21, 2012. She was headed home, about six miles away, on her bike. Mickey was an avid cyclist. Even though she had a car, she rode her bike everywhere she could. Her brother was graduating from high school Saturday morning but she'd never make it to his graduation. In fact, she'd never make it home. Surveillance video showed Mickey on her bike at the corner of University and St. Landry Streets, turning into the Saints Street neighborhood. She was likely planning on taking St. Landry through the Saints Streets area to where the UL bike path starts. It seemed as if she disappeared somewhere in the Saints Streets; she didn't show up on surveillance cameras further along her route home (McElfresh, 5/26/12).

On Friday, May 25th, Lafayette Police released surveillance stills of vehicles that had been in the same vicinity as Mickey where she was captured on film at the intersection of St. Landry and University. Police asked the drivers to come forward in case they had witnessed anything. All vehicles' owners came forward except for the owner of a white, four-door Chevrolet Z71 pick-up truck. On Saturday, May 26th, her bike was found at Whiskey Bay, a desolate exit off of I-10 between Lafayette and New Orleans and a body dumping ground made notorious by serial killer Derrick Todd Lee, who put the bodies of two of his victims there. Although Lee was on death row, the placement of the bike brought back the feeling of fear that had dominated the lives of women in south Louisiana during his years of activity. Texas Equusearch, a non-profit search and recovery team, came to help find Mickey. Over the next few weeks, Mickey's family kept her search in the news and Lafayette Police did not say much about the white truck or the case at all ("KATC Timeline Mickey Shunick Case").

As I taught classes at UL that June, talk of Mickey's disappearance dominated campus. I had taught one of her best friends the previous semester and one of Mickey's sister's good friends was in my class that summer. Some students and community members argued it must

have been a drunk driving accident covered up so that someone wouldn't have to go to jail. From what I had read about missing persons' cases and the cases I had followed in real time, Mickey's disappearance seemed to me to be a stranger abduction, which seemed to be the hardest to solve. My true crime hobby had taught me that stranger abductions of women and children almost always seem to be the work of a serial, deranged sexual predator, who is often times a sex offender. I thought that the campus community and the women of Lafayette were facing something way more daunting than a drunk driving accident.

While not teaching or preparing for class, I spent much of that June posting Mickey's missing fliers in Baton Rouge, putting up her missing signs wherever I could, and wondering where she could be and who took her. I still ran along the UL bike path and in the Saints Streets, but kept my eyes focused on the ground, hoping that if by chance some small clue – an earring, a key, anything, had been overlooked by searchers, I would find it. I eyed the many white four-door Chevy trucks in the area with suspicion, as did most of Lafayette. I googled registered sex offenders around campus until I scared myself silly trying to memorize where they lived, what they drove, and what they looked like. I was frightened. But I also deeply wanted our student found as well as the perpetrator. I wanted all the women at UL and in the community to be safe from whoever it was. A month passed and there was still no Mickey and no clue as to who had caused her disappearance. I followed Mickey's family's Facebook updates and media interviews. I saw pictures of Mickey with students I'd taught and pictures of Mickey with her horse, dogs, and other animals. She was an avid animal lover, as am I. I felt a kinship with this girl who loved animals, studied anthropology, and biked along the same route I often ran (and likely disappeared along that route). I was angry because Mickey could have been any of our

students, any of my co-workers, or even me, and nothing seemed to be happening to move her case forward. The case continued to consume me.

In early July, a friend sent me a message on the internet that she had heard rumors through the “Cajunnet,” or the rumor mill in Lafayette, that police were eyeing a convicted sex offender named Brandon Scott Lavergne from Church Point, Louisiana, a town about forty minutes outside of Lafayette in Mickey’s case. She also sent a link to his online sex offender registry listing. I didn’t hear anything else for a few days, when Brandon Scott Lavergne was arrested during a routine traffic stop in Lafayette on July 5th and Lafayette Police announced at a press conference that Lavergne was charged with the kidnapping and *murder* of Mickey Shunick. Just as I had suspected, her disappearance was a stranger abduction. From reading and following true crime, I knew it was unlikely that Mickey was still alive, but it was shocking none the less to have it confirmed that the police thought so as well. However, they still did not have Mickey’s body. Searches turned to areas closer to Lavergne’s home but produced nothing. Lavergne wasn’t talking (Murray 7/6/2012).

I left to do fieldwork at the Cabrini Shrine in New York not long after Lavergne’s arrest. Every day when I entered the shrine I asked for Mother Cabrini to please help find Mickey’s body soon. Aside from the fact that her family deserved to put her to rest, I knew the prosecution’s case would be stronger with a body. The beginning of August had come and Mickey still hadn’t been found. On the morning of August 7th, I let my frustration take over my inner narrative to Mother Cabrini. I started with my usual silent “please help them find Mickey soon” but then found myself speaking out loud in a hushed but intense and demanding tone. “No,” I demanded aloud. “Not soon. She needs to be found NOW. NOW. Her family needs her

and the women of Louisiana need her to be found to keep this guy locked up. This has gone on too long. She needs to be found NOW.”

I had never dared to request something so forcefully from a saint, deity, or the universe before, yet this felt like the most real conversation I had ever really had with something supernatural. It felt like I was really speaking to Mother Cabrini and made my other usual requests seems like habit more than real dialogue. Before, I always felt somewhat silly about having a conversation with someone who wasn't there inside of that glass coffin. But this didn't feel silly at all. All else had failed. Why not demand it? Since search teams, sleuthing sex offenders, reporting tips of suspicious white trucks had failed, what did I have to lose by frankly telling – not asking – Mother Cabrini that Mickey needed to come home now. Everything I've read about Mother Cabrini as well as her own journals recount that she was a forceful, willful woman who wouldn't be afraid to tell people what needed to be done. I reasoned that the way I spoke to her that morning was fine because that was how she herself operated. She wouldn't shrink from telling people what needed to be done and demanding it. I thought about Mother Cabrini asking the rich Italian sea captain Salvatore Pizzati for funds to construct a new building for the order's orphanage in New Orleans. When he made his offer as to how much he'd donate, she told him it wasn't enough. She ended up getting from him the exact amount she demanded - \$75,000. She wasn't shy when it came to demanding what she saw fit (Sullivan 1992: 128). I had just spoken to her in her own language.

I didn't give it much thought the rest of the day as I went about observing, doing interviews, and helping in the gift store. That evening, I went to dinner with my dad and husband – both avid golfers - who had enjoyed a day of golf in Westchester County, the birthplace of golf in the United States. As we sat eating in a Friendly's restaurant in Yonkers, my

dad's phone rang. It was my mom. I could hear her voice on the other line. As soon as dad said hello, I heard mom scream "They found Mickey!" Goosebumps immediately covered my arms and legs. In that moment, I believed. It was real. It was a miracle. After the phone call, I told my dad and husband about that morning. Their jaws dropped.

The next day, I told Sr. Maria Loretta and other sisters who were at the shrine when I arrived with the story. Their response was one of "wow" but they did not seem as impressed as I was, perhaps because they regularly heard stories of Mother Cabrini granting favors and regularly received ex-votos in thanks that they unpacked and arranged in the museum. The miraculous was somewhat normal for them. Sr. Maria Loretta was immediately concerned with whether or not Louisiana had the death penalty. Only a sister, I thought, would answer the news of my miracle with "That's amazing. Does Louisiana have the death penalty?" Of course she'd be immediately worried that the perpetrator would receive the ultimate and in the eyes of the Church and the sisters, inhumane punishment. While I am opposed to the death penalty, I'll admit that since hearing that Mickey's remains had been found, the thought of Lavergne's fate hadn't crossed my mind. Sister brought me back down to earth and off of the high I was feeling. I should have been concerned then not only with Mickey's justice, but also should be following sister's example and advocating for the man who had scared the campus and Lafayette community and me for months not to receive the death penalty.

I later learned that Lavergne confessed to Mickey's murder and led police to her remains near an old cemetery in Evangeline Parish as part of a plea deal that spared him the death penalty (Brown and Burgess, 8/24/12). The academic in me, as well as the true crime fanatic, started to feel that the discovery of Mickey's body had less to do with Mother Cabrini and more to do with a narcissistic sociopath's desire to spare himself from the death penalty. On August 17, 2012,

Lavergne pled guilty in court to Mickey's murder as well as the 1999 murder of Lafayette woman and mother of three, Lisa Pate. It is presently unknown if he killed any other women, but I doubt the Lafayette community would be shocked if he did. Law enforcement told the media that they were looking at Lavergne in unsolved murders and disappearances of women in south Louisiana and Texas near where his sister lived and he often visited, but as of now, no connections have been announced publicly ("Investigators Look to More Cold Cases for Connections to Brandon Scott Lavergne"). Lavergne's confession was read in court. He had been driving around Lafayette in his white, four-door Chevrolet Z71 that night calling escort services. Mickey had the very bad luck of coming into his line of vision as she cycled home. Surveillance cameras showed that when he saw Mickey, he quickly changed lanes to turn and follow her down St. Landry Street. St. Landry Street ends a few blocks down where it runs into the UL intramural fields and to the entrance UL bike path. He confessed to running into her bike with his truck near the intramural fields and that he coerced her into his vehicle. He had a knife and a pistol. Inside of the vehicle, she tried to use her cell phone; he got it away from her and disabled it. She sprayed him with the mace she carried and got the knife away from him. She stabbed him, leaving wounds on his neck, hands, and body for which he'd have to seek medical help twice in the hours that followed. He eventually regained control of the knife and stabbed her; she finally lay still. Thinking she was dead, he drove to a secluded sugarcane field in Acadia Parish. Mickey jumped up, grabbed the knife and began attacking him again. Unable to get the knife away from her a second time, Lavergne shot her in the head. He then drove to Evangeline Parish to hide her body. Tiny Mickey, who was only around 5'2" and 115lbs., had come mightily close to severing the finger of and hitting the jugular vein of the 5'9" 220 lb Lavergne. In doing so, she left markings that would lead to scars and cuts that he explained away

with stories that didn't make sense and behavior that was odd to say the least. The father of his then-fiancée was suspicious of his scars and stories and called in a tip to the police, which put him on their radar as a possible perpetrator (Brown and Burgess 8/24/12). In fall 2012, the UL football team's helmets bore an outline of Mickey on her bike with her arms outstretched ("UL Football Team to Honor Mickey Shunick with Helmets"). "Mighty Mickey" became an inspiration for the team of perpetual state-level underdogs as they went on to have a winning season and win their second New Orleans Bowl Championship.

I will forever be thankful to Mickey Shunick for the valiant fight she put up in Lavergne's truck. She left behind clues on his body in the form of cuts and scars that he couldn't explain and that led to people being suspicious of him. He ended up on law enforcement's radar largely because of the damage she did to him. I will also forever be thankful to Mother Cabrini even though I am not sure if she had any part in it or if it was just Lavergne's lawyers leveling with him that he was going to die if he didn't give up her location and his own self-preservation that led him to confess and give away where he had hid her body.

The matter was further complicated for me by the fact that days before I had visited the shrine of St. John Neumann in Philadelphia. Neumann, a Redemptorist priest from Bohemia, became the archbishop of Philadelphia, where he worked with Irish and in the later years of his life, Italian immigrants. He also helped organize some of the first Catholic archdiocesan parochial schools in the country. He died at the young age of 48 in the year of Mother Cabrini's birth, 1860. Neumann was beatified in 1963 and canonized in 1977 (Liguori 2010: ix-xix). Like Cabrini, Neumann's body was not incorrupt and a wax body figure was constructed and put on display in a glass case in 1962 (Brennan 11/9/89). In the shrine, there was a small basket with slips of paper on which to write a petition next to the altar. I took two slips of paper. I wrote

a petition for my first cousin, who was fighting breast cancer and I wrote “Bring Mickey home” on the other. Not content to put them in the basket and wanting to get up closer to the glass coffin to be able to compare it with Cabrini’s wax figure in New York, I sat down on the altar next to the coffin as I’d seen the Hispanic students from Mother Cabrini High School do at the New York Cabrini Shrine. I had to compare the one other American saint in a glass coffin with Mother Cabrini. I stared at the body for a long time, coming to the conclusion (and taking some admitted delight in) that it wasn’t as good-looking of a wax head as Cabrini’s. It was even more obviously waxed. His eyebrows were painted on darkly as were his lips. It looked nothing like the pictures of him in the adjoining museum or the gift shop. At least there was a strong resemblance in Cabrini’s wax face. I took the slips of paper and placed them in the corners of the coffin in between the metal panes and the glass. A maintenance man came through, eyed me, and then looked approvingly and went along his business when he saw what I was doing. He didn’t shoo me away as Sister Maria Loretta might have done to a stranger who got so close to Cabrini’s glass coffin. The maintenance man was Hispanic, and the thought occurred to me that this was why he didn’t shoo me away. He understood what I was doing and why I was so close to the coffin, even if he didn’t know it was also to be able to compare Neumann’s wax figure with Cabrini’s. My friend Patricia Connelly Newby, whose family is from Philadelphia, says her sister was cured as a child of meningitis after a relic of St. John Neumann was placed by her bed. When I told her that Mickey had been found perhaps because I demanded it of Mother Cabrini, she informed me – knowing of my previous visit to St. John Neumann – that it was not Mother Cabrini but the “powerful” Neumann who had aided in Mickey’s body being found. In the back of my mind, a small voice questioned “What if it was Neumann and not Cabrini? Maybe that’s not the kind of stuff she does. Maybe she does immigration and school stuff, not

something as serious as locating dead bodies and putting away possible serial killers.” The rational side of me argued that it didn’t matter; Mickey had been found and her killer was surely going to be locked up forever and unable to hurt anyone again. I wanted it to be Mother Cabrini who had granted this favor; I guess a little help from Neumann would be okay as well. Here I was, 29, rooting for my high school’s team, this time in the form of a saint and arguing over who had made a miracle happen, realizing how pointless and ridiculous it was yet how important it was to me as a member of the Cabrinian community and to that part of my identity. It was also important in how I felt better connected to the New York field site. I felt like I finally had a story that fit in with the narratives of others who visited the shrine.



Figure 19. Altar of St. John Neumann Shrine, Philadelphia, PA

I feel silly telling people outside of the sisters and those connected to Mother Cabrini and her order this story. I especially feel awkward telling other academics about it. The academic in me doesn’t believe it was anything more than Lavergne avoiding the death penalty. The person in me who demanded of Mother Cabrini in desperation she be brought home NOW does believe it. These parts of me won’t reconcile. Maybe someday they will, but for now I’ve just come to

the conclusion that both they exist within me. Part of me believes and part of me doesn't. The part that doesn't believe is embarrassed by the part that does. The believer in me is shocked that I would be embarrassed to talk about this experience or write about it academically. I put off writing about it for seven months as I wasn't sure if I should write about it at all. Would I be exposing myself as something less than a social scientist or less of an academic? Would people still take me seriously if they read the story? Would they think I was a religious fanatic or even an idiot who overlooked reason and underestimated coincidence? Was it far too self-indulgent to write about? As autoethnography is often criticized for being self-indulgent (Coffey 1999), should I dare even bring the story up? In the end, I decided to write about it because of how open people at the shrine and people associated with Cabrini High New Orleans had been with me. How could I ask these people to share with me why they came to sites associated with Mother Cabrini, what connections they had to her, and what she and the sites meant to them if I did not tell my own story? If someone whom I interviewed at the shrine had told me a similar story, I would have wanted to know every detail, yet I was struggling with whether or not I should share my story at all. I also thought of academic who had engaged with extremely personal autoethnography – geographer Gill Valentine (2002) writing about sexual harassment and Carolyn Ellis (2009) writing so candidly about being the caretaker of her elderly, ill, incontinent mother that I was at times uncomfortable with her level of intimacy with her readers. Could I still tell my story? No one laughs or scoffs at illness and death....but "miracles," well, that's another story. I laughed at them myself and sometimes, still do. But what's real to someone *is* real, the anthropologist told me. But yet writing about spirituality or miracles seemed to me to be so well, *below* what an academic does. Then I read Martha Beck's *Leaving the Saints* in which Beck, a Harvard-educated sociologist, writes candidly about her inner conflict over leaving the Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the religion in which she had been raised and that she loved. Beck writes about resigning from the church over issues pertaining to the excommunication of Brigham Young University professors whose academic work or comments displeased church leaders, the position of women in the church, and problems with some of the church's teachings and the veracity of some of its scriptures. She also writes about experiencing sexual abuse as a child and the large number of students who approached her while she was teaching at BYU who had also been sexually abused. In their cases, like Beck's, the abuse had been swept under the rug and never reported. Writing about these things alone take great courage, but I found it even more courageous that Beck candidly writes about her longing to believe in the church's teachings, be a good Mormon, and mourning the positive aspects of the community and culture she lost when she resigned (Beck 2005). Here is a Harvard-educated sociologist who isn't afraid to write that she wanted to believe, did believe some parts of a religion, and was greatly saddened when she lost the love and support of the Mormon community. If she could be open about that, I could certainly write my story. If Caridad, the volunteer at the shrine who told me about her elderly mother, and Carolyn Ellis could tell strangers about the illnesses her loved ones in their charge suffered at the end of their lives...if strangers could tell me they came to gawk at a dead body...if illegal immigrants could out themselves as such and tell me they were hoping to legally be allowed to stay in the US...if people could tell me of their deceased or far-away loved ones who took them to the shrine in the past...if Martha Beck could write that she wanted to believe and be a part of something bigger than herself...then I could write this.

I also came to the conclusion that I don't have to decide if the miracle is real or not. But on August 7th, 2012, when I heard my mom screaming that Mickey had been found on the other end of the phone, it was real. It was real to me in that moment and as a professor said to me

years ago, “If it’s real to them (believers), it’s real.” If I’m not focusing on whether or not things related to the shrine and Mother Cabrini are factual or able to be proven, I need to apply that to my own experience as I did to stories related to me by others. I needed to treat my experience as it was in that moment, but also be open about the ambivalence I’ve had towards it since.

Ex-Votos

In the previous chapter, I described some of the ex-votos one will find in the cases in the hall adjoining the shrine and the museum in the back of the chapel at the New York shrine. Why does one leave ex-votos? Miles Richardson suggests that visitors leave ex-votos at shrines and memorials in “solidarity” with other visitors and with the departed “in the face of death” (Richardson 2003: 269). Shrines and memorials generally have to do with death. Saints, he points out, must die before they can become saints. When we visit shrines, we face death. We offer our presence in the absence or death of another. There we can also encounter the presence of others left through ex-votos, flowers, and the like (Ibid). Ex-votos can be a lasting presence at a shrine or memorial, or the lasting participation in solidarity against death.

When I returned home to Baton Rouge, one of the first things I did was to order a plaque that I would send to the Cabrini shrine in New York. Plaques were typical ex-votos in the museum of the shrine. Some held pictures and inscriptions, some just inscriptions. I ordered a small plaque that had a place to insert a picture. I printed Mickey’s photo from one of her missing fliers onto photo paper and put it in the plaque. I had it inscribed with:

“In gratitude to Mother Cabrini for helping to locate the body of murdered University of Louisiana student Michaela ‘Mickey’ Shunick.

To all that read this – believe, miracles are real.”

As I typed this last sentence of the inscription into the order form and typed it above, I wondered if I added it in to convince myself more than anyone else.

I sent the ex-voto for a number of reasons. For one, I learned at the shrine that when a favor is granted, that is simply what one does. Secondly, I had told the sisters and volunteers about my miracle. I suspected that they would expect some sort of ex-voto as it seems to be the norm to send or bring one in thanks if a favor is granted. But overall, I sent it because I wanted Mickey’s story and my story to be one of the stories in the museum. I wanted people to read the plaque, see Mickey’s name and perhaps google her. Then they’d find out about the valiant fight she waged. I also wanted people to know about my experience there. It was one thread among a tapestry woven out of green cards, graduations, ambiguous favors received, marriages, cures for illnesses, and the like in the story of the shrine. It was also leaving presence in the absence of Mickey and Mother Cabrini, as well as a way of leaving my own presence through the ex-voto. It was standing in solidarity with those who visit the shrine against death – Mother Cabrini’s, Mickey’s, my own, and theirs.

I also admit that I sent a smaller, picture-less plaque to St. John Neumann’s shrine. Although I didn’t see any ex-votos on display there, I sent it anyway and decided the order could do what they want with it. It only seemed fair, even if they never displayed it. To not send one to the Neumann Shrine would be to deny that the visit to his shrine was a part of this story as well. It seemed less than truthful to not give him any credit and also send an ex-voto to the shrine, especially since I had, after all, invaded his wax figure’s “personal space” and I suspect a German saint wouldn’t be half as understanding about that as an Italian one. Just as Hispanics

had brought their practices to the Cabrini shrine in New York, I was going to send what I had become accustomed to seeing into the Neumann shrine by sending a plaque.

Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan writes that humans constantly have the desire “to reify experience, to give those fleeting moments of pleasure or pain a narrative outline or visual shape” (Tuan 1980: 462). I suggest that creating – and leaving - an ex-voto is a way to make an experience at a shrine more real or concrete. In designing, writing, and sending in my plaque, I was able to briefly materialize the immaterial – an experience, a story, a miracle.

It’s a materialization of which I had authorship. I got to tell the story on the plaque and also in this dissertation. In his article “Writing on the Graceland Wall: On the Importance of Authorship in Pilgrimage Landscapes,” Derek Alderman suggests that the practice of fans writing inscriptions on the fieldstone wall surrounding the Graceland estate allows them to write parts of the story of Elvis. They help create his memory and feed into his religious-figure-like status by scrawling on the wall (Alderman 2002: 27). While Elvis Presley Enterprises may own everything related to Elvis and seek to control the narrative of his life told on audio tours available in Graceland and anything bearing his likeness or using his songs, visitors to Graceland contribute to the memory of Elvis with their writings (Ibid 27-30). Just as I found that most of the writings on the ex-votos at the Cabrini shrine have to do with three categories – education, non-specific favors received, or neither of these two, Alderman found that the writings on the wall of Graceland related to Elvis as the American dream; Elvis as food consumption; Elvis as sex and romance; and Elvis as family (Ibid 29-32). These do not always exactly line up with the official Elvis narrative from Elvis Presley Enterprises, just as the writings on the ex-votos at the Cabrini shrine do not always neatly fit into the main narrative of Mother Cabrini as the Patroness of Immigrants. There are not many ex-votos that specifically mention immigration problems.

Although Cabrini was a teacher and her order mostly operated schools and orphanages, she is not the patroness of education or any profession, yet many of the ex-votos have been left in thanks when someone has graduated from college or completed a training program. Some are also for curing illness although Cabrini was a reluctant nurse. And what of the story that is told by my ex-voto? Nothing in Cabrini's story or history has anything to do with finding the remains of murder victims. I suspect this one will stand out the most. Yet, because it was real for me in that moment, I wanted to add this story to Cabrini's story. I wanted to face death and absence – of Mickey Shunick, Mother Cabrini, and my eventual own death – by leaving it in solidarity with the others who face their own eventual deaths with me at the shrine and who write a chapter in the unofficial story of Mother Cabrini through their ex-votos.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: LIFE AND PUTTING DEATH IN ITS PLACE

In the spring of 2013, I brought one of my UL classes to the ghost bike and pocket park that was erected in Mickey Shunick's honor near the field on campus property where Lavergne had abducted her. My class had recently discussed shrines, including temporary shrines to victims of traffic accidents and violence. Since such a shrine exists on campus, I felt it was the perfect opportunity for students to read the landscape as a text. To my surprise, it also turned out to be an opportunity to explain to them what ex-votos are; when we arrived at the bike, we noticed that people had draped Mardi Gras beads the color of UL red on the bike, as well as left fake flowers, butterflies, shells, and even a note, which was folded up in a plastic bag decorated with a butterfly and attached to the bike. As class ended and we walked away, I lingered for a moment. I reached out and lightly touched the seat of the ghost bike, whispering "Thanks, girl. You done good." I smiled as I thought Mickey might appreciate "you done good," the colloquial way of saying "well done." It was a thank you to Mickey for getting Brandon Lavergne off of the street by inflicting those telling wounds on him. Thanks to her, south Louisiana women had one less predator to worry about. I also thanked her for the strange opportunity that her tragedy had presented in my life – to tie together my work life, private life, and spiritual life – and make me feel better tied to others as we face death and materialize that story.



Figure 20. Mickey Shunick Ghost Bike, Corner of St. Landry & Coliseum Streets, Lafayette, Louisiana, Photo by author. February 2013.

We confront death in many ways – with ex-votos, offering presence in the face of absence, starting memorial scholarships, getting involved in causes, and more. We know we cannot escape death. But these things allow us to try to make sense of the nonsensical – the departure of friends and family we will never see again on Earth and our own death. We try to work against death in these ways. Ken Jeremiah proposes that the display of mummies and relics is so popular because it makes the “transition (between life and death) seem less extreme” (Jeremiah 2012: 34). I argue that by acts from visiting shrines that hold memories of the deceased or the untouchable past and leaving ex-votos at shrines to founding scholarships and doing charity work in one’s memory, we are all just trying to understand and control death and make the transition that has already happened to others and will one day happen to us seem less extreme.

The geography of religion, I came to recognize, is really the geography of how we make sense of the human experience. This means it is not always limited to what we traditionally

think of as “religion” (which might include organized religion, sacred spaces, shrines) but of any framework that helps humans understand the world, including science, poetry, literature, memorials, or even song lyrics. What is sacred to one and can be used as a lens to better read the past may not be sacred or useful to another. While some may better understand the human experience by making treks to Graceland, others may better understand them at historical sites or at sites that are connected to mainstream religion.

The New York shrine, Cabrini’s bedroom in New Orleans, and the shrine in Rome are a space where people – most of whom are women – can make their own meaning of the sacred outside of official definitions the male hierarchy of the Catholic Church. They are places where death can be confronted or meaning around death can be made. In my fieldwork, I found women engaging with the sacred on their own terms. It wasn’t the monstrance holding the Eucharist in the New York shrine or the plethora of second-class relics in the bedroom in New Orleans that made these places sacred. It wasn’t even necessarily that these places and relics are associated with the first person the Catholic Church officially declared a saint in the United States. In both places, I found women who created the sacred based on personal experiences and relationships in the past. I found women engaging with dead loved ones, as well as pasts that could not be revisited.

Death was the overarching theme that kept coming up in my work. Then, in the last couple of months of writing and proofreading, other things emerged. In 2014, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus shocked students, alumnae, and surrounding community of Mother Cabrini High School in New York when they announced that the school would close at the end of the school year due to the fact that the school had created a huge deficit in recent years and would need seven million dollars for the sisters to even consider keeping it open. But even

receiving seven million dollars would not keep the school running for long since the majority of the students did not pay tuition and attended on need-based scholarships (Weischelbaum 1/21/14). Due to financial restraints, number of student enrolled in the school has also declined over the past decade – from 455 in 2004 to 305 in 2014 (Griffin 4/9/14).

The shrine is still open at the location adjacent to the school and the sisters plan to continue to keep it open there, but one has to wonder how long this will be the case. The new, shiny, large Cabrini shrine in the affluent Lincoln Park neighborhood in Chicago holds only an arm bone as a first-class relic. As the Washington Heights property sits empty save the shrine, it will likely become tempting for the sisters to sell the property. A new shrine on the property where Mother Cabrini died awaits. I think it likely that eventually, Mother Cabrini's American body-figure will end up in the Chicago shrine.

Students, alumnae, and parents of Mother Cabrini High School expressed grief over the death of their school. In the two weeks after the school announced its closure, supporters raised \$62,000 towards keeping it open through an online push called the "Cabrini Movement." However, leaders of the "Cabrini Movement" met with the board of directors, and agreed that there was no way they could raise enough money to overcome the huge deficit the school faced. The school pledged remaining funds to help current students enroll in other Catholic schools, many of which have agreed to honor the scholarships the girls received to attend Mother Cabrini High School (Griffin 4/9/14). After 115 years, the school closed. Alumnae and former students may for a time, be able to engage with memories of the school and their pasts connected to the school at the shrine. But if the shrine eventually moves, these women will have to come up with a new place in which to engage with the sacred pasts they shared at Mother Cabrini High School. It is another death that will be encountered at the New York shrine for as long as it remains open.

No doubt many women will construct the sacred in the shrine around memories of their closed alma mater.

Life

Another event that arose while I was working on this dissertation wasn't that of a death. In fact, it made me reconsider if this project really was all about death and the past after all. After six years of marriage, my husband and I were surprised to discover in the spring of 2014 that we were expecting our first child in November. Yet it somehow came as no surprise that when the doctor set down our due date for us – November 13, Mother Cabrini's feast day. One may have thought we'd be shocked at this revelation, but we weren't. My husband, who spent days quietly busying himself at the New York shrine while I did fieldwork, has supported my involvement in and love for the New Orleans school, and navigated the winding streets of Rome as we sought out Mother Cabrini's other body-figure, was not shocked. I can't say that I was either. After all of the time we'd spent with people and places connected to Mother Cabrini, we just thought "Of course. That makes sense." My husband has shared me with Mother Cabrini and this project over the years. It makes sense that our child would be due on the feast day of a woman around whose shrines, stories, and places we had built much of our marriage.

I'm not claiming this is some grand plan that a saint was behind, just like I don't claim that Mother Cabrini located Mickey Shunick's body. I can't focus on if such things are real or not. Perhaps sometimes they feel real; other times they don't, even though they still make sense. In fact, Mother Cabrini's feast day came and went in 2014 without the baby making an appearance. My disappointment that he wasn't born on Mother Cabrini's feast day faded in the

days after the due date passed as I grew increasingly uncomfortable. I couldn't muster up any energy to be upset about the dates not aligning; I was ready for the birth. The fact that his due date was Mother Cabrini's feast day remains significant to me but I would have liked for him to have been born that day not so much because it would have had meaning, but for practical reasons. By that point I was downright sick of being pregnant. But it was not until fifteen days later that our son Henry Joseph – named for my dad and my late father-in-law – would be born after my nurse midwife finally gave up on waiting for him and agreed to induce labor on November 29.

We were again surprised when we found out shortly after our son's first birthday that we were having another baby in the summer of 2016. But again, we were unsurprised by the due date – July 15 – Mother Cabrini's birthday. After going post-term with Henry and discovering how few babies are actually born on their due date, I don't expect our daughter to share Mother Cabrini's birthday. However, when the nurse told us the due date I said "Of course" and smiled at my husband. He looked at me with a confused expression. "Mother Cabrini's birthday," I mouthed to him. He just shook his head in understanding. Once again, here was death – or at least the dead – showing up in our lives through the due date of a new life, one that once again was unexpected.

Bearing Witness

In the first episode of *True Detective*, Detective Rust Cohle's partner Marty Hart asks why he bothers to get out of bed in the morning since he's consumed with his nihilism. His answer is that "I tell myself I bear witness." Is this not what the geographer or anthropologist

does? I bore witness to those in the shrine who constructed their own sacred meanings and confronted questions of death and loss. Through autoethnography, I bore witness to my experiences with death and these sacred places – and now I am bearing witness to my experience with the new lives of our children.

True Detective ends with Cohle describing a near death experience he had when he almost died in a confrontation with the season's bad guy: "It was like I was part of everything that I have ever loved.....nothing, nothing but that love." Cohle describes feeling his deceased daughter and father in those moments. Although it may seem he'd found religion, *True Detective's* writer, Nic Pizzolato, told Hitflix's Alan Sepinwall (2014) that Cohle had found physics; the energy of his father and daughter and his own energy cannot be destroyed. Given due dates of my son and the daughter I am expecting, in many ways I feel that my children are part of everything I've ever loved – my husband, my parents, and the places, people, and memories connected to Mother Cabrini and this project. Questions of divine intervention and meaning around the due dates don't plague my mind. I am here to bear witness.

Many of the people I encountered at the shrines of Mother Cabrini or interviewed about her bedroom in New Orleans indicated to me that those places allowed them to engage with death and loss and perhaps to put them in their place. However, if death has been a central theme of this dissertation, then so has life. There's no life without death. Our lives are really just series of deaths and endings that we have to make sense of in our own ways. Making sense of death is making sense of life. The people who confronted death at the shrines were really also confronting life. They are one and the same.

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Vita

Katie Judith Berchak-Irby was born on January 27, 1983 in New Orleans, Louisiana to parents Major (US Army Ret.) Henry “Hank” Berchak and Women’s Army Corps veteran Judy Brooker Berchak. She attended Catholic schools in the New Orleans area from kindergarten through high school, graduating in 2001 from Cabrini High School. She earned a Bachelor of Arts History and Spanish from Newcomb College of Tulane University in 2004 and a Master of Arts Hispanic Studies from Louisiana State University in 2007. This master’s degree program is an inner-disciplinary program comprised of Spanish, geography, anthropology, and history classes. It was through this program that she was introduced to geography and anthropology and decided to pursue a PhD in these fields.

She previously taught geography and Spanish at Louisiana State University and South Louisiana Community College, as well as geography at Baton Rouge Community College and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where she was a full-time instructor from 2011-2014. She is currently employed full-time teaching geography, anthropology, and Spanish at River Parishes Community College in Gonzales, Louisiana. She lives in the small cane field-laced town of Sorrento, Louisiana with her husband and favorite registered nurse Matthew Irby, their beloved Chihuahuas, and their son Henry Joseph Irby, who was born during this project. They will add daughter Chloé Beth to their family in the summer of 2016.

In the future, Katie hopes to continue teaching geography and anthropology on the college level and do further research on sacred spaces, saints, shrines, true crime, and folk religion in South Louisiana.