A Revolution (Dis)Placed: Environment and the Creation of Cultural Identity in Fernández, Yáñez, Castellanos, and Poniatowska

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Abstract

Mexican history and culture are particularly illuminating when considering the question of environment and the significance a society places on it. This dissertation analyzes four works from post-revolutionary Mexico that span from the years 1943-1969, by examining how the space in each work interacts with characters to create meaning. Through it, a sense of identity—cultural and historical—emerges which is heavily dependent on environmental space. The works studied in each chapter are: Emilio Fernández's 1943 film, *María Candelaria;* Agustín Yánez's 1947 novel, *Al filo del agua;* Rosario Castellanos's 1963 novel, *Oficio de tinieblas;* and Elena Poniatowska's 1969 testimonial novel, *Hasta no verte Jesús mío.*

These works build on the foundations set by the Latin American writers of the regional novel of the 1920s, adding their own nuances to and taking creative liberties in order to create an understanding of the interrelatedness of society and environment: each one presents environmental identities in a culturally and regionally specific way. The study of these works serves to better understand how the rural and urban environments, along with all of their political and cultural weight, influenced the particular construction of identity portrayed in each one. The trajectory of the four works represents a shift in the general mentality concerning the Mexican government, which was ruled by the almost dictatorial political party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI): a sense of acquiescence to the government wanes, ideas about belonging to a certain place are adjusted, and the ideal of a single Mexican identity comes under serious criticism. In different ways, each work demonstrates how a society or an artist can imbue a place with different meanings, impregnating a space for purposes of power, vindication, or social critique. Through the study of these four works and their different depictions of Mexican land, city, and identity, this

dissertation exposes the ways that literature and film can question, manipulate, and play with mainstream ideas of land ownership, environment and national identity.

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Introduction

"¿Cómo *queres* que nos *váyamos?* [How could we possibly leave here?]" This quote comes from a Mexican film from 1943, *María Candelaria,* and is spoken by the film's protagonist, an indigenous woman named María Candelaria, who, though victim to harsh social injustices in her small village of Xochimilco, cannot bear the idea of leaving her homeland. Her devotion to and connectedness to the nature that surrounds her makes the idea of leaving that place unthinkable, despite the threats of a despotic moneylender and the harsh judgment of her community. The film, then, questions the power exercised by external forces of greed and social pressure, by showing María's rootedness to the landscape as more powerful and meaningful than the economical and societal power that others try to exert over her.

This example from a film (studied in chapter one) represents the primacy of the problem of land and its ownership in the cultural creations of Mexico. Indeed, the idea of land ownership in general is a polemic and perplexing one. It seems odd that trees, grass, plants, and other natural things could be someone's "property." It borders on irrational that a thing that is organic, natural, and inhabited by other living creatures can belong to a single human being and that he can lay claim to it. This question of land and its ownership has permeated the violent history of the Americas and, to this day, we are affected by the colonization, socialization, and politicization of the natural world.

Mexican history and culture are particularly illuminating when considering the question of land and the significance a society places on it. The conquest provides ample evidence of the violence and injustices having to do with the land: Spanish and Creoles were given property rights while the native inhabitants died off as the result of foreign-introduced illnesses, or were killed, subjugated, or estranged from their homelands. The long history of dispute over land in

Mexico does not end there. During Dictator Porfirio Díaz's long rule (1876-1911), the number of haciendas grew, and increasingly, large amounts of land in Mexico belonged to a privileged few. What resulted was the first "successful" revolt against the ruling power in the history of the Americas: the Mexican Revolution, which lasted from 1910-1920. As historians Jürgen and Buchenau observe, the revolution "is the defining event of modern Mexican history" (2). Since one of the revolutionaries' main goals was to implement land reform by redistributing land to the peasant population and away from the oppressive hacienda system, it is a particularly relevant event to consider in the study of land and how it affects cultural and political mindsets in Mexican history. With this in mind, this dissertation will analyze four works from post-revolutionary Mexico that span from the years 1943-1969. My aim is to examine how the natural space in each work interacts with characters to create meaning, to see how identity—cultural and historical—interacts with environmental space.

The question of environment and its meaning is not new to Latin American literature. Following the First World War, there arose in many Latin American literary works a desire to emphasize cultural autochthony through a focus on land and its meaning. Perhaps the most salient examples of this come from the novels, *La vorágine* (1924), *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926) and *Doña Bárbara* (1929). *La vorágine*, by Colombian writer José Eustasio Rivera, "deliberately sets out to destroy the European concept of a tamed nature" (Franco 141), since at the end the protagonist and his lover are "devoured" by the Colombian jungle. *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926), a novel by Argentine writer Ricardo Güiraldes, tells the story of a young man inspired through a mentorship from a gaucho named don Segundo Sombra, who, in some descriptions that appear in the novel, seems to mesh together with the landscape itself. *Doña Bárbara* (1929) by Venezuelan writer Rómulo Gallegos tells the story of a learned man going to the Venezuelan

countryside where his cosmopolitan notions are upended by rural life. Jean Franco says that writers like Güiraldes and Gallegos succeeded in creating of the land "an exaltation of nature" which she said, "implied a condemnation of society" (142). For Franco, Güiraldes and writers like him,

> contrast "natural values" and social values: [they] situate their characters outside of society and allow them to develop in contact with nature alone. [They do not sentimentalize] nature nor [underestimate] its potential dangers, but […] implicitly suggest that human civilization and society have failed to develop truly moral qualities in man. (144)

The works that I analyze in this thesis in some ways create an exaltation of nature in the fashion of Güiraldes and Gallegos, but they also manipulate the natural world to serve their own political leanings and purposes for the creation of varying notions of Mexican national identity. In addition, the city plays an important role in each of the works, and is presented as both villainized and degradated, and as more illuminated and progressive. In this way, these works build on the foundations set by these Latin American writers of the regional novel of the 1920s, adding their own nuances to and taking creative liberties in order to create an understanding of the interrelatedness of society and environment.

In Carlos J. Alonso's seminal study of the regional novel in Latin America, *The Spanish American Regional Novel: Modernity and Autochthony* (1990), he discusses the impact of this *novela de la tierra* from the early 20th century in Latin America. In it, he relates the importance of cultural autochthony to the creation of the regional novel. This movement to create an understanding of the land and create an image of Latin American culture separate from the

European literary models serves as a precursor for the works analyzed in the present study, since they also grapple with the idea of a Mexican national identity.

This dissertation consists of a study of four Mexican works, two from the 1940s and two from the 1960s. The four works I have chosen appear in the wake of this long history of land dispute in Mexico, and each one presents environmental identities in a culturally and regionally specific way. I study these in order to better understand how the environment, along with all of its political and cultural weight, influenced the particular construction of identity portrayed in each work.

These two decades—the 40s and the 60s—represent a shift in the general mentality concerning the Mexican government, which was ruled by the almost dictatorial political party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). We shall see that over the trajectory of the appearance of these four works, a sense of acquiescence to the government wanes, ideas about belonging to a certain place are adjusted, and the ideal of a single Mexican identity comes under serious criticism.

Methodology

Each chapter will provide background on the cultural and political climate during the moment of publication. Also, I review the critical dialogue that has already taken place concerning the work, and then justify my own contribution. I take special care to study the representation of geographic space and how it relates to the creation of identity in each work, yet also allow for other observations, with the mindset that one cannot impose a hard and fast theme on a work, but rather must let the text speak for itself, and take one in other directions.

Perhaps readers will question my choice of leaving out the works from this time period of Carlos Fuentes and Juan Rulfo, two geniuses of prose so emblematic of mid-twentieth century

Mexican literature. Because I wanted to focus on in-depth studies of works, I was forced to leave these two literary giants out of the present study. Yet in the future I hope to also add studies of their works to the analysis of environmental identities during this time period, since they would greatly enrich the analysis.

Chapter One

I chose to begin the dissertation with the study of a visual representation of Mexico, both its provincial and urban worlds: director Emilio Fernández's 1943 film, *María Candelaria,* starring Dolores del Río and Pedro Armendáriz. Beginning the thesis with a film study provides a concrete example of popular culture of the moment. It serves to illuminate what was occurring in the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema and the way in which films were directly relevant to the changing times of urbanization and modernization in 1940s Mexico.

The chapter is entitled, "Homeland Lost: Hegemony, Nostalgia, and Mexicanness in *María Candelaria,"* and explores the idea of the loss of homeland in 1940s Mexican society and how this sentiment appears in Fernández's film. I utilize Gramsci's idea of hegemony or ideological control and the way that the film legitimizes the moderation imposed by the regime of President Ávila Camacho (1942-1948). I argue that not only does the film affirm the revolutionary government of the moment, but also speaks to viewers on deeper levels: nostalgia, and ache for land, amidst the urbanization and economic growth labeled the Mexican Miracle. I also utilize Wendell Berry's concept of homeland to describe the counter cultural mentality of nurturing the land and living in one place, as opposed to exploiting it and living in a transient lifestyle. I argue that the film's enduring legacy also speaks to cultural values of racism through its portrayal of mestizaje. What's more, it portrays the traditional Mexican gender roles as described by Octavio Paz in his essay, "Máscaras mexicanas," in which he describes the

Mexican tendency to hiding one's true self in stoicism and modesty. This chapter sets the scene for the general feel of the Mexico of the 1940s: rapidly changing, struggling to define itself as a nation, and longing for a rural past that perhaps could never be reclaimed.

Chapter Two

In chapter two I examine another work from the 1940s, but shift the genre of study from film to novel. In this way, I hope to provide both an example from the more accessible mainstream popular culture—a film—as well as an erudite work consumed more exclusively in intellectual circles, a dense novel by Agustin Yáñez: *Al filo del agua* (1947). This novel is significant in part because it marks a shift in the narrative tendencies of the *novela de la revolución.* As a result, the work serves to set the scene for what was occurring on the literary stage in the 1940s and provides a meaningful contrast to chapters three and four, which include Rosario Castellanos and Elena Poniatowska's more subversive representations of Mexican society and government.

The chapter is entitled, "The Hidden Gardens of Revolution: Fear of the Unconscious in Agustín Yáñez's *Al filo del agua."* Like Fernández's film, the novel takes place in a small village in 1909, prior to the onset of revolution and appears to serve as a justification for the current government's policies. I incorporate ideas from Freud and Lacan on the unconscious, latent desire, and the Real and the Symbolic realms of the psyche in order to try to understand the symbolism of the novel, especially the specific symbol of the hidden gardens within each villager's home, and how they create an interdependent relationship with the villagers' psyches. I explore how the space of this arid Jaliscan village and its strict Church institution confine the mind, and demonstrate a need to incorporate the Outsider, as well as modern and progressive ideas of the separation of Church and State. Ultimately, Yáñez's novel serves to demonstrate the

downside of being too rooted to one's homeland, and the need to open one's mind to different ways of life. Yet, he underemphasizes any need for agrarian reform, in order to acquiesce to the questionable decisions of the administration of President Miguel Alemán.

Chapter Three

Chapter three analyzes a unique novel, and jumps ahead in time to the idealistic and progressive decade of the 1960s, when the Cuban Revolution (1959) was fresh in the collective cultural memory of Mexicans, and provided cause for a reevaluation of their own revolution of the 1910s, and its inefficacy by comparison. The novel is Rosario Castellanos's *Oficio de tinieblas* (1963), and the chapter is entitled, "*Faltaba mucho tiempo para que amaneciera:* A Pessimistic View of Revolution and Feminism in Rosario Castellanos's *Oficio de tinieblas."* This chapter is organized into two sections that examine Castellanos's deeply pessimistic outlook and how it appears in the narrative: the book portrays Chiapan space as indicative of the revolution's shortcomings and the uselessness of certain tenets of mainstream feminism. The first part examines how the state of Chiapas, Mexico is presented in Castellanos's novel as resistant to the progress of the ideals of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). The distance between Chiapas and the Mexican center of progress, Mexico City, parallels an ideological distance from any sort of social progress. In peripheral Chiapas, the modern capital city loses its potency for progress, as demonstrated mainly in one of the novel's characters, Julia Acevedo.

I also examine how this novel questions two ideals of mexicanness: *indigenismo* and *mestizaje,* by demystifying the identity of the indigenous people, showing the Indians as separate from the landscape as the result of social injustice, and exposing the Eurocentrism inherent to the *indigenismo* movement. The novel also demystifies *mestizaje* through the crucifixion of a mestizo boy, and by stifling his connectedness to the land of Chiapas. In Castellanos's novel, the

indigenous of Chiapas are connected to nature through subjugation and monotony rather than as an idyllic homeland.

The second half of the chapter questions the utility of rejecting maternity in favor of pursuing female agency and power. I use the ideas of Kate Soper, who writes on women's connectedness to the natural world through maternity, as well as Helene Cixous's ideas on phallocentric societies and the need for women to connect to their own bodies in the same way that they do writing. I explain how almost all of the female characters in *Oficio de tinieblas* follow a misguided idea of progress toward female agency by pursuing traditionally masculine traits and rejecting their bodies and their maternal selves, and how the novel demonstrates each endeavor as futile. Thus Castellanos's novel expresses the difficulty of combining motherhood and power and agency in contemporary society, and the way in which there seem to be no options in combining the two ways of life. She presents an alternative, less prestigious, option for obtaining relevance in society through the legend created by the indigenous nanny, Teresa, at the end of the novel.

Chapter Four

I conclude in the fourth chapter with the study of a work that appeared in 1969, a year after the tragic Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico City, during a time when Mexicans were experiencing utter disillusionment with the PRI government. The work also serves to introduce a new sort of genre, one which crosses the boundaries of fiction and nonfiction. It is Elena Poniatowska's "testimonial novel," *Hasta no verte Jesús mío.*

The chapter is entitled, "Undoing the Grand Metropolis, Privileging the Periphery: Mexican City and Countryside in Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío."* In it, I examine the way in which the disillusionment with the revolution and the current government

parallel the geographic identity and life trajectory of the novel's narrator and protagonist, Jesusa. Jesusa's story and situation undermine the PRI government's supposed achievements. Throughout her life she becomes estranged from the countryside and entrenched in Mexico City, a place that she views as overly modern and materialistic. The city appears in this novel as a place that lacks both culture and tradition, while her life as an errant revolutionary is presented as far superior. It emphasizes the feelings of isolation and abandonment of city life as opposed to that of the countryside, thus prioritizing what had been considered a peripheral and unimportant space: rural Mexico.

In this chapter, I utilize John Beverley's ideas on the genre of *testimonio*, which he claims is one that compels the reader to act, since the voice of the subaltern does not generally fit with nationalist projects. I also discuss the moment of publication: the work appears after the tragic Tlatelolco massacre, an event that inspired a general feeling of despair in Mexican society. I hope to demonstrate that Jesusa's story speaks to the feelings of disillusionment of the time by undermining all of the revolution's ideals: education, democracy, social and gender equality, and national unity are all presented as utter failures through the narrative of Jesusa's life.

Project Goals

Through this project, I hope to illuminate the contribution of these four works to the idea of environment and its way of shaping identity, at a time when many Mexicans were distancing themselves from rural life at a staggering rate: in the 1920s, the urban to rural population in Mexico was 30% to 70%, whereas in the 1950s this ratio shifted to 43% to 57% (Hadatty Mora 252). In different ways, each work demonstrates how a society or an artist can imbue a place with different meanings, impregnating a space with a certain significance for purposes of power, vindication, or social critique. I hope this dissertation, through the study of these four works and

their different depictions of Mexican land, city, and identity, will expose the ways that literature and film can question, manipulate, and play with mainstream ideas of rural and urban spaces, land ownership and national identity.

Chapter One: Homeland Lost: Hegemony, Nostalgia, and Mexicanness in *María Candelaria*

María Candelaria (1943) is a film that radiates with the hegemonic ideology of the historical moment in which it first appeared. The film's central themes affirm the Mexican revolutionary government's ideals of *indigenismo, mexicanidad,* and land reform in an obvious way. Yet, in spite of this, it does not feel like a prosaic piece of propaganda, but instead an aesthetic masterpiece. There is something about the film that draws the viewer in. Beautifully photographed, the story is touching and captivating, with its star-crossed lovers who tragically never find the happiness for which they yearn in a society full of ignorance and hate. The film received international recognition, and won two prizes at the Cannes Film Festival in 1946. To this day, Fernández's film is revered as a classic of Mexican cinema. In this chapter, I argue that this enduring legacy is due to the ideas at the moment of the film's release on Mexican national identity, the geographic landscape, and nostalgia.

Before advancing any further, let us first examine the critical dialogue up to this point on *María Candelaria.* Thus far, critics have focused on ideas of gender and the (mostly sexist) representation of women, race and the (mostly racist) depiction of indigenous peoples, as well as the repressive and controlling role of the revolutionary government in the production of the film. While various critics have commented on Fernández's attempts to define *mexicanidad,* to my knowledge, none have tied this attempt to define a nation culturally to the role of landscape and nostalgia in the film's creation of identity.

Laura Podalsky's 1993 article discusses the film's creation of national identity through the use of melodrama and ambiguity. She explains that in Mexican films of the 1940s, "melodrama had a privileged role in creating the new face of the nation" (59). Podalsky argues that *María Candelaria* represents the indigenous characters ambiguously. For example, since we

are never allowed to see the painter's representation of María, this frustrates the viewer's desire to understand Mexico as a unified nation, and the indigenous people as national symbol. For Podalsky, this demonstrates that although Fernández's use of melodrama shapes the face of the nation, it also problematizes it as well. Podalsky's article brings up a valid point, yet there are various other examples of Indians portrayed as types representing the nation. For instance, María and Lorenzo could not be more emblematic of one's stereotype of an indigenous person: they wear traditional clothing, live in a hut, grind their own corn, and live off the land. Despite the problem of ambiguous representation described by Podalsky, I still maintain that the film also affirms the Indian as a type representative of Mexicanness.

Joanne Hershfield's 1996 book *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Women* provides a fascinating chapter in which she analyzes *María Candelaria* and another well-known Fernández film, *Río Escondido* (1948). She explains that the representation of women in these films, and the female figure in general, is used to define national identity. She argues that the films are extremely sexist and objectify women for purposes of defining the national identity: "Although supposedly trying to find a place for Mexican woman in the discourse of national identity, Fernández's films instead reinforced women's confined position within the limits of Mexican patriarchy without revealing the social constraints that circumscribed these limits" (52).

Julia Tuñón has written extensively on Fernández's films and cultural influence. One particular article is especially illuminating: "Femininity, *Indigenismo,* and Nation: Film Representation by Emilio 'El Indio' Fernández" (2006). Here Tuñón discusses the nation-building project of the Mexican government, and how Fernández's film submitted to these needs. She describes the depiction of both the indigenous and female characters, and observes the racist and sexist desire to turn both Mexican women and Indians into a national symbol: by turning

them into the Other, Fernández's film was able to create of them a cultural symbol. In this article, Tuñón touches on the connection of the characters to the land. However, her interpretation of the characters' connection to the land is more pessimistic than mine: she argues that by portraying María and Lorenzo as connected to nature, Fernández perpetuates a stereotype of the connection of Indians and women to nature, one which deems these two groups as less enlightened, and more beastly. This argument has its strength, but I differ with Tuñón in that I also observe a sense of nostalgia and love for land lost in the film—not simply an unconscious desire to label women and the indigenous as Other.

Ela Molina de Morelock's 2007 study describes the sexist representation of women in Fernández's film: María's character is a victim, ignorant, pure, and weak. She remarks that the characters who do not exhibit these characteristics in the film are villainized.

Dolores Tierney's 2007 book *Emilio Fernández: Pictures in the Margins* includes an analysis of the film in which she examines Fernández's take on the genre of *indigenismo* and its significance in the context of the post-revolutionary society. She argues that his portrayal of indigenous people "[embodies] the ideals of cultural nationalism and its sense of *'lo mexicano'*" (80). She also argues, however, that it is not an entirely nationalistic film, since Fernández incorporates Hollywood stylistic moves, especially imitating the style of director Sergei Eisenstein. For Tierney, it's as if Fernández were viewing Mexican culture as an outsider (82). In addition, Tierney analyzes the representation of race in the film, explaining that the film idealizes "whitening" in its utilization of whiter skinned actors for the lead indigenous roles: the two characters who play noble and idealized Indians, are not in reality indigenous.

Dora Ramírez-Dhoore's 2014 study analyzes the life of actress Dolores del Río (who plays the part of María Candelaria) and her struggle with patriarchy as a female actress. Ramírez

Dhoore suggests that del Río subverts society's expectations of her by playing roles that incarnate both a *Malinche* and a *Virgen de Guadalupe*, including that of *María Candelaria.*

Given what critics have studied on *María Candelaria,* the present study hopes to add that the film's representation of the natural world, nostalgia for it among the Mexican people of the moment, and it's relation to the film's creation of Mexican national identity all contribute to its enduring legacy.

I. *María Candelaria* and the PRI Hegemony

Directed by Emilio "El Indio" Fernández and photographed by Gabriel Figueroa, *María Candelaria* recounts the tragic story of the martyrdom of the eponymous indigenous woman who lives in Xochimilco in 1909, just before the beginning of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). The revolution was an event that would impact Mexican society, culture, and politics for the rest of the century, and even continues to have repercussions to this day. To situate the film immediately before the revolution was partly in order to show the way things were before all of the change brought about by the war, and to justify a need for revolution through the representation of a corrupt pre-revolutionary society.

At the moment when Fernández's film appeared in 1943, the Mexican government was ruled by President Miguel Ávila Camacho, in the midst of what was to be a 70-year rule of the political party that was at the time called the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM). After his term as president, Plutarco Elías Calles created the party in 1929. The party's name would be changed to the more well-known title of Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) at the beginning of Miguel Alemán's presidency in 1946. Ávila Camacho's administration promoted moderation and ideological unity in place of the more radical actions of his predecessor, Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), who put into play the revolution's ideals in a way more dramatic than his

predecessors: he re-distributed 18 million hectares of land through the *ejido* system[1] and made the controversial decision to nationalize the oil industry.

Antonio Gramsci famously defined the idea of hegemony in his prison letters, explaining that the state can never rule by force alone, "but relies on a combination of coercion and consent" (1136). In order to win the consent of the masses, the state spreads its idea of hegemony, what it wishes its populace to believe in order to be docile citizens. The state uses societal forces to impose hegemony, such as schools, prisons, churches, and popular culture, including cinematic productions. For Gramsci, the populace needs to generally believe in a benevolent state, so that the state can exert power without the threat of opposition. For this reason, the state exercises the implementation of hegemony, or ideological control.

In the context of Ávila Camacho's government, the state desired to send the hegemonic message that the ideals of the revolution were still being fulfilled, even while the government turned in a more moderate, business-oriented direction, beginning the era which later was called "The Mexican Miracle." Ávila Camacho's presidency marked the beginning of a contradictory time in Mexico: these were years of urbanization, with the large-scale creation of highways, railways, and the skyscrapers of the big cities, but *jefes políticos* continued to dominate the rural villages, making it difficult for progress to occur outside of urban spaces (Joseph & Buchenau 143). The gap between rich and poor would continue to widen as the years of the "Miracle" went on.

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[1] *Ejidos* are communal landholdings expropriated for the use of peasants and indigenous peoples, yet they still technically were owned by the state, meaning that the peasants continued to be landless. Krauze explains their shortcomings: "The *ejiditario* could not legally sell, mortgage, rent, or traffic in any way with his land. If he stopped cultivating it for two years, he would lose it. His fate rested in the hands of the Ejidal Committee, which could take his allotment of land away at any moment, even by inventing an accusation. The *ejido* had freed the peon from the hacienda, but its magnanimous protective spirit had reproduced, in practice, the same paradoxical inequalities that existed in the colonial *Leyes de Indias"* (515).

During this time, Ávila Camacho's administration needed a means to maintain hegemonic control and stability. One way he chose to do this was through the censorship and governmental pressures on the film industry. Through the incorporation of *indigenismo, muralismo* and the idealization of the land, *María Candelaria* legitimizes the state's claims to be a government true to the original ideals of the revolution government, even as these ideals lost their impact, and the Church and big business regained power.

The Role of Cinema in the "Golden Age"

In order to understand how the revolutionary government's ideological agenda plays a role in Fernández's film, it will help to examine the role and legacy of Mexican cinema of the time. The years of approximately 1936-1956 have been labeled the "Golden Age" of Mexican Cinema. Carlos Monsiváis describes the profound significance of the films of the Golden Age for Mexican audiences:

> un público se sorprende, al compartir entusiasmos y catarsis, integrado a una nación. El modelo de realidad social y psicológica propuesto por el cine se va transmutando y, de pronto y a su manera, es ya la realidad misma: los ídolos se tornan los arquetipos que una avidez masiva absorberá y reproducirá: se inventan y petrifican lenguajes y 'reacciones instintivas'. Clásicamente, el cine mexicano--que durante esa etapa sojuzga y devasta los mercados nacionales y de habla hispana--se manifiesta como *way of life,* puerta de acceso no al arte o al entretenimiento sino a los moldes vitales, a la posible variedad o uniformidad de los comportamientos.[2] (1048)

[2] "a public is surprised, upon sharing enthusiasms and catharsis, into integration into a nation. The model of social and psychological reality proposed by the cinema becomes transfigured, and suddenly and in its own way, is now reality itself: the idols become the archetypes that greedy mass will absorb and reproduce: languages and 'instinctive reactions' are invented and solidified. Classically, Mexican cinema—that during that time conquered and devastated the national and Spanish-speaking markets—presents itself as a way of life, an entryway not into art or entertainment but rather to the vital molds, to the possible variety or uniformity of behavior" (translation is mine).

During this time, Mexicans tended to look to stars such as Dolores del Río and Pedro Armendáriz not only as actors, but also as symbols of an identity that perhaps they felt they were beginning to lose in the fast-paced nature of city life and modernization. Monsiváis explains, "It is not really a 'Golden Age' of film, but of a public that, among other things, trusts that these idols will clarify how to manage the new forms of life, orienting them in the vertigo of transformations" (Quoted in Mraz 120). The "mexicanness" movement was not only part of a government effort to create an arbitrary sense of unity, but also a movement of the Mexican people themselves to grapple with a rapidly modernizing, urbanizing society.

María Candelaria **and the Ideals of the Revolution**

María Candelaria is a film in alignment with the stated goals of the revolution. It is pro-indigenous, against corruption, demonstrates the need for state leadership instead of the Church, and presents the idea of the land as something that should be in the hands of all citizens, not just an elite few. A brief summary of the film's plot will help demonstrate how some of these ideals appear in it: In *María Candelaria,* the indigenous characters, María Candelaria and her fiancé, Lorenzo Rafael (played by Dolores del Río and Pedro Armendáriz, respectively), are idealized indigenous types who live in poverty, demonstrating their need for justice in an unequal society. Neither character has any faults; their sufferings are purely the result of external societal forces. For example, the evil village general store owner/money-lender*,* don Damián (played by Miguel Inclán) refuses their flowers and vegetables as payment for the debt they owe him. He then refuses to distribute them the quinine to which they are entitled when María gets sick. As a result, Lorenzo Rafael has no choice but to steal from don Damián's general store. Lorenzo Rafael is thrown into prison for his crime, so María has no choice but to pose as a model for the bourgeois painter so that he will help her bail Lorenzo out. After painting her face, he tells her

wants to paint her nude, but she refuses, scandalized. Another indigenous woman poses in her stead. The resultant painting features María's face and the other woman's naked body. At the end of the film, María is stoned to death, because the villagers erroneously believe that she has posed nude and disgraced their community. María and Lorenzo are peaceful, land-loving Indians who just want to get married, live off the land, and be happy together. Instead, unjust societal forces frustrate their desires.

Precursors to *María Candelaria*

It is important to recognize the ideas and precursors that influenced Fernández's aesthetic representation of pre-Revolutionary Mexico. First of all, the film's idealized picture of indigenous people is in line with the *indigenismo* movement. This movement had its apogee in Latin American literature in the 1920s and 1930s and its representations in Mexico responded to a desire immediately after the revolution to promote the rights of the subjugated indigenous people. In Latin America, *indigenismo* appeared in works which told stories that demonstrated a desparate need for social justice for the indigenous peoples of Latin America because of the abuse and injustice they suffer under the hand of their Creole countrymen. Two of the most distinctive novels that demonstrate this trend are Bolivian Alcides Arguedas' *Raza de bronce* (1919) and the Ecuadorian Jorge Icaza's *Huasipungo* (1934). Fernández, being of indigenous ancestry himself from his mother, a Kickapoo Indian, was deeply influenced by the *indigenismo* movement when he began working in film in the 1930s (Tunón, "Femininity…" 81).

Most of the decade of the 1930s was defined by the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), a leader whom Fernández deeply admired. Tuñón describes the decade as follows: "*indigenismo* […] and nationalism flourished, popular education was reconceived and promoted as an instrument for social change, and the official recognition of strikes and other social

demands served to strengthen the state" ("Emilio…" 187). Using the ideals of *indigenismo,* then, helped to understand what it meant to be Mexican: the indigenous people became a symbol for understanding an arbitrary Mexican identity, or what many were calling, *la mexicanidad*. For Fernández, Tuñón explains, "*Indigenismo* was central to his cinematic practice. He proposed to establish a continuity between the idols of pre-Hispanic cultures and the nobility of contemporary Indians" (Tuñón, "Emilio…" 187).

The muralist movement is another significant influence on Fernández's film, and, like *indigenismo,* celebrates the ideals of the revolution. The movement began in the 1920s, but remained strong in the 1930s and promoted the idea that "an integrated artistic practice could reveal the essence and spirit of the people" (Tuñón, "Emilio…" 179). The movement began in part with the support of intellectual and politician José Vasconcelos's movement for national identity, and in 1923, a group of muralists and other artists signed a manifesto that "validated popular art as a manifestation of the national spirit, indigenous traditions as its quintessence and proposed a monumental art of 'public utility'" (Tuñón, "Between…," 57). The muralist movement, then, represents a major precursor for *María Candelaria.* Gabriel Figueroa, the film's director of photography, even confessed that the muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, one of *los tres Grandes* of muralism, was the greatest inspiration for his art (Mraz 111).

In particular, the paintings and murals of Diego Rivera (1886-1957), share salient visual characteristics with *María Candelaria.* Indeed, the first scenes of one of Fernández's later films, *Río escondido* (1947), include extensive shots of Rivera's mural that depicts Mexican history inside Mexico City's National Palace. Rivera's work tended to idealize the peasant and indigenous Mexicans and vilify the European and Spanish aspects of Mexican identity. As Jean Franco observes, Rivera's murals expressed Mexican identity, "in the use of Mexican folk-motif,

in their background of Mexican fruits and flowers, in the depiction of scenes from national life, and even […] in the revival of ancient pre-Columban [*sic*] techniques" (88). In part due to Rivera's iconic representations of Mexican nationalism in his work, Mexican Indians began to appear increasingly in relation to the land and nature of their surroundings: Franco again explains, "A new iconography appeared, together with an idealization of Indians and peasants who, in Rivera's murals, were associated with flowers, fruit, earth and the rhythms of nature" (89).

When viewing *María Candelaria,* one gets the sense that the scenes and characters themselves stepped off of one of Rivera's murals and hopped onto the screen. For instance, when María and Lorenzo go to the city, they carry enormous baskets on their backs, full of white poppies, an image which is especially reminiscent of Rivera's painting *El vendedor de alcatraces* (1941) (Figures 1A and 1B) in which an indigenous woman appears bent under the weight of a large basket of white lilies. Her large bare feet seem to come out of the basket itself, an image that suggests that the woman and her flowers are fused together as one entity. The painting portrays the indigenous woman as fused with nature, a motif also prevalent throughout *María Candelaria*. What's more, in Rivera's painting, a faceless man appears behind the woman, seeming to weigh down the basket even further, which could represent the history of oppression of Mexican Indians, a theme also largely present in Fernández's film. The painting's title uses the masculine "El vendedor," meaning that the salesperson was male: the woman bearing the flowers' burden will receive none of the benefits of their sale. Also important to the similar image in the film (Fig. 1B), the bourgeois painter is admiring María's beauty in that moment, and would begin to take an interest in her as piece of art, an interest that would prove fatal, as the painting leads to her stoning at the end of the film.

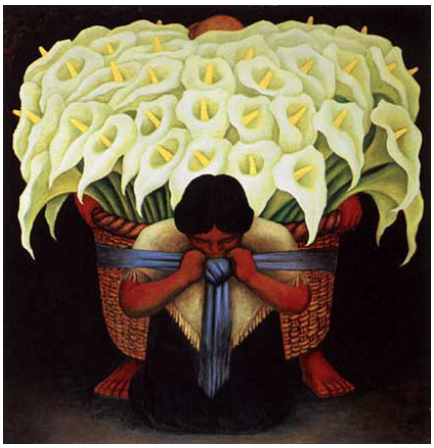

Fig 1A. “El vendedor de alcatraces” (1941) by Diego Rivera (courtesy mexicoart.org)

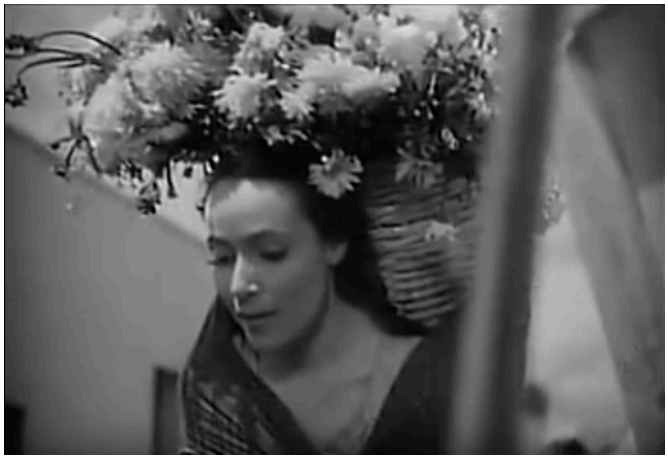

Figure 1B. A similar image in *María Candelaria*

Samuel Ramos’s *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934) is perhaps the first major intellectual post-revolutionary effort at defining *mexicanidad,* an effort that would continue for decades after the revolution. In his book, Ramos describes various aspects of Mexican history and society—the Mexican tendency to imitate Europe in the 19th century, different Mexican types (bourgeois, rural), Mexicans’ collective inferiority complex, political movements, etc.—in an effort to narrow down what it means to be Mexican. As we have seen, this effort to define a nation would continue with the creation of iconic murals, the *indigenismo* movement, and the government’s efforts to create unity and compliance among the populace through film and other popular culture. As Tierney explains, “[Fernández] benefitted from huge Government sponsorship designed to freeze and institutionalize an ideological image of the country and its revolution” (4). Thus, *María Candelaria* forms a part of this effort, and does so by creating a visual narrative of a couple who falls victim to the injustice of their society, suggesting that for Fernández, being Mexican means fighting for the subaltern groups and putting an end to the too-powerful system that fails to address the needs of the lower class.

This motif of the need for justice through land reform is one of the most important revolutionary ideals, as the controversial Article 27 from the 1917 constitution stipulates, "Pertenecen a la nación las tierras, aguas y recursos naturales comprendidas dentro de los límites del territorio nacional, ya sea debajo o encima de la tierra. Regula el manejo de las tierras y recursos de la Nación."[3] In other words, as a result of the revolution, the nation would own all the land and natural resources, and would do with them as it saw fit. In an ideal world, this would mean justice in land repartition, and the peasant and indigenous groups would finally receive some sort of justice in land ownership. The reality was not so idealistic.

Through the representation of the shopkeeper, Don Damián, the viewer encounters the prerevolutionary problem of disrespect and ignorance about matters of the natural world. His scorn for the land and its produce demonstrates a need for change in Mexican society. For instance, he is representative of a capitalist mindset, demonstrating a lack of care for anything besides cash money. He refuses to accept any payment for the paltry 15 pesos and 8 cents that María owes him except for paper money: no produce, no flowers—only money. What's more, when Lorenzo Rafael robs him for the medicine to save María's life, he seeks revenge by coldly murdering María's beloved piglet, an animal symbolic of the connection between human and nature since, throughout the film, María treats the piglet like her own child, and in one scene it even peacefully snoozes in her arms. This relationship demonstrates a unity of human and natural realms, in which a human nurtures the natural creature, as a mother would her infant child. Thus, Damián's disrespect for the indigenous people, and, by way of their connectedness, disrespect toward the land and natural world, demonstrates a refusal to acknowledge the land's natural benefits cultivated by the idealized indigenous couple. The fact that the film takes place

[3] "The property of all land and water within the national territory is originally owned by the Nation, who has the right to transfer this ownership to particulars. Hence, private property is a privilege created by the Nation" (Translated by Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Mexico#Article_27 4 April 2016).

in 1909 suggests that the regime of domination by corrupt businessmen like Damián would end, if only the revolution would finally arrive. In this way, the film legitimizes the Ávila Camacho government, which pretends to comply with the revolution's ideals. The film enforces hegemonic ideology through the polarized portrayal of the evil Damían and the pure and good indigenous couple. It inspires in the viewer a need for change, thus promoting a reverent acquiescence to a false sense of national identity that would inspire submission to the State.

"The Gentleman President" and a False Sense of Unity

Under Ávila Camacho, as with most of the post-revolutionary leaders, the government wanted to feign loyalty to the revolutionary ideal of land reform without backing it up with any substantial action. Ceri Higgins explains this change and how it played out in Mexican cinematic landscapes:

> los cambios en la reforma de la tierra, que eran fundamentales para la Revolución mexicana, fueron socavados por la tendencia cada vez mayor hacia un sistema capitalista y una sociedad urbana de consumo. Sin embargo, las películas de ese periodo reforzaron el vínculo intrínseco entre la identidad popular y la tierra, como algo fundamental para la identidad nacional. Por consiguiente, la investigación del paisaje cinemático revela una ideología formada dentro de una paradoja entre la realidad económica y social del espacio rural mexicano y la realidad imaginada de la identidad nacional mexicana.[4] (153)

María Candelaria, set in 1909, presents the sort of cultural iconography that the government needed, since it vilifies pre-revolutionary Mexico, and paints the picture that

[4] "the changes in land reform, that were fundamental for the Mexican Revolution, were undermined by the ever-increasing tendency toward a capitalist system and an urban society of consumerism. However, the films from this period reinforce the intrinsic tie between popular identity and the land, as something fundamental for national identity. As a result, the study of the cinematic landscape reveals an ideology formed within a paradox between the economic and social reality of Mexican rural space and the imagined reality of Mexican national identity" (translation is mine).

contemporary Mexican society was much improved since the disastrous Porfirian days. However, things were not so perfect in reality. Under President Ávila Camacho, "Mexico was able to take advantage of the world war to promote its own economic growth. Ávila Camacho and his successors put aside the social issues and concerns of Cardenismo that had nourished Emilio Fernández" (Tuñón, "Emilio…" 183). Unfortunately, Fernández's ideals that paint a previous era as inferior would become the stuff of hegemony for the current one: viewers watching his films would imagine that things were improved, even as the move toward social justice began to slow. Monsiváis explains, "with Avila Camacho, the bourgeoisie abandoned their fear of socialism and allowed itself to be convinced by Emilio Fernández, in other words, the Revolution has become an extension of postcards" (Qtd. in Tuñón, "Emilio…" 183).

Important also to Ávila Camacho's ideology was the moderation of what had been harsh anti-clericalism. The revolution's ideals were resolutely anti-clerical. Among other things, the constitution of 1917 prohibited the Church to have a role in primary education, forbade public worship outside of the confines of the Church, and restricted the Church's rights to own property. However, in what was perhaps another effort to create national unity, Ávila Camacho publically admitted to being Catholic, aiding in the reconciliation of Church and state. In Mexico, there had been a long and violent history of division between these two groups. Under President Calles (1924-1928), for example, the State closed Church schools, expelled foreign priests, punished religious teaching and worship, and even suspended masses (Krauze 420; 421). This culminated in an armed rebellion of the peasants, known as the Cristero Wars (1926-1929), which resulted in the deaths of some 70,000 people, and the emigration to the United States of 450,000 people (Krauze 423). Ávila Camacho's olive branch to the Church promoted economic

growth, but diminished this important aspect of the revolution's ideals, inspiring the criticism of intellectuals.

María Candelaria is not anti-clerical, but doesn't give the Church a resounding endorsement either. In this way, it mirrors Ávila Camacho's desire to let go of the staunch anti-clericalism of his predecessors, without being complete untrue to the revolution. The representation of the Church in the film is relatively neutral: the village priest is portrayed as desirous of assisting María and Lorenzo, but ultimately powerless in his endeavors. His character is feminized: with his high-pitched voice, fair skin, and long, flowing robes, he doesn't seem to be the answer to María and Lorenzo's problems. At the same time, he does manage to come to their aid at one important moment: the couple brings their piglet to be blessed at the church, but the villagers want to force them away from the service. The priest's ardent speech moves his listeners to adopt a peaceful attitude and as a result, María and Lorenzo are able to go home unscathed.

The particular scene in which this occurs deserves further analysis: it opens with a close-up of the energetically ringing church bells, and broadens to show a sea of peasants bringing their animals for the church's blessing. As the flower-adorned crowd congregates, the loud beating of tribal drums begins to overtake the sound of the bells; these drums and their incessant noise appear to be symbolic of the Church's inability to squelch what we will soon realize is the ignorance of the indigenous villagers.[5] The villagers see that María is present, declare her a bad

[5] There are two types of indigenous representation present in this film, represented by two different groups. The first is that of the idealized, "noble savage," to use a term from Hayden White, embodied in the characters of Lorenzo Rafael and María Candelaria. They are idealized, innocent, and noble. The second is the collective group of indigenous in the village of Xochimilco, who, if we continue with the ideas of Hayden White, would embody the "Wild Man" stereotype. They are ignorant, raucous, violent, and animal-like. Their brutish ignorance leads to the undeserved stoning of María at the close of the film. María and Lorenzo represent the kind of *mestizo* ideal that the ideal of Mexicanness would supposedly incarnate: mixing the stereotypical civilization of the European ideals with the stereotypical purity and cultural richness of the indigenous tradition.

omen for their blessings and want to kick her out. They approach her ominously, but the priest intervenes just in time, and in passionate remonstrance gives the following speech:

> Ésta es la casa de Dios. Y al que en ella ofenda a un hermano, es como si escupiera en el agua bendita o pisoteara a las alas de los ángeles. Ustedes acusan a esta criatura, y ¿quién los acusa a ustedes? Porque ustedes, ¡todos ustedes! asesinaron a la madre de María Candelaria, acusándola de haber traído la vergüenza al pueblo por su mala conducta. Aquella pobre mujer pecó sí, pero acuérdense de que Dios nuestro Señor castiga y de que todos ustedes tienen hijos. Todos conocimos a la madre de esta criatura y su historia debe dolernos profundamente porque con todas sus faltas, pecadora y todo lo que ustedes quieran, ya está juzgada por Dios, y nadie tiene derecho de agraviar a su hija que desde hace tantos años sufre en silencio y en humillación tan grande. ¡Una madre es una madre! Y yo quiero que todos ustedes guarden respeto para la de María Candelaria.[6]

For a brief moment, the priest's speech impacts the village: one Indian woman cries like a child at his remonstrance. However, immediately afterwards, don Damián appears and turns the scene into utter chaos by unceremoniously throwing one of the villager's animal. The drums begin again, no bells now. He tries to take María's piglet as payment, but the priest intervenes, and Damián is stopped, but only temporarily. At the end of the film, María is murdered, solidifying the fact that the church does not have sufficient control over the uneducated masses, hence justifying the need for a new ruling order. The return of the loud drums symbolically

[6] "This is the house of God. If anyone offends a brother or sister in it, it's as if he spat in the holy water or stepped on the wings of the angels. You all accuse this poor girl and who accuses you? Because you—all of you! —killed the mother of María Candelaria, accusing her of having brought shame to the village because of her bad behavior. That poor woman sinned, yes, but remember that God our Lord punishes, and that all of you have children. We all knew the mother of this poor girl and her story should sadden us profoundly because, with all of her faults, a sinner and whatever else you want to call her, God has already judged her, and no one has the right to disrespect her daughter who for so many years has suffered in silence and great humiliation. A mother is a mother! And I want you all to show respect for the mother of María Candelaria" (translation is mine).

emphasizes the fact that tribalism and the corruption of Damián cannot be conquered by the Church, but only temporarily stifled.

Mario Vargas Llosa labeled the years of 1940 to 1968 as the era of "The Perfect Dictatorship" in Mexico because the political system of the PRI appeared to be a democracy but essentially functioned as a dictatorship. He explains:

> México es la dictadura perfecta. La dictadura perfecta no es el comunismo. No es la URSS. No es Fidel Castro. La dictadura perfecta es México. […] Yo no creo que haya en América Latina ningún caso de sistema de dictadura que haya reclutado tan eficientemente al medio intelectual, sobornándole de una manera muy sutil.[7] ("Vargas Llosa…")

Many intellectuals who were active during these years considered that the revolution's ideals were dead, most notably Daniel Cosío Villegas. In his 1947 essay, "La Crisis de México," he claims that the State had basically failed in achieving its revolutionary goals of agrarian reform with its movement to the right (Tierney 148). However, most intellectuals were not as outspoken as Cosío Villegas, and many were supported economically by the government, serving in roles as diplomats or other government positions, such as José Vasconcelos, Agustín Yáñez, Rosario Castellanos, Octavio Paz, and Alfonso Reyes, to name a few. Thus, the PRI government of the 1940s succeeded in keeping many intellectuals on its side, despite an ever-growing disappearance of the revolution's ideals.

Fernández's film demonstrates this need for a docile intellectual who would submit to hegemonic ideals through its representation of the painter from Mexico City. From the present

[7] "Mexico is the perfect dictatorship. The perfect dictatorship is not communism. Not the USSR. Not Fidel Castro. The perfect dictatorship is Mexico. […] I don't think that in Latin America there has ever been such a case of a dictatorship system that has recruited the intellectual class so efficiently, bribing it in a very subtle way" (translation is mine).

(presumably 1943), this painter sadly recounts the story of María Candelaria to an attractive young reporter. We find out from his recollections of the 1909 story that he had meant well, but his flaw was that he had been oblivious to indigenous customs and practices, and because of this he ultimately played a role in María's tragic downfall. The painter's 1909 self was too Europeanized: he wanted to paint María completely nude, misunderstanding how much this would go against her indigenous and conservative Mexican values. He only succeeded in painting her face, since she was scandalized when he asked her to take her clothes off to model the rest of her body. Another indigenous woman posed in her stead, and when a villager from Xochimilco happened to see the painting later on, she told the rest of the villagers, and they proceeded to stone María to death for her assumed transgression. At its commencement, the film shows the painter's current day self (post-revolution). Judging from his obvious remorse about the past, it is obvious that María's death has served to convert him from a culturally ignorant *fuereño* ("outsider") to an insider, one who holds a deeper appreciation for indigenous culture, since he feels that María represents something within all people. He refuses to ever sell the painting of María Candelaria, demonstrating a disgust for the use of indigenous art and culture for material gain. He explains to the reporter, "Usted sabe que los pintores soñamos siempre con encontrar la materialización de lo poco o mucho que llevamos dentro. Por cierto que casi nadie lo encuentra. Yo sí tuve el privilegio de encontrarlo, que más vale que nunca lo hubiera encontrado."[8] The film uses the technique of flashback to demonstrate the painter's change of heart: it begins in the present day (1943) in his studio, full of Aztec-style relics and typically

[8] "You know that we painters always dream of finding the materialization of even a little of what we carry within ourselves. Of course almost no one finds this. I did in fact have the privilege of finding it, but it would have been better had I never found it" (Translation is mine).

Mexican paintings, and flashes back to María Candelaria's home on the *chinampa*[9], as the painter recounts her sad history to the curious reporter. His present self is an idealized post-revolutionary self, not eager for money or fame, since he feels remorse for having played a part in María's death. This ideal self is more enlightened, because he appreciates the *mexicanidad* movement, describing María to a reporter as "una india de pura raza *mexicana*"[10] (emphasis added), demonstrating the idea that for Fernández there aren't Aztecs, Mayas, and Yaquis, but instead the word "Mexican" describes a new, single race, arbitrarily uniting the many different indigenous groups that form Mexico's society. Thus, the painter represents the two selves of the Mexican intellectual. The pre-Revolutionary Mexican intellectual was exploitative and overly Europeanized. His current day (post-Revolutionary self) has learned through María's tragedy to become celebratory of all things Mexican and identifies deeply with the indigenous heritage as embodied in María. This representation promotes the idea of an intellectual class that would acquiesce to Ávila Camacho's ideal of national unity.

Does *María Candelaria* Subtly Undermine the Government?

Some critics argue that *María Candelaria* and the majority of Fernández's films subtly undermine the revolutionary government. Julia Tuñón, for example, explains that through certain inconsistencies that don't fit with the revolutionary government's ideology, Fernández allows other meanings to seep through in his films ("Femininity…" 81). Dolores Tierney concurs:

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[9] *Chinampas* are small gardens that formed an essential part of the indigenous agricultural tradition in Mexico. Mark Sutton describes them as follows: "The classic form of chinampa was constructed within a lake. First, long stakes were driven into the lake bottom to create a "form." Soil from the lake bottom was then dredged up and piled within the stakes. Layers of different types of soil were placed upon one another until the field had been raised up above the level of the lake. Once formed, willow trees were planted along the edges of the chinampa to help control erosion. Crops could then be planted. New soil was constantly dredged up and added to the chinampa, maintaining its fertility and productivity. As it was surrounded by water, the chinampa was self-irrigating, with the different layers of soil serving the purpose of drawing water to the plant roots" (217). Today the *chinampas* of Xochimilco, where the film takes place, are disappearing because of over-drainage due to the high need for water in a densely populated Mexico City.

[10] "an Indian woman of pure *Mexican* race" (translation is mine).

"Fernández's oeuvre is not the coherent depiction of the institutionalized Revolution's cultural nationalism that traditional scholarship perceives it to be, but instead a fissured, contradictory text" (x). Other critics state that Fernández's films affirm the Mexican government's nationalist agenda to eradicate any differing ideologies or classes except that of a single unified vision of what it means to be Mexican (Mraz 107). I would take a stance that goes between these two schools of interpretation: the counterhegemonic "incongruities" are too subtle to attract the attention of an average viewer, who would be watching the film in a single sitting in a theatre, and wouldn't have the luxury of pausing, rewinding, and poring over the counter-ideological subtleties that may or may not appear within. On the other hand, if a film like *Maria Candelaria* consisted of pure PRI propaganda, it would be dry and unappealing, and would never achieve the enduring legacy and international acclaim that it has enjoyed.

II. *María Candelaria*'s Enduring Legacy

To this day, *Mariá Candelaria* maintains this enduring legacy for many reasons: The film appeared at an time in Mexican history when it was needed politically and emotionally, it speaks to unconscious racist impulses in the viewers, and it addresses the need for national identity through its incorporation of "Mexican Masks" and other nationally unifying symbols. Most importantly, however, the film appeals to a deep-seated nostalgia for a lost rural homeland, both in the time of its release, as well as for those who view it in today's ever-increasingly globalized and transient society.

The first scene in which we meet María Candelaria's character begins with a screen-filled shot of enormous clusters of flowers. She lives along a gently flowing river, and carries around with her an adorable baby piglet, which is sleeping in her arms. She lives simply, yet is very beautiful: barefoot, with her hair tied in two long braids; she happily inhales the scent from the

flowers growing around her hut. An abundance of corn grows nearby. There are expansive, clear skies, speckled with white, puffy clouds. However, the oppressive forces of capitalist society quickly push this poor indigenous woman to become estranged from her land. In the next moment, a peasant interrupts her peaceful reverie to tell her that she owes don Damián 15 pesos and 8 cents and that he will take her piglet if she doesn't pay soon. Everything imaginable goes wrong as the plot unwinds: María's piglet is shot dead by don Damián, her fiancée is thrown into prison, and she is stoned to death by the irate villagers. The idyllic representation of María and her deep connection to her geographic landscape, combined with her society's efforts to uproot her from her native land, eventually murdering her, inspire a sense of indignation in the viewer: why should something so perfect be undone? Why doesn't someone make things right? It also inspires longing and nostalgia in a populace undergoing a mass uprooting to the big cities, and even away from their country.

Social Conditions of the 1940s: Rapid Urbanization and the "Mexican Miracle"

When *María Candelaria* first appeared in 1943, many Mexicans found themselves uprooted and far from their childhood homes. In 1942, for instance, 300,000 Mexicans moved to the United States to help with the lack of agricultural labor in the U.S. due to American war involvement. As a result, many Mexicans watched Fernández's films from afar in big cities like Los Angeles. During the years of 1940 to 1950, Mexico underwent a process of massive urbanization: the population of Mexico City grew by a staggering 6 per cent per annum. When *María Candelaria* appeared, it was at a time when Mexico City, which is now the largest metropolitan area in the Western hemisphere, was growing at an accelerated rate, and the villages of Mexico were being abandoned due to poverty and the attraction of a modern and faster-paced city life. Even Emilio Fernández himself can be included among the throngs of

people living away from their homelands in urbanized centers. Born and raised in a small town in the Northern state of Coahuila, Mexico, he spent much of the 1930s working in Hollywood, and the 1940s in Mexico City. At the time when he filmed *María Candelaria,* his homeland in Northern rural Mexico was a place of the distant past.

The rapid population growth in urban environments, along with the diminishment of rural populations changed the way people perceived the countryside and rural life at this time. Tuñón explains how Mexican perceptions of the environment were changing in the 1940s: "En la ciudad la vida rural se mira como algo remoto: para muchos es ya el origen de la familia, el pasado, más que el presente o el futuro"[11] ("Femininity…" 45). Rural environments represented the stuff of nostalgia, and *María Candelaria* speaks many viewers' contradictory feelings: they longed for homeland, but also knew they had better stay in the city, where there were more opportunities. As Tuñón observes, "In his films, Fernández unconsciously represented the problem of the transition from a traditional communitarian social model to an individualistic modern world" ("Emilio…" 189).

Nostalgia for Homeland

In 1688, Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer first defined the term nostalgia as "the sad mood originating from the desire to return to one's native land" (Boym 3). He claimed that the displaced people whom he was treating held a longing for their native land that became "their single-minded obsession" and they tended to remember their land of origin erroneously, idealizing the everyday comforts of home (Boym 3). The word itself comes from the combination of two Greek terms: *nostos,* which means "homecoming," and *algos,* which means "pain or ache." Thus the term implies a longing for home so acute that it provokes actual pain. It

[11] "In the city rural life is seen as something remote: for many it is now the origin of the family, the past, more than the present or the future" (translation is mine).

is of note that Hofer defined this state of mental illness as a desire for the land itself. It seems that we often overlook our connection to the space in which we find ourselves until we leave it, especially when that space includes certain physical and geographical features that are absent in our new and foreign space. This nostalgia, this pain and longing inspired by a loss of one's homeland, is what, I argue, permeates the sentiment and allure of *María Candelaria.* Although the film is somewhat formulaic and melodramatic, and even enforces the hegemonic messages of the PRI, it also speaks to a deep-seated sense of nostalgia for the viewer in 1940s Mexico, and, what's more, continues to resonate in today's increasingly globalized society.

When Fernández was in Hollywood making films, he experienced a profound sense of nostalgia for his Mexican homeland; he would travel to the Mexican border and peer through the bars of the fence: "I was so nostalgic for Mexico that I would travel from the North to the frontier simply to see the desolation of the desert. I cried when I saw the Mexican side […]. I felt that I was missing half of my soul" (Qtd. In Tuñón, "Emilio…" 180).

Tuñón comments on the persistent theme of the land as it appears in many of Fernández's films:

> [I]n his films the land had two values. Explicitly, land was linked to social demands and to a social thesis: the need for agrarian reform. But the land also carried a more obscure, atavistic and ritualistic connotation: it was the basis for life, matter from and for the dead, what sustained life and provoked a sense of stability. ("Emilio…" 188)

This nostalgia for a geographic homeland appears in *María Candelaria* through the societal forces that work to cut María and Lorenzo off from their land: don Damián, the painter, and the antagonistic villagers. Fernández's film demonstrates the need to recognize that Mexicans are not only identified in terms of personal and psychological cultural traits, but also

through a deep connection to the land that surrounds him. The star crossed-couple of *María Candelaria* longs to enjoy various ideals—equality, justice, freedom—but under an oppressive capitalist order, like that of don Damián, and the modernizing forces of society, this simply cannot be.

In his essay, "The Unsettling of America," Wendell Berry comments on the ambivalent views of the land that appear throughout the history of the Americas. His ideas serve to illuminate the ideological difference that appears in the film between the protagonist couple and ruthless don Damián's understanding of the natural space of Xochimilco. Berry contrasts the mentality of indigenous peoples with that of colonizers, dividing them into two distinct groups: those who exploit and those who nurture the land. Berry praises the indigenous tradition of considering the land as homeland. Instead of seeing the natural world as something that solely provides monetary gain, indigenous groups tend to view it as something to be cared for and to which a group of people should belong. For Berry, the idea of seeing the environment in which one lives as a homeland is completely countercultural to our modern Eurocentric and capitalist mentalities. It is almost impossible in today's society to maintain a mentality of contentedness with one's chosen place of living. He explains:

> One of the peculiarities of the white race's presence in America is how little intention has been applied to it. […] [W]e [have] continued, […] with increasing haste and anxiety, to displace ourselves—no longer with unity of direction, like a migrant flock, but like the refugees from a broken anthill. […] To be just, however, there has been another tendency: the tendency to stay put, to say, 'No farther. This is the place.' So far, this has been the weaker tendency, less glamorous, certainly less successful. It is also the older of these tendencies, having been the dominant one among the Indians. (56)

Berry claims that the greatest problem in our current society, the exploitation of land and people, has its roots in the origins of how the Americas were founded: when the Europeans arrived, the indigenous culture was "forced to change much faster than change could be adjusted to" (59). The present system of exploiters and exploited points back to the origins of how our communities were colonized or conquered, both in the United States and Latin America.

María and Lorenzo's lifestyle represents the mentality about land that Berry favors, the countercultural view of land as homeland. For instance, when Lorenzo Rafael suggests they flee from Xochimilco to escape the injustices of the village community, María refuses to part from her homeland, a place that she feels is an extension of herself. She says to Lorenzo, "¿Y nuestras chinampas? ¿Y nuestras flores? Aquí nacimos los dos y aquí hemos vivido siempre. [*She picks up a bit of soil*] Esta es nuestra tierra. Mira qué negra y qué suave. ¿Cómo *queres* que nos *váyamos*?"[12] Lorenzo, touched by her connection to the land, promises also to stay true to his homeland, which for him appears here to be embodied by María, telling her, "Yo nunca te dejaré, María Candelaria."[13] He will never leave María, and thus, he will never abandon his homeland. Julia Tuñón argues that this scene enforces gender stereotypes and the subjugation of women, explaining that María here believes that, "immobility is best, and the woman is its spokesperson" ("Femininity…" 93). However, perhaps Tuñón misses the fact that immobility could also be considered in a more positive light: as contentedness, sustainability, a conscientious attitude toward the land that surrounds us, instead of imprisonment or confinement due to gender discrimination.

[12] "What about our *chinampas?* What about our flowers? Both of us were born here and we have always lived here. [*she picks up a bit of soil*] This is our land. Look how black and how soft it is. How can you think of us leaving it?" (translation is mine)
[13] "I will never leave you, María Candelaria" (translation is mine).

Despite its melodrama and its subtle affirmation of the Ávila Camacho agenda, *María Candelaria* does accurately represent one of the major pitfalls of contemporary society: exploitation of land and, as a result, people. Exploiters care about efficiency and profit. In contrast, those who nurture the land uphold the idea of caring, desiring health for both themselves and the land. Says Berry,

> The exploiter is clearly the prototype of the 'masculine' man-the-wheeler-dealer whose 'practical' goals require the sacrifice of flesh, feeling, and principle. The nurturer, on the other hand, has always passed with ease across the boundaries of the so-called sexual roles. [...] And the land itself is not a mother and father only, but both. (57)

Counter to the modern ideal, a true nurturer embodies motherly and fatherly characteristics, not only planting seeds, a paternal trait, but also gently caring for growing and living things, with patience and steadfastness, exhibiting traditionally maternal traits as well. This sort of mentality is difficult to maintain in the modern world of capitalism and greed, as is demonstrated in *María Candelaria.*

What does it mean to be a nurturer in the context of 1943 Mexico, after a revolution that had killed over a million people, where tens of thousands had abandoned their homelands, at a time when the world was in the midst of a war where millions would be killed as a result of a false idea of ethnic superiority? What can the land mean in such a destructive time? The ideal presented in *María Candelaria* is that of the struggle to overcome a mentality of an urban existence in which one has been uprooted from one's natural space and to enter into a mentality of land as homeland. The majority of Mexicans could not return to this ideal, but found comfort in identifying themselves with Fernández and Figueroa's film, both because of its idyllic natural space, as well as because of its final tragedy. Perhaps the tragedy of María's death was so

provocative because a sense of loss of land (as represented by her character) permeated the society of the time. Those Mexicans who were filling up their country's urban spaces must have felt not only nostalgia, but perhaps also a sense of loss and even guilt at the death of so perfect an ideal.

A Whitening Agenda

The film not only speaks to this bittersweet sense of nostalgia, but also to a hostile side of modern society: racism and Eurocentric bias. The films' whitening of indigenous peoples demonstrates that its success in part rests in appealing to viewers' racist tendencies. This points back to José Vasconcelos' seminal essay "La raza cósmica" (1924) that purportedly idealizes the idea of *mestizaje,* or the mixing of indigenous and European races. However, his ideal is not as noble as it sounds: he sees *mestizaje* as necessary in order to eventually eradicate the indigenous race, which he deemed inferior. As Hershfield explains,

> Vasconcelos appeared to hail the mestizo as the 'quintessential Mexican.' He wrote of the coming of a new age wherein a fusion of races and classes in Latin America would culminate in the creation of a mestizo race, or what Vasconcelos called the 'cosmic race.' However, while proclaiming to celebrate Mexicans' racial mixture, Vasconcelos's thesis promoted the notion that this new race would emerge as a result of a 'cleansing' of indigenous blood through European intermarriage. Vasconcelos's ideology of 'fusion' (shared by many of his contemporaries) was thus actually a thinly disguised conviction that Mexico's pre-Colombian roots should and would eventually be whitened into extinction. It was, in essence, a thesis of spiritual eugenics [that] rationalizes…a single way out to the Indian: Mexican nationality. (Quoted in Schroeder Rodríguez 105)

Fernández's film is emblematic of Vasconcelos's ideology in which the indigenous are encouraged to embrace European physical features and cultural values and traditions, such as the religion of Catholicism. Dolores Tierney has criticized the film for embracing what she calls "whitening," since both of the lead "indigenous" actors, Dolores del Río and Pedro Armendáriz, have European features and pale skin: "Rather than depicting the *indígena* as a noble individual, *María Candelaria* textually universalizes Mexico's aspiration toward whitening" (86).

This "whitening" trend, then, explains a grim side that explains the legacy of *María Candelaria:* the film speaks to latent racist values that date back for hundreds of years in Mexico's history. Guillermo Bonfil Battalla describes two civilizations that are and have always been at play in Mexico in the last 500 years: the Mesoamerican civilization (which he labels *México profundo)* and the Westernized civilization (which he labels "imaginary Mexico"). According to Bonfil Batalla, mainstream Mexican society has a long history of suppressing the voice of the Mesoamerican civilization: "Imaginary Mexico's westernization plan has been exclusionary and has denied the validity of Mesoamerican civilization" (xvi). This suppression appears in *María Candelaria:* although the indigenous culture is upheld in the noble representation of María and Lorenzo, they are a whitened representation. Any real inclusion of true indigenous people is not so positive. For instance, María's rival, the indigenous woman (and Lorenzo Rafael's ex-girlfriend) who constantly attacks and insults her, is the only character to utter anything in an indigenous language in the entire film, and she does so in an especially brutish way, covered in water and mud after María had pushed her into the river in self-defense. In contrast, María never once speaks the indigenous language, and although her hair is in braids and she goes around barefoot, there really aren't any other determining characteristics that define her as Indian. In this way, the film fits into the cultural tradition of denying the validity of

Mesoamerican civilization, speaking to the viewers' unconscious (or perhaps conscious) racist ideals of European superiority. Fernández, who was nicknamed "El Indio" because of his own indigenous heritage, seems to have internalized the idea of mestizo privilege, converting the indigenous characters like María's rival into a symbolic other. Lomnitz explains that the *indigenismo* movement developed into something that,

> was charged with the task of forging Mexican citizenship both by 'indigenizing' modernity and by modernization the Indians, thus uniting all Mexicans in one mestizo community. […] The aim of Mexican *indigenismo* had been the incorporation of the Indian into the capitalist system of exploitation, and in so doing it had abandoned the scientific and critical potential of the discipline. (231)

At first glance, it seems noble that Fernández presents such an idealized and noble image of the indigenous peoples, however, as we have seen here, it is actually an abandoning of the culture and accepts to the whitening tendencies of the moment.

Fernández's Mexican Masks

María Candelaria also maintains its legacy because it upholds Mexican social ideals for the roles of males and females. One of the main themes of the film, as incarnated by Lorenzo Rafael, is the idealization of stoicism, especially for males. This stoicism is important because it is a key factor in the creation and understanding of a Mexican national identity. Mostly silent, with a tough, expressionless face, but with a heart of gold, Lorenzo Rafael embodies an ideal that has defined and continues to define Mexican identity.

Octavio Paz describes this societal tendency in his 1950 essay, "Máscaras mexicanas"[14] (another effort to define *la mexicanidad).* He describes the Mexican male tendency to be closed off, simulate, lie, and even disappear into the space that surrounds him. He explains that in

[14] "Mexican Masks"

Mexican culture, it is dangerous to open oneself up to others, and the ideal Mexican male is one who never allows this to happen (51). For Paz, Mexicans uphold heroes who remain stoic even in the face of adversity, such as the last Aztec king, Cuauhtémoc, who was tortured by the Spanish who pressed hot irons to his feet, yet still refused to reveal the location of Moctezuma's treasure (Krauze 25). Paz also discusses the problem of *la Forma* in Mexican culture: Mexicans are so constrained by forms and customs, that they rarely show evidence of their interior selves. Because of this, Mexican men tend to be reserved and the women exhibit an excessive amount of modesty. For Paz, this cultural trend of impenetrability points back to what was happening in colonial times: "El mundo colonial ha desaparecido, pero no el temor, la desconfianza, el recelo. […] Nos disimulamos con tal ahínco que casi no existimos"[15] (65). Paz argues that this tendency to hide one's true self can at times result in a fusing together of person with landscape:

> En sus formas radicales el disimulo llega al mimetismo. El indio se funde con el paisaje, se confunde con la barda blanca en que se apoya por la tarde, con la tierra oscura en que se tiende a mediodía, con el silencio que lo rodea. Se disimula tanto su humana singularidad que acaba por abolirla; y se vuelve piedra, pirú, muro, silencio: espacio. (65)[16]

Paz's description of this tendency to blend in with the landscape is particularly relevant to the visual representation of Lorenzo and María in *María Candelaria.* Let us first examine the representation of Lorenzo Rafael taking into consideration Paz's cultural theory. Because of his intense stoicism, most Mexican viewers would quickly Lorenzo Rafael the hero of the film, since

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[15] "The colonial world has disappeared, but not the fear, the mistrust, the suspicion […]. We dissimulate so eagerly that we almost cease to exist" (translated by Kemp).

[16] "In its most radical forms dissimulation becomes mimicry. The Indian blends into the landscape until he is an indistinguishable part of the white wall against which he leans at twilight, of the dark earth on which he stretches out to rest at midday, of the silence that surrounds him. He disguises his human singularity to such an extent that he finally annihilates it and turns into a stone, a tree, a wall, silence, and space" (translated by Kemp).

he is in line with Paz's description of the Mexican ideal of wearing a metaphorical mask. Lorenzo is almost completely devoid of any external expression of emotion. For instance, when María passionately asks him if he loves her during their moonlit canoe ride, he barely reacts, and assents simply with a barely noticeable smile. The most common shot of him in the film is that of his eyes looking serious and mildly concerned, staring off into the distance. According to the logic of Paz's essay, he cannot show emotion because it would mean making him more vulnerable, thus taking away his qualities of masculinity and heroism. Even in the moment of María's death, he silently embraces her as she breathes her last, briefly glances at the villagers as if in subtle remonstration, and slowly carries her away, his face expressionless. His character exemplifies the Mexican ideal of hiding oneself behind a mask. Mexican male power is found in this ability to hide one's expression. What's more, this hiding of the self is also a way of connecting him to the filmic landscape, again inspiring an idealization of land as homeland and an extension of the self. Lorenzo Rafael appears in various moments in conjunction with a similarly calm and unemotional landscape: the tall, motionless trees in the background and the barely moving river are stoical and silent, just like his character. In conjunction with Paz's description of Indians' connectedness to their ambient, Lorenzo Rafael appears as connected to and even fusing together with the natural world.

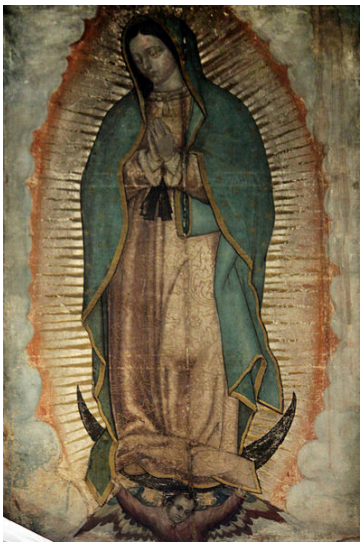
Let us now turn to the idea of "Mexican Masks" and their relation to the character of María Candelaria. Paz comments that a woman's role in Mexican culture is simply to reflect masculine will and desire: "En un mundo hecho a la imagen de los hombres, la mujer es solo un reflejo de la voluntad y querer masculinos. Pasiva, se convierte en diosa, amada, ser que encarna los elementos estables y antiguos del universo: la tierra, madre y virgen; activa, es siempre

función, medio, canal" (57).[17] María Candelaria upholds this idea in that her character is often presented as a goddess, as well as deeply connected to the earth. Because she is presented in this way, she is more symbolic of male desire than of a dynamic individual. She is a type, rather than a nuanced person.

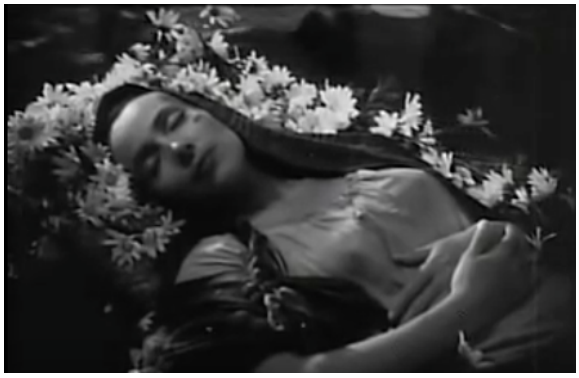
First, let us look at her representation as deity in the film. Besides the obvious fact that her name is "María," María is often presented in conjunction with Mary (Spanish: María), the Virgin Mother of God. These images convert her into a symbol of virginity, purity and female deity. María Candelaria shares qualities both physical and moral that equate her with representations of the Virgin Mary and the Virgin of Guadalupe, her Mexican and darker skinned apparition. For instance, in the moment of her death, her martyrdom turns her into an almost exact copy of the Virgin of Guadalupe: eyes closed, head turned to the side, with a robe draped around her head (Figure 2A, Figure 2B). The Virgin of Guadalupe symbolizes a perfect mix of Mexico's indigenous and Spanish heritages. Having a darker complexion more comparable to a mestizo or indigenous person, she is arguably the most revered symbol of the Catholic faith in Mexico. The juxtaposition of María with the Virgin of Guadalupe is undoubtedly purposeful, both ideologically and sentimentally. Mexican Catholics hold the Virgin of Guadalupe in extremely high regard; there is a long tradition in Mexico of veneration for the Mother of God, which has even been linked to politics. For instance, when in 1808 Father Miguel Hidalgo issued the "Grito de Dolores," in which he called for Mexican independence from Spain, the flag that he waved bore an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In addition, in 1815, Simón Bolívar observed that,

[17] "In a world made in man's image, woman is only a reflection of masculine will and desire. When passive, she becomes a goddess, a beloved one, a being who embodies the ancient, stable elements of the universe: the earth, motherhood, virginity. When active, she is always function and means, a receptacle and a channel" (translated by Kamp)

the leaders of the independence struggle in Mexico have put fanaticism to use by proclaiming the famous Virgin of Guadalupe as the queen of the patriots, praying to her in times of hardship and displaying her on their flags. In this way, political enthusiasm has been mixed with religion to produce a vehement fervor in favor of the sacred cause of liberty. The veneration for this image in Mexico far exceeds the greatest reverence that the shrewdest prophet might inspire. (Krauze 113)



2A. Original representation of the Virgin of Guadalupe, 16th Century (courtesy Wikimedia Commons)



2B. María Candelaria after her death, looking like the Virgin of Guadalupe

This symbol that inspired the independence movement also proves to be an inspiring figure in the film *María Candelaria:* at her lowest moment, with Lorenzo Rafael imprisoned, and nowhere to turn to pay her debt to don Damián, María Candelaria rushes to the town cathedral, furious at her beloved virgin for the great injustice she is suffering. Upon seeing the sorrow expressed on the face of the image of the Virgin Mary in the church, she repents of her anger, and in a stunning moment, the shot that fills the screen is that of María Candelaria, with almost

precisely the same expression as that of the Virgin, and even an almost exactly similar covering wrapped around her head (Figure 3A and Figure 3B). Interestingly, María comes to symbolize both Our Lady of Sorrows, the more European-looking figure in the church, and Our Lady of Guadalupe, the indigenous/mestiza representation of the Virgin, demonstrating an amalgamation of both races within a single character. From this imagery, it is apparent that María Candelaria embodies Paz's idea of woman as goddess, a representation of man's will to see her as other, which in part explains the film's enduring legacy. Her juxtaposition with the Virgin appeals to a sexist cultural ideal of the woman appearing as man desires her to be.

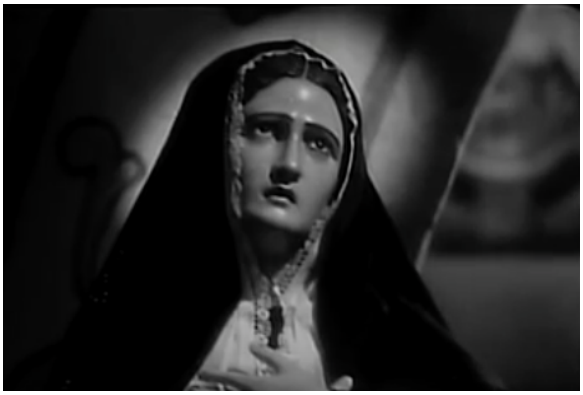


Figure 3A. The Virgin apparently crying in the church

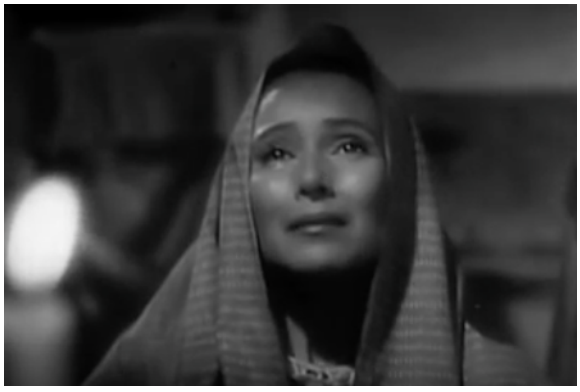


Figure 3B. María Candelaria juxtaposed with the Virgin

María Candelaria not only appears as goddess but also, like Lorenzo Rafael, as an extension of the land itself, and deeply connected to nature in a maternal way. In this way, her character upholds the male desire for woman to appear as a cultural symbol as described by Paz's essay. Her character incarnates the male ideals of the passive woman who represents a goddess (in her juxtaposition with the Virgin), a lover (through her relationship with Lorenzo Rafael) and a person who incarnates the universal elements: the earth, motherhood, and virginity. What is most striking, however, about María Candelaria's representation in the film is her interconnectedness with the earth itself. In the film, María Candelaria is presented as both literally and visually merged with the landscape in which she finds herself. Unable to sell neither produce nor flowers to the judgmental villagers, Lorenzo and María must go to the big city to sell to the dreaded outsiders (*fuereños).* Lorenzo at first doesn't want his fiancée to accompany him, worrying that the outsiders, "se aprovechan porque eres bonita."[18] María suggests, "si quieres, me lleno la cara de lodo para que *naide* se fije en mí y *puédamos* ir juntos."[19] Upon saying this, she takes a handful of mud and rubs it across her cheek. She plans to use the dirt as a defense from the potential unwanted advances from the outsiders they will encounter in the city. Symbolically this scene could be interpreted to illustrate María's tendency to blend in with the land itself, again demonstrated her fusion with the landscape.

What's more, in this same scene, María is presented visually as if she were walking straight out of the landscape that surrounds her. When Lorenzo Rafael arrives in his canoe, she walks across the *chinampa* to meet him. In this striking moment, she seems to share qualities with the cypress trees that surround her as she walks. The extremely low camera angle creates the illusion that the trees and María are of the same height and build (Figure 4).

[18] "they will take advantage of you because you're pretty" (translation is mine).
[19] "if you want, I'll cover my face in mud so that nobody will look at me and we can go together" (translation is mine).

Her long, thick black braids even seem to resemble the tall and slender trees. This effect of both literally and figuratively connecting her with the land and landscape demonstrates that the film idealizes and idolizes the idea of a deeper connection to the land. Blending in with the land around her and using the mud itself to disguise her beauty, it seems that film could be sending a subtle message: Where this woman ends and the land begins is difficult to discern. This begs the question: what would happen if we put ourselves on the same level as the land and landscape, instead of seeing ourselves as superior and distinct from it? For rural Mexicans living in an urban environment, this question is at once enticing and discouraging. Enticing because they are feeling this nostalgia for homeland, and discouraging because many of them could not, for economic or other reasons, ever return to this place of oneness with one's ambient.

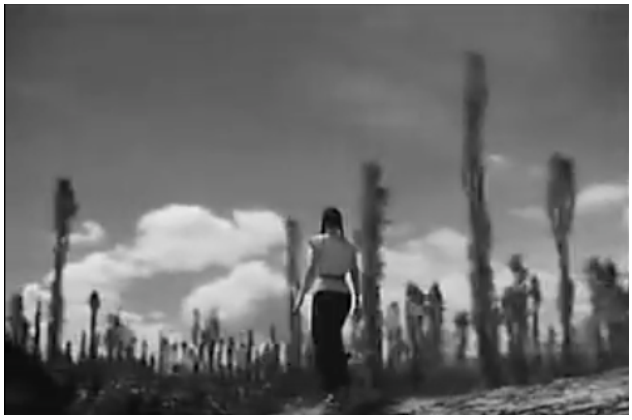


Figure 4. María juxtaposed with the Cypress Trees

National "Unity" and Identity

María Candelaria supports the government agenda, backed by many intellectuals, of the push to create a sense of national unity and identity which would center on the successes of the revolution, when in fact many of the revolution's ideals had not come to fruition. In an effort to promote his agenda of national unity, Ávila Camacho famously invited all the living Mexican ex-presidents, many of whom had previously been at odds with one another, to appear together in the Zócalo (Mexico City's central plaza). Shockingly, Abelardo

Rodríguez, Pascual Ortiz Rubio, Adolfo de la Huerta, Emilio Portes Gil, Lázaro Cárdenas and Plutarco Elías Calles stood beside the president in what appeared to be a friendly reunion (Krauze 506; Figure 5).

Figure 1. The ex-presidents stand alongside Ávila Camacho in the Zócalo (courtesy http://pcuervo.com/fotografica/fotografias/sin-titulo-339/)

The medium of film helped the Mexican people contend with what for some may have been a shocking, or at least upsetting, change of place, from rural to urban, from spacious and natural to cramped and artificial, from slow and gradual to speedy and impatient, from the care and cultivation of land, to doing whatever it takes to make a living. Viewers living in unfamiliar urban environments could turn to Fernández's films to help them cope with an identity of estrangement from the land, perhaps finding comfort in an identity based on types and visual ideals, a false ideal of cultural unity, so that they might not feel so isolated in their urban and/or modern environment. Fernández and Figueroa took this collective desire for making sense of Mexican culture and converted it into their visually striking films. Ramírez Berg comments,

> Fernández and Figueroa's shared ambition was to create a uniquely *Mexican* cinema, films that unambiguously and unmistakably explored Mexican themes, portrayed

> Mexican characters, and were set in a landscape that would be recognized by filmgoers the world over as—and only as—Mexico. (10)

María Candelaria appeals to this desire to find unity and identity, to simplify an increasingly confusing society.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how *María Candelaria* affirms the hegemonic ideals of its moment—the illusion that the revolution's ideals had been fulfilled by its government, while society actually turned in a more moderate direction—but also speaks to viewers, both Mexican and international, in 1943 and the present day, on a deeper level. The film upholds a racist, whitened ideal, which may makes us examine critically our ideals of beauty and superiority in society. It demonstrates Paz's cultural explanation of Mexican Masks, or fusing with the landscape, hiding of one's true self, which may make us wonder how we as viewers withhold our interior selves from the rest of those with whom we come into contact, and how this may be a tactic of self-preservation. It also speaks to nostalgia, a pain or ache for home, a desire for homeland rather than an uprooted, modernized, globalized mentality. In our ever-changing society, where the average person moves up to 12 times in a lifetime, we may feel like Fernández did when he lived in Hollywood: looking back through the bars, choking back tears, wondering when we can return to our homeland, the geographic space of which we were originally a part. Geography for María Candelaria is inextricably linked to her identity, and she will never leave her homeland, but instead dies in her effort to have a mentality of what Wendell Berry described as, "No farther. This is the Place." This ideal, so contrary to modern society, continues to appeal to viewers to this day, and in large part explains the film's enduring legacy.

Chapter Two: The Hidden Gardens of Revolution: Fear of the Unconscious in Agustín Yáñez's *Al filo del agua*

This chapter examines Agustín Yánez's 1947 novel, *Al filo del agua (The Edge of the Storm).* The novel takes place in 1908-1909, and its title refers to the buildup of tension in a provincial Mexican town preceding the revolution. The novel presents the revolution as the result of the harsh repression of the Church, by telling the story of small town villagers in Jalisco whose freedom is stifled by the Church's strict rules. These restrictions put in place by both the exacting priests and the villagers who hold tight to tradition make it seem as if there were no choice but for the people to revolt in such a closed-minded community. While in reality land ownership and agrarian reform were central motivators for the outbreak of the revolution, Yáñez's novel downplays this precursor, and highlights the Church's repression as the deciding factor in the commencement of battle. Much of the novel's action is described by the omniscient narrator's description of the inner workings of each character's mind, thus allowing the reader the privilege of knowing what is occurring beneath the surface. What we encounter is a desire to free their passions mixed with the fear of societal pressures if they were to do so. This emphasis on the workings of the mind is mirrored by the landscape and spaces of the village itself. In this chapter, I argue that this juxtaposition of land and space with both individual and collective identities of the villagers serves to deepen Yáñez's novel's justification of the revolutionary government of the moment of the novel's publication.

Before analyzing these ideas more in depth, I will briefly summarize the novel: *Al filo del agua* has no protagonist, but rather the unnamed Jaliscan village serves as the focal point for the story's action. It is the account of the two years preceding the onset of the Mexican revolution. The text jumps around from character to character in the village, revealing to the reader his or her interior—and often socially unacceptable—thoughts. Father Dionisio

Martínez is the head priest, and struggles to maintain control of the villagers' lives and decisions. He has taken in his two orphaned nieces—Marta and María—as well as an orphaned boy, Gabriel, who works in the church as bellringer.

Much of the novel's action revolves around the Church's calendar. There are two long and detailed chapters on Lenten exercises, as well as Holy Week, which culminates on Good Friday, with one of the leftist-leaning villagers, Luis Gonzaga Pérez, going insane during a sojourn through the surrounding hills of the village. Also in this chapter, don Timoteo Limón's wife dies on Easter Saturday; her death was brought on by the emotional return of their prodigal son, Damián, who arrives in the middle of the night, unannounced, after a long stint in the United States, full of new and elitist ideas.

As the novel progresses, Dionisio begins to feel that the villagers are like marbles, rolling uncontrollably in different directions. He despairs that he cannot protect and control each villager indefinitely. The novel culminates with three murders: furiously jealous that the flirtatious Micaela Rodríguez is pursuing his father instead of him, Damián Limón murders his father's precognizant dog, Orión, his father, don Timoteo, as well as Micaela.

Another subplot includes Gabriel, the bellringer, and a beautiful outsider, Victoria, who fall madly in love with one another. Their love can never be, and both leave the village. While away, Gabriel realizes that he does not love Victoria, but instead that María (Dionisio's niece) is his true soulmate. He writes multiple letters to Dionisio, asking for her hand in marriage, but receives no response. The final chapter of the novel, entitled "El cometa Halley," consists of a rapid summary of the onset of the revolution. María, who longs for Gabriel's love and for the freedom to read what she wants and travel to the cities of the world, finally explodes with desire, and runs off to fight in the revolution alongside Damián. The novel closes with a mass service led by an ailing Dionisio, in which he cannot focus on the service, overcome with guilt for not allowing Gabriel to marry María. He finally realizes,

when it's too late, that he has been too legalistic, and should have allowed true and virtuous love—like that of Gabriel and María—to flourish in the village.

While *María Candelaria* depicted Xochimilco as a land of abundance along a river, full of lush plants, flowers, and crops, *Al filo del agua* presents the Jaliscan landscape as characterized by death: arid, almost completely lifeless, and with a river that is perpetually dried up. In Yáñez's work, like Fernández's, the landscape plays a significant role in the creation of meaning. What is unique about his representation is that although the external countryside is depicted as lifeless and dry, there are lush gardens, seeming to metaphorize forces of life and desire, hidden within the walls of each of the villagers' homes. These hidden gardens are significant for a variety of reasons, mainly because they seem to symbolize the unconscious drives behind the façade of the villagers' religious dedication. Sigmund Freud, one of the defining thinkers of the 20th century, wrote on the idea of the unconscious in his 1899 book *The Interpretation of Dreams.* In it, he defines latent desire as unconscious or repressed drives that are hidden behind the dreams that one has. Thurschwell explains, "the latent content of the dream is its hidden meaning—the repressed unconscious wish or infantile desire" (35). In the following study, I argue that the hidden gardens of *Al filo del agua* represent the central symbol of the novel, and their brilliance and vivaciousness parallel the need for the recognition of desire fueled by unconscious drives in rural Mexican society. Perhaps also by placing the gardens and landscape as central symbols in his novel, Yáñez unknowingly points to the centrality of the land in Mexican identity.

As I mentioned earlier, these hidden gardens of *Al filo del agua* exemplify Yáñez's pro party propaganda: he was a dedicated member of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). His portrayal of latent passions manages to justify the need for revolution, even during a time when the Mexican government, ruled by the PRI, was increasingly economy-oriented and de-emphasized the rights of poor and rural Mexicans. In *Al filo* we again find that the

land and the natural world and its connection to the people are central to defining Mexican identity, and in this case the land is represented as the dried up external façade that Mexicans were showing prior to the revolution, which hid their desires, stifling their passions.

The storytelling style of *Al filo del agua* differs significantly from that of *María Candelaria*. Apart from the differences in genre between film and prose, Yáñez employs several stylistic innovations, breaking from the traditional and linear storytelling style of Fernández's film. The novel contains several different perspectives, including innumerable anonymous comments in the form of dialogue from unidentified characters. In this way, the village itself serves as protagonist, instead of the more traditional single protagonist and linear narrative style exemplified in *María Candelaria.*

Critics have already observed inherent in this novel a justification for revolution which affirms the PRI regime of the moment of the novel's publication. However, none signal the latent passion of the garden and the land as the central imagery behind this justification, and the importance of the connection to the land as a part of Mexican identity. Let us examine first some of the background and previous studies of Yáñez's novel in order to establish a framework for the current study.

Yáñez's Innovations to the Tradition of *la novela de la Revolución*

Al filo del agua establishes many narrative innovations within the tradition of the Mexican novel, and it is often distingued as a groundbreaking work in Mexican literature. It is a work that marks a shift in narrative style from the first wave of the so-called *novela de la Revolución*, which generally appeared during the years of 1911-1940. This first wave of novels is characterized by realism and the depiction of the violence of the revolution that was so fresh in the writers' memories. Often these works were semi-autobiographical, such as Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo* (1915) or Martín Luis Guzmán's *El águila y la serpiente* (1928): writers borrowed liberally from their own experiences fighting in the revolution in

the creation of their texts. Yáñez's novel appears to be a starting point for the second wave of the *novela de la Revolución* (1940-1970), which consisted of novels that were generally more experimental and psychological. Many of these are often included in the so-called Boom in Latin American literature, such as Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and Carlos Fuentes's *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962). Ochoa explains the novels of the second wave as follows: "In the second generation of the *novela,* there is a clear awareness of the disconnect between the unimpeachable, original ideals of the Revolution and the mixed results of its legacy and implementation" (312).

Noteworthy articles on this topic of narrative innovation include O'Neill's analysis of Yañez's use of interior monologue: he claims that Yáñez's novel is the first psychological novel of the revolution after the initial wave of more realistic works. Also, John Flasher comments on the novel's incorporation of foreign literary techniques, borrowing from foreign writers like Faulkner, Dos Passos, and Joyce. Not only does Yáñez incorporate these contemporary 20th century writers' techniques, but also the novel has distinct traits that liken it to 19th century realism, and Flasher even goes as far as labeling Yáñez, "el Balzac mexicano" (31). In another study, Van Conant reflects on the narrative innovations of *Al filo del agua* exemplified in the simultaneity of the various story lines found within the text, as well as what she denominates the innovation of the "estilo repentista" or "improvisational style:" the novel incorporates excerpts of a poetic nature which contain repeated phrases and songs that have a rhythmic quality (101). Gamiochipi de Liguori adds that Yáñez takes the *novela de la Revolución* from a historical narrative to an artistic creation through its incorporation of the collective group as protagonist, instead of a single individual hero so characteristic of the 19th century novelistic tradition, and which had been imitated by the first wave of revolutionary novels (19). Llamas Jiménez concurs, explaining that while the first wave of novelists of the revolution emphasized politics, history and society, as in *Los de*

abajo, in *Al filo del agua* the reader encounters "una interpretación estética del mundo"[20] (62). Walter Mignolo also writes on the novelties of *Al filo del agua,* commenting that the collective hero is reflective of a change in mentality inherent of the times:

> La colectivización del héroe es una forma narrativa cuya aparición está motivada por exigencias socio-culturales […]. El crecimiento demográfico, el ascenso de las masas al poder político y […] la quiebra de la filosofía del sujeto después de los trabajos de Marx y Freud, producen estas exigencias.[21] (9)

Yáñez's novel, then, clearly denotes a general shift in the literary and cultural mindset of the Mexico of the 1940s. It marks a moment when intellectuals and writers were ready to move on from simply grappling with the trauma and confusion brought on by the revolution, to understanding its significance on a deeper psychological level, and its implications for Mexico's rapidly changing society. The time for mourning the casualties of the bloody revolution was passing, and the time for profound cultural questioning was beginning.

Yáñez's novel has a dualistic nature: it is simultaneously specific and universal, both locally and internationally relevant; its themes are specific to Mexico and the region of los Altos de Jalisco, but also applicable to other times and places. Flasher explains, "En escala microcósmica, el pueblo descrito por Yáñez en *Al filo del agua* reproduce el universo"[22] (39). In addition, one critic even labels this characteristic a "microcosm-macrocosm" and explains his term as follows:" "The configuration of the microcosm-macrocosm association hinges primarily in a dialectic tension between specificity, embedded in the novel's ethnographic study of the region known as the Altos de Jalisco, and indeterminacy, which allows for multiple levels of reading" (M. Anderson, "Agustín…" 82). Thus the novel addresses the

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[20] "an aesthetic interpretation of the world" (translation is mine).
[21] "The collectivization of the hero is a narrative style that appeared as a result of sociocultural demands […]. Demographic growth, the rising of the masses into political power […] and the breakdown of the philosophy of the subject after the work of Marx and Freud, produced these demands" (translation is mine).
[22] "On a microcosmic scale, the village described by Yáñez in *Al filo del agua* reproduces the universe" (translation is mine).

specific region of Jalisco, but at the same time reaches readers of all backgrounds with its broader-reaching themes. Along the same lines, critics have noted that the village of the novel is a microcosm specifically of Mexican culture, history, and identity (Detjens). For instance, Didier Jaén sees in the characters of Victoria and Gabriel the two battling cultural currents of the history of Mexico—Neoclassical Humanism and traditional Catholicism, respectively—and their inability to reconcile themselves to one another (900). It is no surprise that the novel's literary innovations have been the catalyst for so many studies.

Reading and the Society of 1940s Mexico

In *Al filo del agua,* the theme of reading, both within and outside of the novel, is another popular topic of critical attention (D'Lugo 1991; D. Anderson 1995). The problem of reading and its ramifications is a constant theme throughout the novel—characters like María, Luis, and even Dionisio are brought to confusion, rebellion, and even insanity through the act of reading. What critics do not seem to mention is the intertextuality with Cervantes's *Don Quijote* and the effects of reading, especially in the analysis of the characters of María (Dionisio's niece) and Luis. In fact, the epigraph of the novel makes several references to *Don Quijote,* demonstrating an even purposeful intertextuality that has yet to be explored. In the epigraph, Yáñez says the novel could just as easily be titled, *En un lugar del Arzobispado,* in reference to the famous first line of *Don Quijote,* which reads "En un lugar de la Mancha de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme"[23] He repeats this reference at the close of the epigraph, which reads, "En un lugar del Arzobispado, cuyo nombre no importa recordar" (2), which is an almost direct copy of the opening line of *Don Quijote*. Yáñez's use of the term *arzobispado* (archbishopric) in place of *La Mancha*, also is significant, since it emphasizes the fact that this village is defined almost exclusively by the Church—its rules, leadership,

[23] "En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme" ("On a certain corner of La Mancha, the name of which I do not chuse to remember" (trans. Smollett)).

and customs, and anyone who does not fit into this mold is estranged from the homogenous community.

The experience of reading the novel itself has also been of interest to critics: the novel is nonlinear, and plays with the reader's expectations; we find out much of the information second-hand through the gossip of unnamed villagers. D. Anderson explains that the text thwarts our desire to read a linear story. For example, the reader does not learn the fate of poor Micaela and don Timoteo (who are murdered by Damián) until several chapters later, and only through hearsay. He explains, "In contrast to an allegory of emancipatory reading, *Al filo del agua* reveals the importance of critically rereading to understand the role that we play, individually and collectively, in socially constructing our reality and our subjection" (59).

More recently, critics have written cultural studies-based analyses of the novel, questioning what relevance Yáñez's depiction of the past had in the context of 1940s Mexico. As mentioned in Chapter One, the 1940s and 1950s in Mexico were characterized by a strong cultural push to create a collective sense of Mexican identity, albeit an arbitrary one, such as in Octavio Paz's essays from *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950), Rivera's iconic murals, and Fernández and Figueroa's films that appeared to present themes and characters that were typically Mexican. Danny Anderson describes the shift of the tone in the revolutionary novel that begins with Yáñez's work as indicative of this effort to define *mexicanidad:* "*Al filo del agua* makes evident a broader cultural project in the 1940s and 1950s that changes the rhetoric of Mexican nationalism, a shift variously identified as 'spiritualization,' 'essentialization,' or 'universalization'" (45). He adds that the novel causes readers to rethink the revolution and create "the spiritualized subject of an emergent style of Mexican nationalism" (48). Since in the 1940s, Mexican people were rethinking the meaning of the revolution in their society, Anderson claims that Yáñez's novel purposefully oversimplifies

the evils of Porfirian times, overemphasizing the Church's oppressive role in pre-revolutionary Mexican society, thereby enabling a more simplified understanding of *mexicanidad.* According to Anderson, there was an increasingly global-minded attitude in Mexican society in the 1940s which also played a role in this:

> The rereading of the Mexican Revolution in the 1940s […] takes place in an atmosphere of introversion and extroversion […], turning inward to look at national concerns and the Revolution, turning outward to respond to Mexico's place in a new configuration of global identities. (62)

Mark Anderson's article, "Was the Mexican Revolution a Revolt of Nature?" is of special interest to this chapter, since he analyzes the history of the region in which the novel takes place, the highlands of the state of Jalisco*,* and how the history of colonization has worked to all but ruin the landscape of that region. In this history of land mistreatment, the characters of the novel interact with the land itself, as if all were a part of a greater ecosystem. This chapter builds on Anderson's ideas about a cultural ecosystem, digging deeper into the concept of repressed desire and natural imagery and their connection within Yáñez's work. In another article, Mark Anderson also comments on Yáñez's political agenda, explaining that Yáñez "attempts to mitigate the opposition to the official party's totalitarian politics that began surfacing in the 1940s" (92). What I hope to add to Anderson's arguments is an analysis of how Yáñez's portrayal of the land and spaces of the little village of the novel defines the characters' unconscious identities, ultimately concluding that this portrayal supports the PRI party agenda that the novel's themes seem to promote.

Al filo del agua was published at an important time in Mexican history; it appeared toward the beginning of the presidency of Miguel Alemán, a presidency that commenced with the not insignificant renaming of the revolutionary party, which went from the Partido Revolucionario Mexicano (PRM) to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). The new

adjective in the party's title, "Institutional," is indicative of the paradoxical fact that what had been the counterinstitutional ideals of the revolution were now becoming a part of the institution. Those who supported the revolution and its ideals were no longer considered renegades or mavericks; instead, they were part of the ruling powers' hegemony. As Enrique Krauze explains, hypocrisy, greed, and corruption characterized Miguel Alemán's presidency (529, 536). He repressed the press and any dissident voices, totally ignored the needs of poor rural people, and put his friends into office undemocratically (555, 556). He also intimidated Mexican intellectuals, who found themselves coerced to either support the PRI or suffer consequences (589). Although his father had been a revolutionary hero, the ideals of the revolution began to die with Alemán, while big business and friendly relations with the United States grew (530).

With this political context in mind, John Ochoa's insightful article, "Pastoralism, Parricide, and the PRI: Nostalgia and Self-Awareness in Agustín Yáñez's *Al filo del agua"* describes intriguing ulterior motives in Yáñez's novel. Ochoa pushes back against the notion that the novel is purely propaganda, explaining that Yáñez's text was more conflicted than it seems at first glance. For Ochoa, the fact that Yáñez was not only a revolutionary and an intellectual but also a dedicated PRI party member,[24] made the vision of Mexico that appears in the novel conflicted and ambiguous. Ochoa demonstrates this through a variety of examples from the novel. As I have noted in the film *María Candelaria,* Ochoa observes a sense of nostalgia for the lost rural life in Yáñez's novel as well. He explains that in *Al filo,* the "nostalgic self-reflection on a disappearing rural past fits with this national mood of self-critique in Mexico during the 1940s" (Ochoa 310). Ochoa's article is convincing and seems to debunk many of the prior critics' assertions regarding *Al filo del agua.* While I agree there is a sense of nostalgia for a lost rural past, I believe that perhaps Ochoa is overly idealistic in

[24] Yáñez served a in a wide variety of political posts over the course of his professional life. Notably, he was governor of Jalisco in 1953-1959 and, during the controversial presidency of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, he served as Secretary of Public Education (1964-1970).

his interpretation of *Al filo.* I find that the larger message of the novel is the reconciliation of the rural and urban communities of Mexico. The perceived goal of bringing the innovations of modernity to Mexico's rural space appears to be more important than the longing expressed by Yáñez's work for a lost past.

The Latent Vitality of the Revolution

Now that I have reviewed most of the critical discussion on Yáñez's novel, let us turn to the idea of the hidden gardens of revolution as a central underlying theme of *Al filo del agua.* In the novel, the precursors of revolution permeate the text in a way akin to the description in the novel of the villagers' hidden gardens: the signs of the impending revolution that appear throughout the text are very much like the gardens' vitality and the passion within each character restrained by a society obsessed with religion, legalism, and rules. Revolution and hidden gardens, like the unconscious mind, find ways to make their subtle appearances in manifest life of the plot. As D. Anderson explains, in *Al filo del agua* we observe, "the underground force of repressed desire that reverberates throughout life in the village" (63). This "underground" force finds its importance in the dead homeland and its juxtaposition with the life force found in the hidden gardens, which also appear to represent the duality of the hidden unconscious mind—full of drives both "sinful" and pure—found within each character. However, before analyzing exactly the way in which the novel does this, first it is important to understand certain traits of the region of Jalisco and their significance in Mexican culture and history.

The Problem of a Dead Homeland: Imagery that Leads to Revolutionary Justification

Al filo del agua represents a novelistic treatise that supports both the revolution revolution and the PRI: Yáñez injects the moments of time leading up to the revolution with meaningful imagery in an effort to justify the need under the Díaz regime for serious change in Mexican society and to affirm his current government. The novel accomplishes this by its

depiction of the downside of homeland. *María Candelaria* depicts the benefits of the land as homeland: the chinampas of Xochimilco for María and Lorenzo are beautiful and inviting, full of lush greenery. The film's protagonists experience a deep connection to their surrounding environment. When the surrounding environment feels warm and inviting, like that of the *chinampa*, one has a sense of belonging and peace. However, sometimes one's homeland can create a sense of bitterness and powerlessness, especially in the context of provincial life. Small town life as presented in *Al filo* is replete with closed-minded conservatism, a place where the inhabitants feel forced to either conform to social and religious norms or flee. Those who don't fit the mold encounter gossip, judgment, and often even estrangement from the community. In the case of *Al filo,* homeland feels like a suffocating place, instead of one of solace. The novel depicts the negative aspects of homeland through its representation of this stifling Jaliscan village, and demonstrates that because of the stagnant, changeless and closed-minded existence of the community, a revolution, be it literal or psychological, inevitably results. This is implied through various examples in the novel, but most importantly through hidden abundance of the villagers' gardens, representing their repressed interior selves.

Yáñez expresses his own personal connection to his homeland of Jalisco in the introduction to a book by friend and writer José Cardona Vera, and his description is quite opposite from the arid, lifeless space he describes in the novel:

> Cardona Vera sentía como yo la tierra natal, carnal, que fue para ambos el entrañable primer espejo de la belleza; nuestras madres nos hicieron vibrar ante los espectáculos de cielos y caminos rurales […]. Fuimos así educados en un sentido rural de la existencia, tan amplio, tan sano, tan fuerte y libre como la naturaleza, lejos de toda

> pequeñez, refractarios a todo ámbito confinado, a toda mezquindad.[25] (Quoted in Gamiochipi de Liguori, 77)

Jalisco, where Yáñez grew up, is a place that he describes here as *carnal,* or part of his own flesh. This mentality appears in his novel, through the representation of the village environment as parallel to the characters' psyches. However, there is a paradoxical nature to Jalisco, which would explain the disparity between Yáñez's personal fond memory of his homeland, and his dystopian representation of it in *Al filo del agua.* Like most of Mexico, and for that matter all of the Americas, the state of Jalisco has suffered from a history of colonization through pollution and land mistreatment as a result of the history of conquest and colonization. What Yáñez describes as an arid and lifeless place in his novel was not always this way. Spanish agricultural introductions of nonnative animals and crops during colonization resulted in serious damage to the environment. Shortly after Yáñez, Juan Rulfo would also immortalize the region of Jalisco in literary form, in works like *El llano en llamas* (1953) and *Pedro Páramo* (1955). Rulfo characterizes the historical burden of the region in terms of the prideful, entitled mentality of those Spaniards who originally settled there, and which he believed persisted to his present day:

> Yo soy de una zona donde la conquista española fue demasiado ruda. Los conquistadores ahí no dejaron ser viviente. Entraron a saco, destruyeron la población indígena, y se establecieron. Toda la región fue colonizada nuevamente por agricultores españoles. Pero el hecho de haber exterminado a la población indígena les trajo una característica muy especial, esa actitud criolla que hasta cierto punto es reaccionaria, conservadora de sus intereses creados. Son intereses que ellos consideraban inalienables. Era lo que ellos cobraban por haber participado en la

[25] "Cardona Vera felt, as did I, his homeland, his carnal land, that was for both of us the intimate first glance at beauty; our mothers made us emotionally moved by the sights of the skies and the rural paths […]. In this way, we were brought up to have a rural understanding of our existence, so wide, so healthy, so strong and free—just like the nature itself—distant from any triviality, immune to any confined environment, to any pettiness" (translation is mine).

> conquista y en la población de la región. Entonces los hijos de los pobladores, sus descendientes, siempre se consideraron dueños absolutos. Se oponían a cualquier fuerza que pareciera amenazar su propiedad. De ahí la atmósfera de terquedad, de resentimiento acumulado desde siglos atrás.[26] (Qtd. in González Boixo 15)

This land in which Yáñez's novel takes place, then, has been the victim of a long history of destruction of humanity and nature, and is characterized by a sense of ethnic entitlement combined with a general feeling of resentment. These characteristics are much more prominent in the prose of Rulfo, but don't fail to be present in *Al filo del agua.* M. Anderson has pointed out that this historical sense of degradation of the natural environment itself in the state of Jalisco is an important aspect of Yáñez's novel:

> The images of drought that saturate *Al filo del agua* are not mere decoration; the desertification of Los Altos de Jalisco, as in many other parts of Mexico, is a legacy of the ecological disaster initiated by the Spanish Conquest. […] Diseases such as smallpox and typhoid fever eradicated up to ninety percent of the native population, not only enabling Cortés to conquer Tenochtitlan with relative ease, but also leaving former indigenous agricultural lands open to pastoral uses by the Spaniards, who, unwilling to adopt indigenous foodstuffs, introduced their European livestock and plants into the local ecosystem. The uncontrollable reproduction of the European species resulted in the rapid desertification of native ecosystems not equipped to deal with ungulates as voracious as European cows and sheep. (Anderson, "Was…" 451)

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[26] "I am from a region where the Spanish Conquest was too rough. The conquistadors did not leave a living soul there. They wasted no time in destroying the indigenous population and establishing themselves there. The entire region was newly colonized by Spanish farmers. But the fact of having exterminated the indigenous population brought them a distinct characteristic, that Creole attitude that to a certain point is reactionary and conservative in its vested interests. These are interests that they consider inalienable. It was what they collected for having participated in the conquest and in the population of the region. Then the children of the settlers, their descendants, always considered themselves absolute owners. They were opposed to any force that might seem to threaten their property. From that aspect comes the atmosphere of stubbornness and resentment accumulated since centuries past" (translation is mine).

The history behind the landscape in which Yáñez's novel takes place is quite bleak, and his novel presents it as dead and dry, perhaps still scarred by the effects of imperialism and colonialism. The land is not naturally arid, but, as we see from Anderson's explanation, gets its aridity from a history of misunderstanding, on behalf of the Spanish conquerors, of the land's needs. It is a land that has been violently usurped and ruined by outside forces. Perhaps that is why the community of the novel is described as completely hermetic and stagnant—they have been misused before by outsiders, and shutting themselves off, both psychologically and physically, to the outside world seems the only option. Indeed, no indigenous characters appear in this novel—it almost seems as if a Spanish rural village was dropped into rural Jalisco, because of the ostentatious lack of *mestizaje* as a theme in the novel. This is, perhaps, another example of the ideology of political elitism inherent in the novel's themes.

The Latent Abundance of the Villagers' Gardens

In *Al filo del agua,* the reader encounters extensive beauty, life, and passion hidden within the homes and minds of each villager, yet the landscape and society is completely opposite: arid, dying, hostile. The Church is portrayed as the catalyst for this spiritual drought in the community. It is the defining institution that exercises control in the minds of each of the villagers. As Yáñez explains in the epigraph, the novel could just as easily be entitled, *En un lugar del arzobispado,* demonstrating the Church's centrality in the identity of this small community. Villagers' tendencies to feel guilt, judgment, fear, worry, or hope, all are in relation to the belief system of the Catholic Church. For instance, the women of the village are judged extremely harshly, especially in terms of their sexuality. In keeping with the Mexican tradition, the women are normally categorized as either a Mary or an Eve: either as pure and virginal or as a traitorous adulteress. The girls who form a part of the religious group, *Las Hijas de María,* are highly esteemed by the community, but those who break the

strict rules of the group are considered less Christian, less virtuous, and even become estranged from social interaction. This explains, for example, Mercedes Toledo's angst when she receives a love letter from Julián, another boy in the village. Terrified of the judgment that would befall her from the group if she is found out, she thinks of the letter as a "maldito papel"[27] (25) and the amorous words are for her, "lenguaje del demonio"[28] (27). However, her determination to condemn the letter cedes in an interior monologue in which she imagines Julián speaks to her, saying: "¡He de llegar a ti, hoy o mañana, tarde o temprano, y tú misma desearás--¿deseas ya?—mi llegada! […] Ya lo pide la sangre, brincándote a lo largo del cuerpo" (29). This seemingly unstoppable passion is difficult not to equate with the impending revolution that serves as a subtext for all of the novel's action. Yáñez uses Mercedes's ardent interior longing for Julián and her battling with the institutional pressure of the Church as an example of Mexican society as a whole prior to the revolution: desirous of freedom from the Church's restraints and power.

The version of Catholicism carried out in the village is stifling, legalistic, and harsh—much like the landscape itself. Father José María Islas, one of the three priests of the village, embodies the irrationality of the legalism through his disapproval of romantic relationships of any kind, even including marriage and procreation. Head of the *Hijas de María,* he frowns especially on sensual acts, and children in the community are taught that they are a shameful thing, since they are the result of the sex act:

> Los niños van adquiriendo uso de razón en este clima de penumbra, inhibitorio. Sus pasos y risas tropiezan en mitad de silencios. Hallan que todo en la vida es un misterio. Escuchan frecuentemente la idea de que mejor hubiera sido que no vinieran al mundo. Flota en la atmósfera una difusa certidumbre de que han venido por

[27] "damned paper"
[28] "language of the devil"

> caminos de tristeza. […] Y así en los corazones recientes germina la raíz del miedo y de la curiosidad; germina con pausas mortales; germina.[29] (232)

As this passage demonstrates, there is something in the "dark climate" that inhibits happiness and the village has an atmosphere that allows the children to believe they came into the world through "paths of sorrow." This is one of many moments in which the space itself is indicative of the mentality of the collective village. This passage is preceded by a lengthy description of Father Islas and his power of controlling the minds of his parishioners. In this way, it seems to show that the result of his strictness is this environment of sadness and darkness. Not insignificantly, at the end of the novel, the onset of the revolution is paralleled by the heart attack suffered by Father Islas, who is no longer able to serve as priest to the villagers. His psychological domination dies in the final chapter where the revolution finally breaks out.

While *María Candelaria* depicted a village full of life and tropical greenery, the town of *Al filo* is arid and lifeless, with either the fiery heat of the sun burning overhead, or clouds that never produce rain. Even the fields are monotonous and sterile, only producing corn once a year. Both works, however, depict villages in which people have backwards ideas and suffer societal corruption. Like María Candelaria and Lorenzo Rafael, the villagers of *Al filo del agua* are extremely connected to the land. However, since they inhabit a landscape so death-like, the space itself seems to push them to also have an affinity for death through their connectedness to it. In fact, it is the opposite of the edenic landscape of *María Candelaria*. However, in the midst of what seems to be a hopeless hell on earth, within each of the villagers' houses is a hidden garden: these demonstrate the powerful hidden life of the

[29] "Children grow up in this dark climate of inhibitions. The silence around them checks their laughter and their games. All life seems to be a mystery. They often hear people say it would have been better for them not to have been born. There's a widespread belief in the atmosphere that they've come into world along paths of sorrow. […] So the root of fear and curiosity germinates in their hearts; it germinates with long pauses; but it grows."

unconscious mind, and provide hope for brighter futures, if they allow the revolution to infiltrate their closed off natures.

The hidden gardens make their appearance early on in the novel in an important context: the collective and timeless description of the village. This famous first chapter, entitled "Acto preparatorio,"[30] describes the landscape in terms of monotony and death: "Pueblo seco, sin árboles ni huertos. Entrada y cementerio sin árboles. Plazas de matas regadas. El río enjuto por los mayores meses; río de grandes lozas brillantes al sol. Áridos lomeríos por paisaje, cuyas líneas escuetas van superponiendo iguales horizontes. Lomeríos. Lomeríos"[31] (4). The almost hypnotizing repetition of *lomeríos* and the fact that in this excerpt the place is defined by its lack through the repetition of the word *sin* (without) followed by what typically would be greenery (orchards and trees) demonstrates that an important part of the physical environment is missing: life. What's more, it shows that the village's inhabitants are almost hypnotized by the monotony of the repetitive landscape itself. However, in almost the same breath, the narrator goes on to describe a hidden life tucked within the walls of each home: "En cada casa un brocal, oculto a las miradas forasteras, como las yerbas florecidas en macetas que pueblan los secretos patios, los adentrados corredores, olientes a frescura y a paz"[32] (4). There is a surprising amount of life found around the *brocal,* or old-fashioned well, of each villager's home, with plants that smell of "freshness and peace." Within each home one finds a tranquil and happy bit of life through water and

[30] An "Acto preparatorio" is one of many significant references to the Catholic faith found throughout the novel. It is a "preparative act," a time of purification for what is about to be a religious experience. In titling his first chapter in such a way, it is as if Yáñez is ironically winking at the reader, suggesting that the reading of his text itself is going to be a religious and illuminating experience. This is ironic since as the plot unwinds, the reader becomes increasingly aware of the problem of the Church, and the lack of a higher power. Instead of a deity, the reader finds meaning and depth through the exploration of the unconscious motives, drives, and desires of the villagers. This suggests a powerful move into modernity: the death of God, the awakening of ego-centered psychology largely propelled by the ideas of Freud and Jung.

[31] "It is a barren village; there are no trees or orchards; no trees even at the entrance or in the Cemetery. In the Square, only watered plants. For most of the year the river is dry; river of large, smooth stones, shining in the sunlight. A landscape of barren ridges stretching tier behind tier to the horizon…barren ridge on barren ridge" (This and all subsequent translations of *Al filo del agua* come from Ethel Brinton's 1963 translation, *The Edge of the Storm*)

[32] "Each house has its well, hidden from the curious gaze of the outsider, like the pots of flowering plants in the hidden patios and inner passageways, smelling of freshness and peace."

colorful plants, but the external image, what outsiders see, is a landscape of monotony and drought. Outside of each home is a place where agriculture constantly frustrates and lowers the spirits of the townspeople: "Las gentes viven de la agricultura. Se cultiva mucho maíz. Hay una sola cosecha al año. Carece la comarca de presas y regadíos. Una constante zozobra por malos temporales deja su huella en el espíritu de las gentes"[33] (12). As M. Anderson has noted, there is a constant reciprocity present throughout the novel between townspeople and environment: "Yáñez's novel represents a co-penetration of the landscape with its inhabitants in such a way that the identities of the characters become fundamentally linked to their environment, while the landscape is frequently defined in human terms" (M. Anderson 451). Anderson's observation solidifies the idea that these gardens represent the repressed unconscious, by symbolizing a vital space hidden from view.

Latent desires for Sex, Intellectual Satiety, and the Real in *Al filo del agua*

The hidden gardens of each home is an important symbol in *Al filo,* since it represents a pattern that recurs in other sectors of the village society. There are other "hidden gardens," or repressed desires, that appear in different forms throughout the novel, namely the "hidden gardens" of sexual desire, intellectual desire, the desire for the Real, and the desire to embrace modernizing ideas from outside of the village. Each of these desires finds its origin in the unconscious mind. This aspect of the novel suggests that in order to free themselves from environmental confinement, the villagers must allow the unconscious mind to be free as well rather than repress it. Let us look at several examples to understand this in a more in-depth way.

Sexual Desire

First is the example of the "hidden garden" of sexual desire, a most scandalous subject for the strictly religious community. The conservative Father Islas, for instance, discourages

[33] "The people make their living farming. Much Indian corn is grown, only one crop a year, for the region is without reservoirs and irrigation. Constant worry about bad seasons leaves its mark on the spirit."

anyone to marry, even frowning at the presence of new babies, saying it is more pious to live a life of celibacy in dedication to the Church. However, sexuality in the novel appears as a life force that resists containment, since it is connected to the landscape itself. One particular example of this occurs in the depiction of the *Casa de Ejercicios:* this restrictive space ultimately proves ineffective at reigning in the villagers' sexual desire. The Casa de Ejercicios was constructed by the head priest, Father Dionisio Martínez, as a spiritual retreat center for parishioners to go and spend time in fasting, spiritual study, prayer, and self-denial in various forms. When they stay there, they sleep on the cold, hard floors, spend time in complete silence, and participate in daily self-flagellation. The place is windowless, cut off completely from the natural world, and full of morbid paintings and writings on the walls, which entreat its inhabitants to meditate on death and the dangerous repercussions of living a sinful existence. It is a powerful place, in which one does not feel social class, time, space, or responsibility. As the narrator describes it, those within encounter, "el silencio y tinieblas de aquella casa llena de ecos, donde se tiene la impresión de haber sido transportado a otro mundo remotísimo del que nunca se saldrá y en el que no haya tiempo ni espacio"[34] (54). In the chapter entitled, "Casa de ejercicios" the men of the village spend a week in the house during the Lenten season, and slowly reform their attitudes: they promise to let go of old grudges that they have against one another, confess all of their sins, and promise to live more piously. However, after this rigorous week of self-flagellation, meditation, scripture study, and fasting in the influential space of the Casa de Ejercicios, the parishioners quickly return to their carnal lifestyles, hidden within their homes. Almost instantly after returning home, the narrator describes each man conceiving a child with his wife, and ponders: "Esta noche ¿quién será concebido? Abel o Caín, un sacerdote o un forajido, el salvador del pueblo, su

[34] "the silence and darkness of the echoing house, where one was transported to another far-distant, timeless world from which there is no return."

escandalizador y verdugo, la gloria o el oprobio, quién sabe si solo vidas inútiles"[35] (69). What's more, their return to ther carnal desires is quicker than ever, demonstrating the environment of heightened agitation that would eventually lead to revolution: "'Nunca fue más efímero el esfuerzo cuaresmal, nunca más pasajeras las conquistas del Santo Tiempo'—a una reflexionan los eclesiásticos"[36] (165). This powerful dark space of the Retreat House is no match for the deep-seated sexual longings that each man that returns home experiences.

Another example of repressed sexual desire comes from the conservative young woman, Mercedes Toledo. She is in love with a young man named Julián, but feels conflicted about even speaking to him, since she is a part of *las Hijas de María.* In the chapter entitled, "Aquella noche," we are privy to Mercedes's inner thoughts in which she tries to resist her desire for Julián, repeating the words from the Gospel that Jesus Christ said when he prays in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Señor aparta de mí, ya este cáliz"[37] (31). She finds her sexual desire too much to bear, and bears it as if she were the Christ. Sexuality then, lurks within the heart of the villagers. As readers, we understand that this is a "hidden garden," since Father Islas and Father Martínez's overly restrictive views on sexuality border on the ridiculous, and Micaela's desire for Julián is a perfectly normal one.

Intellectual Desire

The second "hidden garden" of desire tucked within the psyches of the villagers is that of intellectual curiosity. This longing to satiate the intellect is especially salient in the ruminations of María (Dionisio's niece), but is also present in Gabriel, Luis, and the collective descriptions of the community. The problem again stems from the Church's repression: the priests and strictly pious community view the world outside of the Christian village as the enemy of the soul. Outside ideas that infiltrate the community are considered

[35] "Who will be conceived this night? March 27. Abel or Cain? A priest or an outlaw, the savior of his people, or their shame to scourge, their glory or opprobrium? Perhaps merely useless lives."
[36] "the curates reflected, 'Never has the Lenten effort been so ephemeral, nor the victories gained in these holy days of such duration.'"
[37] "Take this bitter cup from me, O Lord!"

infectious. Reading is the main way that these ideas can spoil the community's supposed purity, so the priests take drastic measures to stop any reading of non-Christian texts. Father Reyes even checks the village mail daily for the infiltration of leftist or "sinful" ideas, citing the fact that the *arrieros* who bring in the outside letters and merchandise are "los vehículos de infección comunicados con otros pueblos, con la capital, con el mundo, enemigo del alma"[38] (149). The Church's authorities strive to maintain the ideological "perfection" that remains (at least on a superficial level) in the village.

María's story is particularly illuminating in order to understand the latent intellectual desire and its meaning in the context of the narrative. She is the orphaned niece of Father Martínez, the priest who raised her and her sister, Marta, from infancy. Although he loves his nieces dearly, he never shows it, and is an exacting and strict caregiver. María loves to read, but is forbidden from doing so by her uncle. She reads whatever she can find in secret. She longs to leave the town and explore the cities of the world. As the novel progresses, María becomes increasingly unhappy with her stifling town and desirous of change and more knowledge. There is a moment when she feels that not only the people, but also the environment itself imprisons her. From the walls, to the horizon, to the sky, María passionately hates her homeland. When the liberal don Román Capistrán impertinently invites her to go to Mexico City with him, she overflows with fury and frustration at her situation, desirous first of revenge against Román for such a suggestion. However, her desire for revenge on Román expands to one for vengeance on her entire community, and even the space of the village itself:

> Recrecía el oleaje de proyectos vengativos, primero contra el autor del agravio, después contra todo el pueblo, contra todos y cada uno de los inaguantables vecinos,

[38] "They are, in fact, enemies of the soul, carriers of infection between the village and the world outside."

de las odiosas vecinas; contra los muros, contra el horizonte, contra el cielo sofocante, contra todo lo que la tenía presa en este aborrecible rincón del mundo.[39] (350)

In this way, we see that it is not only the people, but also the space itself—the horizon, the sky, the walls—that keep the villagers imprisoned in intellectual mediocrity. Near the end of the novel, María leaves the village in a wave of infamy, dressed in full color (instead of the normal black mourning garb that all of the women wear) and on horseback, she abandons the village to join the revolution. She finally allows her inner passion for a greater knowledge of the world to become a part of her outer self. The reason she found this power was through the reading of forbidden texts, as D. Anderson observes, "the forbidden readings, serving as a technology of the self, generate a new subjectivity for María, and they encourage her resisting attitude" (55). However, this means she must leave the village since she no longer conforms to their norms. Upon her departure, María's reputation almost instantly becomes stained in the village, suggesting that all who allow their passion to surface must be condemned within this space: "La noche y el día y las semanas que vendrán. Despellejando la memoria de la fugitiva. En las alcobas, en las puertas, en las tiendas, en la plaza, en el atrio, en las calles, en los caminos, en las sementeras. Empecinadamente"[40] (383). This is significant, since the "despellejamiento" or "flaying" of María's memory will take place in connection with the space of the village itself: in the rooms, doors, and stores. María's departure, followed by the quick judgment from the anonymous villagers described as seemingly contiguous within their harsh space begs the question: will the collective condemnation of inner passion by the closed minded village ever go away? It seems that it will not, since the space itself pushes the villagers' identity to be hermetic and confining. As

[39] "Plans of vengeance filled her mind, vengeance first on the author of the insult, then on the whole village, on one and all of her hateful, insufferable neighbors, on the walls, the horizon, the confining sky, vengeance on everything that kept her prisoner in this corner of the world."
[40] "Night and day, during the following weeks. Picking to pieces the memory of the runaway. In bedrooms, in doorways, in shops, in the Square, in front of the church, in the streets, on the roads, in the fields as the seeds were sown; stubbornly."

the introductory chapter describes, the village space and the villagers themselves parallel one another in a shared trait of impenetrability:

> Gentes y calles absortas. Regulares las hiladas de muros, a grandes lienzos vacíos. Puertas y ventanas de austera cantería, cerradas con tablones macizos, de nobles, rancias maderas, desnudas de barnices y vidrios, todas como trabajadas por uno y el mismo artífice rudo y exacto. Pátina del tiempo, del sol, de las lluvias, de las manos consuetudinarias, en los portones, en los dinteles y sobre los umbrales. Casa de las que no escapan rumores, risas, gritos, llantos; pero a lo alto, la fragancia de finos leños consumidos en hornos y cocinas, envuelta para regalo del cielo con telas de humo.
>
> En el corazón y en los aledaños el igual hermetismo.[41] (3)

This juxtaposition of a closed people and place perhaps explains the futility of María's vibrant transition to translate to any possibility of change and liberation within the village itself. D. Anderson also has a somewhat pessimistic view of what he deems María's not-so-powerful departure, calling it "escapism:"

> Whereas María's resistance to dominant reading practices empowers her to join the Revolution and reject monastic existence in the village, she seeks the refuge of escapism, believing that passion, heroism, and adventure lie beyond the village […]. María exercises little critical choice in her reading of the Revolution; she simply repeats her escapist hermeneutics. Her reading practices both enable and yet severely constrain her resistance. (57)

[41] "People and streets absorbed in their own thoughts. The smooth, straight walls present a blank surface, broken only by doors and windows. Doors and windows, set in plain stonework, and fastened with heavy beams of good seasoned timber; there is no varnish or glass and all have the appearance of having been fashioned by the same craftsman, primitive and exact. Time, the sun, the rain, the daily touch of hands have given a patina to the panels of the doors, to the lintels and thresholds. From these houses no sounds of voices, no laughter, no shouts, no cries escape; but above them hovers the fragrance of fine wood, burned in ovens and kitchens, wrapped like a gift from heaven in clouds of blue smoke. Inside and out, the same secrecy."

For Anderson, María's reading style is too romanticized and not critical enough. For this reason, her moment of change has no impact on the community. The villagers continue to live a life of repression of inner passion, and no change occurs upon María's departure. It seems there must be a better option for hope of changing the community itself. Instead of those who are different being forced to leave, a change from within would be more advantageous.

Something similar to María's escape occurs in the account of the character of Luis Gonzaga Pérez, who also "escapes" the village as a result of being too given to liberal and dissenting ideas. Luis's fatal flaw is that he wishes to reconcile Catholicism and its tenets with his liberal-leaning ideas, and it ultimately drives him out of his mind during a long walk through the red-hot countryside that surrounds the village in midday on Good Friday. As a result, he finds himself forced to spend the rest of his days in an insane asylum in Guadalajara. In the village, Luis is known for his beautiful and elaborate altars that he constructs to commemorate Holy Week. However, these altars often exhibit liberal leanings, and are censored by Father Martínez. For instance, when Luis recreates the scene of the Last Supper, he puts Porfirio Díaz's face on the figure of Judas, and Dionisio forces him to change the visage to that of Benito Juárez, the liberal hero of the War of the Reform of the 1850s, a decision emblematic of the Church's desire to demonize the left.

Luis's desire for intellectual stimulation is combined with his religious fervor. He reads the Bible and interprets it imaginatively and passionately through his representations in the elaborate altars. This is a taboo form of Biblical interpretation in the strict old-fashioned village, although it does inspire many curious observers to visit his home. His mother scolds him for his reading style: "Mira como eres. No, si cuando te digo que a nada bueno conduce que leas a tus anchas la Sagrada Biblia, como protestante"[42] (111). Luis's emotive

[42] "I'm telling you that no good will come of your reading the Holy bible as you please, like a Protestant."

interpretation of the Bible combined with his liberal tendencies has no place in Dionisio's understanding of the Catholic faith. As the more lenient Father Reyes tells him, "Luis, tú eres un católico a lo Chateaubriand; de la religión te gusta lo externo, que halague los sentidos. Apuesto que aspirabas al sacerdocio por lucir los ornamentos, porque te besaran la mano, etc."[43] (119). Reyes exposes Luis's vanity here, but also demonstrates a theme of the brand of Catholicism practiced in the village: there is no place for Luis's appreciation of the pleasure or beauty of scripture in the religious customs of this village. One must leave to find deep and profound emotion, which is what Luis finds himself forced to do. His expulsion occurs after his mystical experience in the countryside, where he deludes himself into thinking he is the Christ walking to his martyrdom on Good Friday.

When Dionisio forbids him from being a part of the Good Friday procession, Luis spends the hot afternoon in the sunny hills outside the village, ultimately losing consciousness at about the same time that Jesus Christ died. His bizarre wanderings through the countryside, where he gets in touch with his unconscious mind contrast starkly with what the rest of the village is doing: meditating in the deathly and dismal Casa de Ejercicios. Once again, the hidden life of the natural world connects more deeply with the characters, and the stifling nature of the Retreat House forces them into an unnatural submission. The narrator describes Luis's interpretation of the moment: "Hoy todo está desierto. No hay muchachos que jueguen, hombres que miren hacia el río. Allá, cerrada la Casa de Ejercicios, tétrica, en competencia con la soledad del cementerio, frente a frente. Pueblo mío, hecho de piedra y de resecas maderas"[44] (117).

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[43] "Luis, you are a Catholic like Chateaubriand; you like the externals of religion and the aspects which appeal to the senses. You aspired to the priesthood in order to deck yourself in its robes, so that people might kiss your hand."

[44] "Today, all is deserted. No boys are playing, no men looking towards the river. Up there, Retreat House is shut and gloomy, as lonely as the Cemetery opposite it. My village, village of stone and dry wood." (the word "pueblo" is translated here as "village," but also can mean "people," in Spanish, again emphasizing the interrelatedness of people and space.)

The sun plays an important role in his moment of mental confusion: "El sol iba llegando al cenit. Los horizontes bailaban como flamas de hoguera. El cielo y la tierra, sin amparo de sombras, implacables. Lumbre caía de lo alto, lumbre salía de las entrañas del mundo, lumbre acumulaban todos los rumbos, en solemne silencio"[45] (121). Luis encounters his own personal hell, with all of the sun's fire-like heat torturing his soul. Driven insane by this discrepancy between his passion and its relation to religion, Luis is forced to leave the village, and is institutionalized in an insane asylum in Guadalajara, the nearest big city. M. Anderson has an interesting observation about Luis, theorizing that he represents the direction Mexico needed to take collectively: a general move to the urban centers, with a nostalgia for its rural past: "[Luis] represents Mexico's future, which, for Yáñez, required the nation to leave behind but not forget the rural (which would be memorialized in culture) for the modern, urbanized world of the 'Mexican Miracle,' the cure-all for the psychological ills responsible for the Revolution" (454). Luis's unique reading of the Bible leads him to insanity, and like María, his nonconformity estranges him from his unforgiving homeland, and he is forced to spend the remainder of his days in an insane asylum, far from the village. Again, there is no place for dissenting voices or original views in the homogenous community of the village. It seems there is little hope for intellectual fulfillment.

The Real through Musical Expression

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan coined the term "the Real" to define the state of mind of an individual before he/she acquires language. For Lacan, this stage is important since it contains the whole reality, before the categorizing power of language takes over the psyche. One critic describes Lacan's ideas about language as follows: "Language, in Lacan's analysis, operates on us as much as we operate on it. We follow the signs. Language speaks us. But in the process, we become split between a conscious self and an unconscious self that

[45] "The sun was reaching its zenith. The horizon was shimmering with waves of heat. Sky and earth, with no sheltering shadow, were alike implacable. Heat beat down from above, heat rose up from the center of the earth, heat pervaded the atmosphere in solemn silence."

we repress, deny, and repeat" (Lacan 1282). Lacan differentiates the Real from the Symbolic order of the mind, which he defines as the world of language and signifiers, in which the mind is confined and constrained by outside influences. In *Al filo del agua,* one way that the villagers get in touch with the Real, or a deeper understanding of the unconscious, is by listening to music in the outdoor space. The music allows them to connect with the inner workings of their minds, their deeper desires, the "hidden gardens" within their souls. Music without words could be considered to have an effect that would undermine the symbolic order: free of language, it can speak to the unconscious, the state of mind before the signified takes over with language. There are two such incidences in the village in which music expresses something more profound, something beyond the ideological control and social pressure that the village and its community strive to maintain. Through music, in the form of Gabriel's bell ringing and the orchestra from the city, villagers are able to connect with the Real, a part of the psyche that cannot or will not be put into words.

Let us first examine the situation that occurs with Gabriel, the village bell ringer. He is an orphan boy whom Dionisio takes in from a young age, and his only gift is an almost mystical ability to ring the bells of the village Church. Unable to properly perform the responsibilities of an altar boy because he is so clumsy, Dionisio allows him to ring the bells and do other odd jobs around the church. Gabriel is a singular character in the novel, and his passionate bell ringing elicits what may be considered "the Real" from the villagers' psyches. What's more, it seems that, more than any other character, Gabriel is intricately connected to the land of the village. If asked to play music elsewhere, the narrator explains that he would likely respond,

> yo soy ajeno a esos pueblos y no podría hacer hablar sus campanas; las campanas de cada lugar han de ser como la lengua de cada individuo: este habla ronco y aquel atiplado; uno tartamudea y otro es tarabilla, sin que lo quiera, sin que lo hayan

> aprendido: por naturaleza y respondiendo a los más pequeños modos de su ser, a sus virtudes y a sus debilidades.[46] (180)

Gabriel's music is not only able to elicit unconscious motives from the villagers, but also is connected to the natural world and homeland—he is only able to make the bells of his own place speak since he is so deeply connected to the space itself. Gabriel is linked to the village itself, and expresses the villagers' innermost passions through his bellringing: "era […] como si en él su pueblo hablase: su pueblo, que él mismo era, cuyo carácter traía infundido: médula intransferible"[47] (181). As Jaén observes, "Gabriel es, […] a través de sus campanas, lengua a los deseos inexpresados, tal vez inexpresables, y reprimidos del pueblo"[48] (898).

Gabriel's self-expression through the medium of bell ringing activates what appear to be archetypal emotions in those who listen; he activates villagers' ancient memories. The following excerpt, in which Gabriel allows unbridled emotion to surface through bell ringing upon the departure of Victoria from the village, demonstrates his ability to use music to inspire the awakening of the unconscious, the Real:

> era la satisfacción de llorar con un canto nuevo y arcaico, sobrehumano, como si concertara las voces de todos los mundos y de todos los tiempos: presentes, pasados y futuros; todas las agonías y todas las esperanzas de los que sufrieron, de los que sufren, de los que sufrirán. Si las fuerzas de la tierra se confabularan presto, no, no, no detendrían al torrente, movido por los invictos poderes del amor y la muerte.[49] (239)

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[46] "'I would be a stranger in those cities, and couldn't make their bells talk. The bells of each place are as individual as the speech of a man: one has a deep voice, another a high-pitched one; one man stutters, another rattles along; no one tries or learns how to speak like this; each man's voice is determined by his nature and expresses his way of being, his virtues and weaknesses."

[47] "It was as if he himself were talking, as if his village were speaking through him, and he was his village; he bore its character deep within him, its unchanging essence."

[48] "Gabriel is […] through his bells, the voice of the unexpressed—perhaps inexpressible—and repressed desires of the village" (translation is mine).

[49] "He had found the means to express his grief in harmonies both new and archaic at the same time, harmonies transcending the human, as though in this concert he were pouring out all the grief of the world and the ages, all

In this moment, we realize that Gabriel is essential to the delicate psychological balance of the community by providing a socially acceptable outlet—bell ringing—for untapped emotion to unfold. The narrator adds, "Nadie, sino el arcángel de la muerte pulsara los bronces, transfigurando en música el sonido, elevando a la eternidad lo transitorio, a la universalidad lo comarcano, y mudando el horror en deleite: catártico"[50] (184). Gabriel's bell ringing brings a deeper, universal illumination to the superficial world of the village. When he abandons the village, full of shame for breaking Dionisio's rules, the villagers never again experience any sort of psychological equilibrium. Indeed, the final pages of the novel include Dionisio's lament for the loss of Gabriel, comparing it to the loss of youth, vitality. The loss of Gabriel to the community signifies a loss of a cathartic outlet for the deep-seated passions hidden within each villager's psyche. As a result, the novel closes with the community doomed to a death-like existence, characterized by loveless faith, a world full of gossip and judgment, without compassion or artful expression. This is exemplified by the large crowd of curious townspeople at the final mass described the novel, motivated not by piety but by a sinister desire to watch Dionisio react to the elopement of his niece.

In the subsequent love story between María and Gabriel, like María and Lorenzo of *María Candelaria,* we encounter another example of tragic love: in both cases, we observe a perfect love that can never be. Gabriel and María love reading, share a deep affinity for one another, but, much like María Candelaria and Lorenzo Rafael, they are thwarted by their harsh societies. However, most of all in the case of Gabriel and María, anti-intellectualism leads to their downfall—no one allows them to enjoy literature, whether it be Alarcón's *El final de Norma,* Dumas's *The Three Musketeers,* or even the daily newspaper. Both flee their society's constrictions in their own ways: María, heartbroken, breaks free from her black

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the past, present and future agony and hope of mankind. All the forces of earth combined could not stem the torrent set in motion by the power of love and death."

[50] "Only the Archangel of Death could make bronze vibrate like this, raise the transitory to the eternal, the regional to the universal, and, strange alchemy, turn horror into delight."

clothes of mourning, and joins the revolution dressed in colorful clothing. Gabriel sets sail for Europe to pursue his artistic career, but without any of his deep-seated passion that came from producing music through the bells and his deep connection to the land of the village. The true artists are forced out, and those left are the superficial busybodies who attend mass for the sole purpose of seeing Dionisio fail or lose face due to his niece's disgrace. Thus, the environment of the village itself asphyxiates true humanity. The disembodied voices that incessantly gossip are all that remains upon the departure of those who desire intellectualism and passion, such as Gabriel and María.

Gabriel's departure from the village is represented in the landscape, since the land falls again into infertility, seemingly as a result of his parting. As the chapter ends, there were "amagos de lluvia, infecundos"[51] (249). The "sterile" clouds mirror the impossible union between Gabriel and María. Water, a metaphor for life, cannot arrive to this infertile village because it cannot allow these two perfect souls to unite. As Gabriel leaves the village, Father Islas preaches the sermon of Ascension Thursday, telling the story of when Jesus Christ leaves his disciples and ascends to Heaven. The juxtaposition of Gabriel leaving the village and Christ ascending to Heaven is by no means accidental. When Gabriel leaves, he takes with him his rare skill of ringing the bells in such a way that he would awaken the passion, heart, and real drives of the villagers, and thus leaves it a dry, sterile place, dominated by the symbolic order.

The Orchestra of Outsiders

Llamas Jiménez observes in Yañez's novel the omnipresent power of the capital city and its dynamism in a village that is trying desperately to hold on to its timeless traditions: "Aunque el ambiente recreado en la novela es la provincial […], la capital está omnipresente

[51] "a few drops of rain fell, but without bringing life."

como símbolo difuso de un ideal de progreso nefasto porque implica cambio"[52] (Llamas Jiménez 22). This is especially relevant in the case of the orchestra that arrives from the big city and the unconscious drives and desires the musicians elicit from the villagers through the music they play in the plaza one night. Space again plays an especially important role in this moment, since there is a stark contrast between the ways the music is perceived in the two spaces where the musicians play their pieces. When they first arrive, they are exhausted from their long trip from afar into the remote village and disturbed by the unfriendly and death-like surroundings of the Casa de Ejercicios where they are made to stay, since Father Islas deems it inappropriate for them to stay in the villagers' homes. As a result, they play terribly for the religious celebrations of the Immaculate Conception celebrated on December 8. This first performance contrasts starkly with the soul-illuminating and powerful way that they play when outdoors in the plaza the following night. Through this contrast, it becomes apparent that the enclosed space of the Casa de Ejercicios represents the limitations of an existence of only mind and spirit, without any passion, which is awakened only in the outdoor space of the plaza. The Casa de Ejercicios is a place where the space pushes those therein to live only internally, completely apart from the external world. When the musicians play outdoors (against the wishes of Father Islas), something startlingly different occurs in the heart of each of the villagers:

> Cuántas heridas abiertas por el rebullicio de los músicos, por las nunca oídas melodías—amor, ensueño, tristeza dulce, íntimo júbilo, hallazgo de buscadas expresiones—que desvelaron al pueblo y revelaron a los adolescentes un mundo, un lenguaje nuevos, en la noche del ocho al nueve de diciembre; mundo y lenguaje presentidos muy cerca, mas inasibles; llenos de celestiales encantos, y al mismo tiempo humanísimos; mundo y lenguaje de los deseos cotidianos, hasta entonces

[52] "Although the environment represented in the novel is provincial […], the capital is omnipresent as a wide-spread symbol of the ideal of a disastrous sort of progress since it implies change" (translation is mine).

> oscuro, de pronto iluminados con magnificencia por el concierto de instrumentos y voces, por las voces que hacían colar palabras de amor y de melancolía, palabras corrientes que alcanzaban en el vuelo la expresión de lo inefable, transfiguradas, como cohetes de luces; mundo y lenguaje de los deseos, liberados por primera vez en la noche del pueblo, en la noche gratamente sobrecogida, transverberada con saetas vibrantes, luego hechas arrullos en los ámbitos de soledad, estremecidos; estremecidos como el ahora deleitable desvelo de viejos y adolescentes, que nunca oyeron música igual, distinta de la consuetudinaria música eclesiástica […].[53] (310)

The description goes on extensively to describe each villagers' particular desire: María for the city, Lucas Macías for bygone days, and, for many, the memory of lost lovers. It is through listening to this powerful music that María realizes that Gabriel is her true love (313). The narrator calls this moment a "[s]ensual sublevación"[54] (312). What is most surprising, however, is that despite this moment of exultant passion, the villagers rise the next morning and condemn the musicians for their drunkenness, acting as if nothing had happened to their own spirits through the inspiring experience. What immediately follows this event is a terrible season for crops with almost no rain and a pestilence among the cattle. The natural world, then, resembles the failure of the villagers to bring their unconscious desires to life with the coming of the day—they are doomed to live in a lifeless place if they cannot allow their inner selves to appear. In the same way that Gabriel with his soul-touching bell ringing is expelled from the community, the orchestra's attempt to awaken the desires of the villagers

[53] "How many wounds were re-opened by the playing and singing of the musicians! Their melodies, never heard before—of love, dreams, tender melancholy, secret joys, emotions long unexpressed—kept people awake and revealed a world, a new language, to adolescents on that night between the eighth and ninth of December, a world and language felt to be very near but inaccessible, full of celestial and, at the same time, human charm; a world and a language of daily desires, hitherto hidden , but now magnificently illumined by harmonies, of instruments and voices, which sent words of love and sadness winging forth, common words but transfigured like the dingy rockets that suddenly burst into color and brilliance and trace briefly, in flight, ineffable thoughts. It was a world and a language of desire loosed so freely for the first time in that village. The vibrant cries, which could suddenly die to trembling murmurs in the surrounding solitude, took old men and adolescents by surprise, held them awake in an enchantment new to their ears, so different from the church music to which they were accustomed."

[54] "Sensual rebellion"

is thwarted by the power of social and religious pressure that seems to be inherent in the space itself. The deeper workings of their unconscious minds are again forced into submission.

Dionisio's Dream: The Breakdown of the Symbolic Order

The influence of psychoanalysis and the ideas of Freud that were widespread during the time of *Al filo del agua*'s publication are apparent in the novel's themes, as is evidenced in the previous examples. One central character of the novel is so frequently haunted by his unconscious mind that it drives him to feelings of confusion and dread. This character is Father Dionisio Martínez, who midway through the novel has a disturbing dream that haunts him during his waking hours, and slowly eats away at him both physically and mentally. An examination of the evolution of his mental states will help to better understand the portrayal of desire in the novel and its relation to the gardens as symbolic of the unconscious mind as well as the impending revolution.

Dionisio dreams that a man who is a mysterious composite of Gabriel, Damián and Satan appears to rape a woman who is a composite of both María and Micaela (his beloved nieces). After this dream, he is unable to think clearly. He begins to lose his grip on reality and his objectivity as a priest. This event demonstrates that even Dionisio is not immune to the need for real feeling in this arid landscape of a community. D. Anderson observes that, "[t]he novel ends with the celebration of a mass, ironically emphasizing permanence and perhaps the impossibility of change within the community" (56). Anderson makes a compelling point. However, I would argue that the novel's final pages leave the village's fate open to the reader's interpretation: will Dionisio, who begins to undergo change and get in touch with the deeper passions of his unconscious mind, be estranged from the village—like María, Luis, and Gabriel before him? Or will change finally infiltrate in the village itself, through Dionisio, who has such a strong influence on its community?

M. Anderson offers a more optimistic conclusion for the fate of the village. He explains that since Dionisio's health fails and the legalistic Father Islas is paralyzed and removed, there is a newfound possibility for freedom in the community: "With the mediators responsible for its strict geographic demarcation removed, the landscape is left blank for the possibility of the writing of a new history in a wider context" (455).

Throughout the novel, Dionisio's health gradually deteriorates. He is often bedridden, but tries desperately to maintain order and control over his village. He begins to feel the villagers are unstoppable *canicas,* or marbles, that roll around, and he cannot control their unexpected behavior.

When Dionisio awakens from his disturbing dream, he begins to mix reality, fantasy, and his prayers in Latin:

> Don Dionisio—*Dies irae, dies illa*—consiguió despertar—*solvet saeclum in favilla--,* mas despierto—*teste David cum Sibylla*—dudó—*Quantus tremor est futurus*—si ahora estaba dormido—*quando judex est venturus*—o muerto—*cuncta stricte discussurus*—y si todo lo soñando era realidad mortal.[55] (213)

Intermingled with Dionisio's confusion about lucidity, he repeats the first stanzas of the "Dies irae," which is a Latin hymn used for the mass to mourn the dead. The Latin verses intermingled with the Spanish of the above-cited quote are translated by the Anglican Ordinariate as follows: "The day of wrath, that day will dissolve in ashes, David being witness along with the Sibyl. How great will be the quaking, when the judge will come, investigating everything strictly." These lyrics speak of the impending day of judgment and the end of the earth. In this moment, Dionisio feels as if he is attending his own funeral (213), and mourns the loss of his own self. This dream indeed marks the onset of a change in Dionisio: he begins to lose his grip on reality, let go of his legalism, open himself up to the

[55] "Don Dionisio—*Dies irae, dies illa*—finally awoke—*solvet saeclum in favilla*—but he could not be sure whether he was awake or asleep, or dead, or if all that he had dreamed was stern reality."

possibility of change. For instance, in the final chapter, aware that he has been too harsh with Luis and by doing so has perhaps contributed to the young man's insanity and institutionalization, Dionisio orders Father Abundio Reyes, the more liberal and lenient priest, to lead the Lenten exercises in the Casa de Ejercicios, knowing he will not be as strict in the organization of the activities as Father Islas. It's as if the novel suggested through Dionisio's transition after the dream that if we allow the unconscious mind to make an appearance, we would open ourselves up to a different way of life, a different way of thinking.

What's more, Dionisio bitterly laments his harsh and cold behavior toward his family and parishioners. When he prays, he cannot help but regret his past:

> Toda oración es arrollada por imágenes de amargura: su estéril celo por la pureza, su casa para ejercicios espirituales, los largos años inútiles de severidad contraproducente. ¡Si hubiera dejado que la ternura se le derramara! Ya es insoportable la fatiga de sus piernas, le tiemblan las manos, las rodillas; debe recostarse. No. No. Aunque lo cubra frío sudor. Debe castigar la inutilidad, el fracaso de su vida.[56] (385).

The dream for Dionisio becomes a catalyst for his rejection of legalism: he realizes that the unconscious mind is more powerful than his severity and efforts to maintain a community completely cut off from the outside world. Yet, at the same time, the verb "castigar" (to punish) suggests that he perhaps is in danger of falling back on his old way of looking at religious obligations, emphasizing sternness over tenderness.

Another significant example of the change Dionisio undergoes as a result of his dream is when Consuelo, Justino Pelayo's 10 year-old daughter, dies. Dionisio, who has always

[56] "His prayers were interrupted by bitter thoughts: his zeal for purity, Retreat House, his long years of vain severity that defeated its own ends, all had gone for nothing. If only he had let his tenderness overflow! His feet were weary, his hands and knees trembled, he should go to bed. No, no! Even though he was covered with a cold sweat, he must punish the uselessness, the failure of his life."

prided himself on his divine ability to forget what was said in the confessional to him by his parishioners, suddenly cannot summon this ability: he cannot help but remember Justino's confession about how he had cheated on his wife with a prostitute. The earth thrown onto the little girl's tomb feels like blows to his own head: "Caían las paletadas de tierra en la tumba de la niña y eran como golpes en las sienes del cura"[57] (346). Dionisio's mind suddenly turns to María in this moment, and he experiences a conflicted interior struggle between wishing for the buried girl to have been María and longing to show her fatherly love, instead of his usual dry and indifferent treatment (346). His tight reign on his unconscious mind begins to make appearances such as this as a result of his dream. Critic John Ochoa notes that Dionisio struggles with the weight of "self-knowledge about being confined within the impossible paradox of trying to manage and maintain order when the reigning narrative and ethos is one of revolution and change" (313). Getting in touch with the unconscious in this instance is synonymous with allowing the ideals of the revolution to take hold of the community, since at this same moment, the revolution is only two months away, and tensions are building in the country with the recent imprisonment of political opposition candidate to Porfirio Díaz, Francisco Madero.[58]

Throughout the novel, various characters repeat the words of Jesus Christ in a struggle to resist desires and passions that they believe to be sinful. For instance, Father Martínez in particular repeatedly prays the words that Christ prayed in Gethsemane, asking not to be martyred on the cross: "Aparta de mí este cáliz" (Take this cup from me), demonstrating his lofty belief in a parallel with himself and the Christ. Significantly, at the end of the novel, his prayer differs from the original version of the Bible. Dionisio omits the words "Thy will be done (*Sed quod tu),*" demonstrating his refusal to give up his free will. Ochoa explains,

[57] "The shovelfuls of earth fell on the child's coffin like blows on his temples."
[58] Madero ran against Díaz for election in 1910 but was imprisoned by the Díaz regime in June of that year. This chapter takes place two months later, in August of 1910. The revolution is said to begin on November 20, 1920, when Madero planned to overthrow Díaz. The juxtaposition between these events and Dionisio's unconscious finally surfacing should not be ignored.

> Dionisio omits the "your will be done" in his final prayer, refuses to give up his free will: His is a divided and conflicted existence: his wish is to be free, his duty is to conform—perhaps like Yáñez himself, who was simultaneously an instrument of the Party, and an intellectual of the second generation whose task it was to offer constructive 'self-criticism' regarding the inheritance, and uses, of the Revolution. (326)

The power of Dionisio lies in his ability to find agency within himself, instead of blindly following the tenets of the Catholic faith. The "hidden garden" of his unconscious mind at the end of the novel deters him from completely becoming a heartless legalist for the Church. And, as Ochoa so keenly observes, this could possibly be a subtext for the restrictions that Yáñez himself felt from his government.

The Equivocal Influence of the Outsider

At various moments in *Al filo del agua*, the outsiders who come into the village from other towns, cities, or even countries create a contrast with those living there in that, instead of being fused together with the landscape, they are distinctly separate from it. This is most starkly portrayed in the example of the Northerners (*norteños)*, or ex-villagers who return home from the United States and, as a result, have lost their original connection to the land through the attachment to a new place. They are described as "cizaña," a harmful plant that can ruin a whole crop, enemy to the villagers who have remained rooted to the land of the village. Instead, these estranged villagers, "ya no se hallan a gusto en su tierra"[59] (151), they give "mal ejemplo, burlándose de la religión, de la patria, de las costumbres"[60] (151), they work to "hacer que se pierda el amor a la tierra, en alborotar a otros para que dejen la patria miserable y cochina"[61] (151). Although they are less connected to the land, they also are

[59] "[They] aren't satisfied here [in their land] any longer."
[60] "a bad example, making fun of religion, the country, the customs."
[61] "undermine patriotism [the love of the land], and encourage others to leave this 'filthy, poverty-stricken country.'"

somewhat illuminated in comparison to those who haven't traveled, at least some of them. The *norteños* bring home ideas about justice: they complain about the issues of poverty, landless people, and powerful haciendas, saying "peor que esclavos viven las gentes"[62] (154). Coming home to the village is not a happy reunion between those who return and those who have stayed, but instead a conflict-ridden encounter between those who have changed and those who have loyally conformed to the norms of their community. The Northerners bring an ambivalent set of values: in the character of Damián, we see the evil characteristics of greed, materialism, debauchery, and murder that can penetrate the community, but in the anonymous student who speaks to Dionisio (152-154), we encounter all the idealism and hope for change that inspired the revolution. This dual nature of the outsider demonstrates a level of caution for native Mexicans: they must strive to borrow the good and reject the bad from the influence of the neighbors to the North.

First, Damián, don Timoteo's prodigal son, represents the evils an outsider can bring. When he returns home to the village from the North, he immediately engages in distasteful behavior, causing his own mother's death by his very appearance. He proceeds to buy an ostentatious, American-style coffin for her, and regularly drinks himself into a belligerent stupor. He becomes obsessed with Micaela, the flirtatious young villager who also has been influenced by her journeys to the big cities of Guadalajara and Mexico City, and longs to be fashionable. She flirts with Damián, who begins to stalk her as if possessed. One night, when he waits outside her home, the sky is described as "siniestro, sin estrellas"[63] (199). That night he jumps into her bedroom, where they most likely have sexual relations, though the text doesn't explicitly say so. The next day, the sun is described as blood-like, with anonymous villager voices observing that something bad must have happened, as if the sun spoke for the sinful sex act of Damián and Micaela: "sol como de sangre y agua, desteñido (--¿Qué sucedió

[62] "The people live worse than slaves."
[63] "sinister, without stars" (translation is mine, since Brinton omits this part).

anoche?) Sol sanguinolento. (--'Algo ha de haber sucedido anoche.') Cielo manchado"[64] (204). In this quote, Yáñez intermingles the villagers' anonymous observations with the description of the sun and sky's foreboding traits of blood and stain. Sky and village function as a single unit in these moments in the representation of the collective mood. That very night, Dionisio has his ominous dream, which will disrupt him for the remainder of the novel. The outsider's corrupting influence in the case of Damián causes Dionisio to stumble in what he deems a noble endeavor as a priest and spiritual leader of the village. Significantly, the morning after Damián and Micaela's affair, the villagers celebrate the Día de la Santa Cruz, in which they decorate crosses with brilliantly colored flowers. This immediate description of a colorful religious celebration after such an ominous description of mood and sky that were stained by the sex act demonstrates the great dissonance that exists in the village between public and private life. Perhaps the brilliant flowers adorning the religious symbol of the cross represent a desire to unite the two disparate spheres of village life. The section of the colorful crosses reads as follows:

> Desde la Cruz—enflorada--, desde la cuesta se divisan los toques de color: verde, blanco, morado, azul, entre las cruces, por sobre los muros lisos. Colores de papel de china, en tiritas, en rosetones. Colores de hojarasca tierna, en guías, y de bugambilias, de margaritas, de tulipanes, de obeliscos, de yedras. No hay una Cruz que amanezca sin adorno en las casas de piedra, en las de adobe, a la entrada de los caminos, en los sitios de muerte. Banderolas y flecos de papel, manojos de flores recién cortadas, ramas verdes traídas en el fresco de la mañana. Queda en suspenso la austeridad de las calles, de los muros. Desde la media noche se afanaron las manos de sombra para que retoñaran las cruces de palo y las de cantera, las de cal y canto y las de palma seca. En

[64] "The sun was pale [lit. bloody] and watery. ('What happened last night? Something must have happened last night!') The sky was streaky [lit. stained]."

los rostros quiere aflorar la sonrisa y hasta parece que los dedos, cuando hacen la Cruz, tienen luces de colores.[65] (204)

These bodiless hands decorate crosses that are bursting with color to celebrate the Day of the Holy Cross. At first glance, this excerpt appears to imitate a simple *cuadro de costumbres* adopted from the 19th century tradition, a description of the tradition of provincial life, yet, it appears that there is a touch of irony here: just after Damián and Micaela consummate their "sinful" act, the flowers burst onto the scene from bodiless hands, the walls that are usually dead, are filled with every type of flower and piece of natural life possible. It's as if the juxtaposition of color and natural life with the tradition of an arid existence characterized by the repression of a strict church, is telling the reader that there is an odd dichotomy at work here in the town. Strict Catholicism is not winning out completely in the community; passion as symbolized through the brilliant colors of the flowers also fights to make an appearance. The flowers might be interpreted to represent the more respectable desires for social justice and land reform, or even the more iniquitous ones of lust, greed and pride embodied in Damián and Micaela, the two most corrupting outsiders in the village. Either way, they do seem to symbolize the unspoken motives of the villagers that attempt to surface.

In addition to the Northerners, there is another group of outsiders described in the chapter "Estudiantes y ausentes," which describes students who return to the village from larger Mexican cities where they had been studying. These students are not so decidedly evil as Damián, yet their presence is considered toxic in the minds of the strictly conservative

[65] "From the Cross, wreathed in flowers, patches of color could be seen: green, white, purple, blue. Between the crosses, on the smooth walls, there were strips and rosettes of colored crepe paper, green leaves, bougainvillea, daisies, hibiscus, ivy. No cross was unadorned, all of them—those on stone houses, those on adobe houses, those at street corners, those that marked where someone had died—every one had its paper streamers and fringes, bunches of freshly cut flowers, green boughs, placed there early in the morning. Streets and walls were no longer plain and unbedecked. Since midnight, hands had been working in the darkness to set wooden and stone crosses, mortar, and even straw, abloom. Fleeting smiles appeared and the fingers making the sign of the cross reflected the colored light."

village: for the villagers, the students harm not only the pristine piety of the inhabitants, but also of the place itself. Again place and person in this hermetic village fuse together as one, as is demonstrated in the following quote, which describes the reaction of the physical space of the village to the presence of the boisterous students:

> Retachaban en las aceras de puertas y ventanas herméticas los gritos, las pláticas resonantes, las jactancias, los apodos, los chiflidos, las canciones y aun los rasgueos de guitarras, que hacían estremecer las cruces, las piedras, los muros recoletos; la profanidad saltaba sobre las azoteas y conturbaba el sagrado de patios, alcobas y oídos de mujeres y niños, como una tolvanera que cuela polvillo y basura por los menores resquicios.[66] (298)

The students, with their noisy and celebratory behavior, disturb the "sacred" patios and walls of the village. Despite all the disruption these students bring, however, they—unlike the ungrateful Northerner Damián—still feel deeply connected to the space of the village. When their vacation comes to an end and they must return to school in the city, they long to again be united with the land and space of the village:

> Quisieran acarrear con los sentidos la traza de las calles, el contorno de los muros, la silueta de las cruces, los olores de las puertas, de los patios, de las alcobas, el timbre de las campanas y de las voces familiares, el sabor de los manjares caseros, el regusto del aire y de las luces provinciales, la fragancia del humo, de este humo nostálgico de yerba seca consumida por el fuego en las postrimerías del otoño; por eso andan de aquí para allá con ojos, narices, oídos, labios, manos y corazón penetrantes […]. Mañana: ¡Cuán lejos todo esto entrañable![67] (301)

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[66] "Outside the doors and the tightly sealed windows, shouts, loud conversations, boasts, nicknames, whistling, could be heard, songs, and even the scraping of guitars which sent a shudder through the crosses and stones of the conventual walls. Profanity leaped the walls and disturbed the sanctity of patios, bedrooms, and the ears of women and children, like a dust storm whirling dust and rubbish into the farthest corners."

[67] "They try to fix everything in their memory and feeling—the pattern of streets, the outline of walls, the silhouettes of crosses, the taste of homemade food, the country air and light, the fragrance of the smoke, that

Here the students describe their connection to the space of the village to be "entrañable" or so close to them that it is part of their inner physical selves. The students' return to the village, then, is ambivalent: on one hand they are boisterous, irreverent, and offensive, yet on the other they yearn nostalgically to remain a part of the place that they have chosen to leave and feel a loss of their deeper connection to it. The act of departing from the village is both enriching but also painful, since it means breaking away from the environment itself.

Another interesting case of an outsider is the unique story of Victoria, the gorgeous young woman who comes for Holy Week. She is likened to the Greek statue, the Winged Victory of Samothrace, and described as if she were made of stone, not of flesh and blood. In her odd encounter with Gabriel, the bellringer, the text describes her as follows: "Victoria—mujer, diosa y estatua […]. Victoria—imperial—dio nuevo paso adelante (con el ademán victorioso—muslo, pecho, brazos, cabeza—de la estatua, invisibles las alas)"[68] (191). Although Victoria exhibits absolutely no inappropriate behavior toward any villager, she becomes a collective scapegoat for the villagers. In an act of collective Freudian projection, the villagers blame Victoria for all of their "sinful" desires, because since she is so very beautiful, none can help but be attracted to her. Even the narrator is complicit in these accusations: "El pensamiento en Victoria, la sombra de Victoria invade las conciencias de viejos, hombres maduros y mancebos, pegajosamente, que ni el confesonario, donde se revela, logra desarraigarla siquiera en los casados"[69] (165). Victoria herself does nothing to elicit this kind of a reaction from the community, it simply happens to the men, causing them to go insane with obsession over this beautiful outsider. Luis's mother, Doña Carmen, is

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haunting smell of burning leaves at the end of autumn. On their final rounds they fill eyes, nose, ears, lips, hands, and heart with it all. […]Tomorrow all this, so deeply rooted in their hearts, will be so far away!"

[68] "Victoria (woman, goddess, and statue) […]. Victoria, imperiously, took a step forward, her gesture triumphant—thighs, breast, arms, and head like those of the statue, the wings invisible."

[69] "The minds of old and young were filled with thoughts of her. Victoria had made such an impression on the men that the very Confessional, where this was revealed, was unable to banish her image, even in the case of married men."

Victoria's aunt who hosts her during her time in the village. Ashamed of her niece's effect on the male population of the village, she tries to get Victoria to leave by being a passive aggressive hostess. For instance, she does not serve her meals on time. It seems that Victoria, an innocuous outsider to the village who never does anything distasteful, would be welcome, yet she finds no place or welcome among the village community. She elicits male desire, but the men, who believe all attraction to be evil, cannot understand their inclinations, and consider her to be evil as a result.

Thus, the outsiders who visit the village, as well as those who have left and been influenced by outside spaces—the Northerners and Damián, Micaela, the students, and Victoria--unearth the complexes of the village by their external influences of modernity, corruption, open sexuality, sensuality, and new ideas about land reform, as in the unnamed Northerner who converses with Dionisio about social justice. These outsiders are not all good or bad, but different from the community of sameness found within. These stories suggest that the outside influences on the community are inevitable in the increasingly mobile and urbanized society of mid-20th century Mexico. The villagers cannot treat them as pure evil nor pure good, but must have a discerning mindset, accepting the good, as in the idealistic Northerner who cares about social justice, and rejecting the bad, as in Damián's materialistic and murderous behavior (he murders Micaela, his father don Timoteo, and even his father's clairvoyant dog, Orión). If villagers were to discriminately welcome outsiders, instead of blindly condemning them, the "hidden gardens" of their unconscious minds would perhaps be more open to flourishing, or becoming liberated in the community, whilst still maintaining the metaphor of a garden, which is emblematic of the cultivation and restriction of the natural world.

Conclusion

The Real, which is the mental realm described by Lacan found beneath the symbolic and imaginary orders of consciousness, is that which is unsignified: it is the part of our mind free from the signifying powers of the language of our societies that limit us. Beneath the strict signifying rules and rituals of the Catholic faith, the villagers of *Al filo del agua* are real human beings, with human longings. Those that get in touch with these longings and allow them to surface—like Luis, María, and Gabriel—are estranged from their homeland. The great problem of this village is finding a way to allow for diversity of ideology and at the same time allow these people to stay in their homeland, to which they feel so deeply connected, as if it were an appendage of their very bodies. Dionisio perhaps demonstrates the beginning of this possibility with the change brought about by his dream, but we don't find out if he realizes his potential, since the novel ends leaving the reader ignorant as to his final outcome.

In this chapter I have attempted to describe how the hidden gardens within each of the villagers' walls are a physical reminder of their own hidden desires within their psyches. In this way, land and psychological identity have a symbiotic relationship. Throughout the novel, the reader becomes aware of an urgent need for these subconscious drives to be recognized more openly in the hermetic society of the village. The character of Dionisio represents hope for the Church to change, through his declining notions of strict Catholicism and his embracing of the more liberal-leaning priest, Father Reyes.

Yáñez's novel indirectly provides what appears to be a justification for revolution through the portrayal of the land and the PRI government during the years of the 1940s, when the government, instead of being rebellious, was institutionalized, instead of liberal, became more moderate, and, instead of limiting the Church, tried to ease up the restrictions on the Church.

What's more, the PRI government of 1947 was again open to business relations with the US. The novel demonstrates a justification for these ties by demonstrating that foreign and outside influences, instead of being universally rejected, need to be evaluated. Jalisco, a place that has been characterized by destruction by outsiders dating back to the Conquest, would be a place in which people may find it hard to embrace modernizing or illuminating ideas. Yáñez's novel seems to challenge its readers to do so.

If we look at the novel in the broader literary context, it is as if Yáñez were challenging the reader to be accepting of his own foreign stylistic borrowings and innovations to the genre of the *novela de la revolución*—He borrows from Balzac, Pereda, Joyce, Clarín, Dos Passos, and dares us to accept his new-found ideas and literary techniques, letting go of the autochthony typically held in such high esteem in the classic style of not only the novel of the Mexican Revolution, but also the greater Latin American tradition of the regional novel. In this way, he paves the way for the myriad narrative innovations that would follow in Mexican and Latin American Literature of the mid-20th century.

Yáñez's novel is a work of art, an aesthetic masterpiece, but at the same time is politically charged in favor of the PRI government. The identity of arbitrary unity promoted by the PRI is quite possibly paralleled in the central motif in the novel of the incongruity between the hidden gardens' potential and the arid Jaliscan countryside. The message of the novel appears to be that these two disparate natural spheres would do better to reconcile themselves to one another, just as the Church and the people's ideology should work together. In small town Mexican society, people should allow for passion, vibrant life, and the unconscions to surface in the dried out landscape of the institution of the Church: Yáñez appears to demonstrate in his work a need to to reconcile passion and modesty, liberalism and conservatism, thus affirming the increasingly watered-down agenda of the PRI government.

Chapter Three: *Faltaba mucho tiempo para que amaneciera*: A Pessimistic View of Revolution and Feminism in Rosario Castellanos's *Oficio de tinieblas*

"El día inútil"
Me han traspasado el agua nocturna, los silencios
originarios, las primeras formas
de la vida, la lucha,
la escama destrozada, la sangre y el horror.
Y yo, que he sido red en las profundidades,
vuelvo a la superficie sin un pez.[70]
From *Lívida luz* (1960) by Rosario Castellanos

The poem of the epigraph, by Mexican poet, novelist, essayist, and journalist Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974), is exemplary of her tendency to present the world though a pessimistic lens: a place where one is constantly missing something, where one encounters uselessness at every turn, and where striving produces nothing. Elena Poniatowska observed that Rosario Castellanos's approach toward literature was as a form of therapy or catharsis: "Rosario usó de la literatura como todavía la usamos la mayoría de las mujeres, como forma de terapia. Recurrimos a la escritura para liberarnos, vaciarnos, confesarnos, explicarnos el mundo, comprender lo que nos sucede"[71] (57). Her 1962 novel, *Oficio de tinieblas* is no exception to this trend: it seems that through the narrative Castellanos works to understand not only herself, but her cultural, gender, and historical context—and concludes pessimistically about these sectors of life.

This chapter is divided into two parts: the first examines Chiapan space as presented in *Oficio de tinieblas* and how the shortcomings of the revolution, past and present, reveal themselves in this peripheral space. The second part examines the role that female characters play in trying, and mostly failing, to gain agency as a marginalized group through the rejection of motherhood, and provides an alternative way to understand female achievement.

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[70] "The Useless Day. / These have soaked me through: the night water, the silences / of origins, the first shapes / of life, of struggle, / the destroyed fish scale, blood, and horror. / And I, who have been a net spread in the deep, / return to the surface without a fish." (Translation is mine.)

[71] "Rosario used literature in the way that the majority of women still use it, as a form of therapy. We turn to writing in order to liberate ourselves, to empty ourselves, to confess, to explain ourselves to the world, to understand what happens to us" (translation is mine).

Both parts attempt to describe a general feeling of pessimism expressed in the text, which contrasts with the progressive idealism so characteristic of the 1960s decade.

I. The Revolutionary Shortcomings of the 1960s: A Counterculture for the Elite

Chiapas is Mexico's poorest state. It has the highest rate of illiteracy in the country; its inhabitants suffer from large social inequalities and a long history of brutal racism. However, it also has some of the largest indigenous communities of the country, and is a site of cultural power: San Cristóbal de las Casas, a small town in the Chiapan highlands, was the site of the Zapatista uprising of January 1, 1994, spearheaded by Subcomandante Marcos. Even further back in the past, Chiapas is where revolutionary Emiliano Zapata began his legendary movement for agrarian reform. Chiapas, then, is a place of poverty and inequality, but also a space that, though peripheral, has been a catalyst for propelling social change and represents a profound and historic cultural heritage.

What's more, Chiapas is the state where writer Rosario Castellanos grew up and came of age, until her landowning family was subject to President Cárdenas's land reform project of the 1930s, and found themselves forced to move to Mexico City after losing their land. She was raised in large part by her indigenous nanny, and passionately cared for the cause of the indigenous people in Mexican society. She realized, when traveling in Paris, that she was deeply connected to her homeland of Chiapas, when in the Musée de l'Homme she observed an exhibit of pre-Colombian art from her home state. She wrote of the feelings the exhibit inspired in a letter: "Fíjese, ya no era siquiera México cuyo recuerdo me es más o menos soportable, sino Chiapas, como quien dice la mera entraña de uno"[72] (Qtd. in Lund 168). Castellanos's oeuvre tends to express this visceral connection she had to the land and space of Chiapas, as Poniatowska observes: "su arte es de observación, de increíble entrelazamiento; eso sí, de sus células, las de su piel con las células de esta desenfrenada

[72] "Listen, no longer was it only Mexico whose memory is more or less digestible for me, but rather Chiapas, as one might say, it's in my bones" (translation is mine).

creación tropical que es la naturaleza de Chiapas"[73] (92). For Poniatowska, the very cells of Castellanos's skin were entangled with Chiapan geography.

One could argue that Castellanos has played a role in Chiapan space's subversive and symbolic importance through her many writings on the region, including her two novels: *Balún-Canán* (1957), a semi-autobiographical bildungsroman of a girl in a landowning family growing up in Chiapas during the 1930s, and *Oficio de tinieblas* (1962), a novel also set in the 1930s which tells of the racially divided towns of Chamula and Ciudad Real (San Cristóbal), and the injustices found therein. The latter of the two novels will be the focus for this chapter.

Oficio de tinieblas harshly criticizes the revolutionary government of Castellanos's childhood as well as of that of the moment of publication. It is set during the 1930s, under the presidency of the post-revolution's most lauded president, Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). The novel demonstrates further disillusionment with the PRI government through its realist representation of the peripheral space of Chiapas, and the government's failure to reach that region in its efforts for land reform and social equality.

Like *Al filo del agua,* Castellanos's novel utilizes a community as its protagonist, rather than any one specific individual. But, in contrast to the nameless Jaliscan village of Yáñez's novel, *Oficio de tinieblas* utilizes real, specific places, though they are given fictional names: San Juan Chamula and Ciudad Real[74] (also known as Jobel). These two towns, located in the Chiapan highlands, and separated by a mountain range from Mexico

[73] "her art is that of observation, of incredible entanglement; that is, of her cells, the cells of her skin with the cells of this unstoppable and wild tropical creation that is the natural world of Chiapas" (translation is mine).

[74] Ciudad Real's real name is San Cristóbal de las Casas. The novel only refers to it by its fictional name of Ciudad Real, or by the indigenous name for it, Jobel (which is used in real life). Castellanos's choice of renaming the town for the novel is most likely significant: *Real* in Spanish translates as either "Royal" or "Real." Perhaps Castellanos wanted the reader to serve as judge to what *Real* could signify. By the end of the novel, one would most likely come to the conclusion that the naming of the city as "royal" is quite sarcastic, since the Ladino people who live there are evil, selfish, and even violent. *Real* meaning "real" could signify that Castellanos is giving us the real, authentic version of events, as opposed to an idealized version of history.

City, the country's political and cultural center, function in an almost feudalistic way in the novel, demonstrating the utter lack of change that had occurred since the revolution. The novel's realism emphasizes the harsh realities found in these two small towns of Chiapas: social and gender inequality, deep-seated racism, and regional injustice. It demonstrates the potency of these societal evils through the narration of shocking accounts of murder, violence, rape, and, most disturbing, filicide. Jean Franco comments on Castellanos's choice of using the realist genre for the novel: "her choice of the historical realist novel with a third person omniscient narrator contributes to the ideological closure of the novel and its pessimistic view of the outcome of both the struggles of the indigenous people and of women" (*Plotting*... 141). Franco's description of the novel as "historical" is somewhat accurate. In her tale, Castellanos combines two historical moments from Mexico's past into one. The first is an indigenous uprising from the mid-19th century, in which the Indians revolted against the landowning elite (Roberts-Camps 197). However, she takes this event and places it in the context of the Cárdenas presidency (1934-1940). It's as if she's asking, what if there had been another revolution to combat the evils of our post-revolutionary society? What would have happened if the landowners were made brutally aware of the inadequacy of the system in this country? The novel provides an intriguing answer through its depiction of this hypothetical past: the Indians rise up against the landowners, but in response they are smothered, massacred, receiving much more injury than what they had done to those in power. They almost completely disappear from the community, demonstrating little hope for change in their unjust situation.

At a time when Mexican (and Latin American) writers were experimenting with the mixture of reality and fantasy (as in Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955)) and playing with abstraction, time, and narrative voice (Carlos Fuentes' *La region más transparente* (1958); *La*

muerte de Artemio Cruz[75] (1962)), Rosario Castellanos writes this realist masterpiece, demonstrating her separateness from the mainstream and mostly male-dominated literary trends of the moment. Her novel draws attention to and criticizes the ineffectiveness of the *indigenismo* and feminist movements, while at the same time harshly criticizing the repressive PRI government. The second half of this chapter will deal with the shortcomings of women trying to function as male in an effort to gain agency in a phallocentric society.

Post-Revolutionary Malaise

Important to understanding this novel is the historical moment in which it appeared. *Oficio de tinieblas* was published in 1962, at a time when Mexican intellectuals were grappling with a repressive and hypocritical government, but at the same time were feeling inspired by the ideals of the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The president at the time, Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964), was a man who preferred travel and womanizing to his presidential duties, and allowed others to control many of his responsibilities as president. Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (who would later become the president who ordered the tragic massacre on peaceful protesters in 1968) was his right-hand man. During López Mateos's presidency, many peaceful demonstrations were silenced using military force. For example, in 1959, a strike organized by the railway workers led to the incarceration of tens of thousands of people, including renowned muralist, David Alfaro Siqueiros. Another instance of repression was the case of Rubén Jaramillo. A Methodist pastor, and the peasant leader of the Zapatista[76] region of Morelos, Jaramillo was brutally murdered on March 23, 1952, along

[75] Fuentes's novel, which was published just a few months after *Oficio de tinieblas* and received almost instant critical acclaim, might explain in part why *Oficio de tinieblas* at first received little to no attention. It wasn't until Joseph Sommers's seminal essay, "Forma e ideología en *Oficio de tinieblas* de Rosario Castellanos" came out in 1978 (and after her mysterious death in 1974) that the novel came into deeper critical dialogue. This also could be indicative of gender bias in the study of literature.

[76] Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919) was a revolutionary hero who prioritized agrarian reform, and fought during the revolution in the central state of Morelos. His legacy lives on to this day, with the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de la Liberación Nacional) movement in Chiapas. In the 1960s, Pastor Jaramillo had fought under Zapata's command in the revolution, and carried on his legacy in the fight for peasant land rights in Morelos until his assassination in 1962.

with his family and pregnant wife, by order of the president (Krauze 642). López Mateos's administration trampled on workers' and indigenous people's rights in contrast to his predecessor, Ávila Camacho (1940-1946), who preferred diplomacy.

This increasingly repressive environment, coupled with the beginning of the idealistic 1960s decade, characterized a time of increasing divisiveness in Mexican Society, where attitudes were becoming more and more polarized. One of the main events that sparked this leftist inspiration of the moment was the Cuban Revolution of Fidel Castro in 1959. At the time, Castro's revolution awed and inspired Latin American intellectuals. As Krauze notes, "[t]he passionate sixties had begun on January 1, 1959, with the victory, as unexpected as it was inspiring, of Fidel Castro" (Krauze 643). Randolph Pope adds that the Cuban Revolution, "promised a new age" (228). As a result, the Mexican government found itself trying to mediate between the interests of the United States, businesses and the Church on one side, and with leftists, unions, Cuba and Russia on the other. In the decade of the 1960s, the Cuban Revolution also caused Mexican intellectuals to re-evaluate the shortcomings of their own revolution as they reflected on what seemed to be a much more organized and effective revolution in Cuba.

In the Mexican context then, the idealistic leftist movements of the 1960s, led by students and intellectuals, with their hope for social change, frequently met with feelings of disillusionment, and even despair, caused by the repression from the hypocritical governing forces. *Oficio de tinieblas* demonstrates this growing pessimism through its portrayal of Chiapan space and how the government fails in fulfilling the original ideals of the revolution, from land repartition, to *indigenismo* and *mestizaje.* As Nuala Finnegan explains, *La Onda,* or the counter culture characteristic of the decade of the 1960s, was "very much a phenomenon of the metropolis," (75) which explains why Castellanos would narrate its lack of potency in

her novel, in such a peripheral space as Chiapas—a place, as the narrator describes it, "tan remoto, tan apartado de todos los caminos"[77] (125).

The first of many moments of disillusionment with *La Onda* as well as the revolutionary government in the novel is its portrayal of Fernando Ulloa, the government worker sent from Mexico City to the region of Ciudad Real to impose *el señor presidente'*s land reform movement through the imposition of *ejidos*. His methods for imposing land reform are completely ineffective in a space characterized by hundreds of years of unwavering ethnic divisions and false notions of Ladino[78] superiority. Almost immediately, the most powerful landowner of the region, Leonardo Cifuentes, tricks him into visiting his *hacienda* and tries to bribe him to stop carrying out his governmental duties. The encounter between the two is emblematic of the conflicted factions of the 1960s: Fernando represents the idealistic leftist notions about equality and progressivism, while Leonardo signifies the greed and tradition of racial oppression inherent to the landowning elite of Chiapas.

When Fernando insists on land reform even after Leonardo's attempts at bribery, Leonardo explains to him that the Indians are like animals, and explains his arbitrary ideas of ethnic superiority: "Ser patrón implica una raza, una lengua, una historia que los coletos poseían y que los indios no eran capaces de improvisar ni de adquirir"[79] (149). We find out in the same chapter why Fernando is so adamant about implementing change. His life has been full of difficulties: His father, a peasant, died fighting with General Zapata in the revolution. He grew up in Mexico City with his mother, going hungry and working for pennies; he tried to complete school, but had to borrow books and was often hungry. When he quit his degree

[77] "so remote, so far off of all beaten tracks" (this, and all subsequent translations of *Oficio de tinieblas* come from Esther Allen's translation of the novel, *The Book of Lamentations.*)
[78] The term Ladino is a complicated one. Generally, it is a term used to refer to non-Indian peoples, but also is used in reference to an Indian who acts more like a person of European descent. The Real Academia Española defines it as a person that is mestizo and speaks Spanish. The term seems to be based more on cultural affinities than on race.
[79] "Being a patrón implied a race, a language, a history that the Coletos had and the Indians were incapable of improvising or acquiring."

program because of his lover, Julia, his mother died, seemingly out of disappointment. This lifetime of struggling with injustice and disappointment makes him immune to Cifuentes's offers: "Una lealtad llena de cicatrices andaba en Fernando, lo manifestaba afuera del alcance de las insinuaciones del otro"[80] (156).

Despite Fernando's powerful scruples against corruption, he fails in his attempts at imposing any sort of land reform in the region. The city of Ciudad Real is too entrenched in its antiquated traditions of imposing rule over the indigenous people, and the Tzotzil people do not trust Fernando or his idea of justice, preferring to revolt using violence, and unsuccessfully. At the end of his encounter with the *patrón*, Ulloa suddenly feels as if the space of Cifuentes's hacienda and its surrounding territory is a geographic jail: "De pronto Fernando sintió un hormigueo en los pies, una asfixia, una opresión, un ansia de irse, de romper esta cárcel de lluvia, de lodo, de cerros"[81] (156). It's as if the land itself, its rain, mud and hills, carries with it a stagnancy and closed-mindedness that make reform impossible in the area.

Quite purposefully, Castellanos situates her novel during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), a president who was often lauded as a hero of the revolutionary government. He had a love for the indigenous people, and would speak with them personally to hear their petitions for help (Krauze 457). In portraying the revolution's shortcomings during the presidency of such a national hero, *Oficio de tinieblas* emphasizes the failure of the effort to implement of land reform. For instance, one of Cárdenas's benevolent moves in office was that he reformed the education system and passed a law requiring landowners to provide their indigenous laborers with education. Most of the landowners in the novel ignore this law, save one, the German *cacique:* don Alfonso Homel. However, even don Alfonso's efforts are almost completely fruitless, since after a grueling day of labor, most of the

[80] "A deeply scarred loyalty held sway over Fernando; it kept him beyond the reach of the other man's hints."
[81] "Suddenly Fernando felt a stinging in his feet, a sense of asphyxiation, an oppression, an anxious need to leave, to break out of this prison of rain, mud and hills."

workers are too exhausted to attend class, save one: Pedro González Winiktón. Despite the fact that Pedro learns to read, write, and speak Spanish, in the end the cultural divide between himself and Ulloa is too great, and he takes matters into his own hands instead of trying to make change happen through the legal system. He leads the Chamula Indians in a bloody revolt against the landowners, which ends in the brutal suppression of his own people, with the indigenous people more subjugated than ever.

Another of Cárdenas's lauded accomplishments is the fact that he expropriated and redistributed almost 50 million acres of land, whereas his predecessors of the previous 17 years had redistributed only 25 million acres combined (Krauze 469). Despite this achievement, *Oficio de tinieblas* presents Chiapas under Cárdenas's presidency as a space where this land reform movement was completely ineffective, because of its depiction of the staunch opposition that Ulloa faces, and the deep cultural divide between Chamulas and Ladinos.

In reality, Cárdenas was not so effective a hero as he was reputed to be, and Castellanos demonstrates this in her novel. As his presidency went on, he became more moderate, slowing land reform and becoming allied with right wing politicians. In 1940, he supported the more moderate presidency of Manuel Ávila Camacho. Perhaps this is in part why Castellanos portrays him in the novel as ineffective and distant: it's possible that his efforts at justice felt even more distant in 1962, under the repressive government of López Mateos. What's more, Miguel Alemán (president from 1946-1952) undid many of Cárdenas's reforms. During the "Mexican Miracle" and throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the PRI government was looking more and more like the pre-revolutionary *Porfiriato*, as land reform, unions, and education became distant priorities, and business boomed for the elite few.

A Distant D.F.

Throughout the novel, Mexico City and President Cárdenas are referred to as distant, unreachable, and nameless. Referred to as *la ciudad* and *el señor presidente,* respectively, these icons of Mexican power in the 1930s signify little to the habitants of Chamula and Ciudad Real, who never name this distant place or their president. It seems that Castellanos makes both an artistic and a political decision in this choice to leave the Mexican center unnamed, demonstrating its inefficacy in the periphery of Chiapas. The metropolis is presented purposely as a place lacking in renown and the ability to govern in the region. When the Ladino men meet to discuss the possible revolt of the Chamula Indians, one man exclaims: "Algo vamos a sacar en claro: que el Presidente sepa que en Chiapas sus leyes valen una pura y celestial chingada"[82] (277). There can be no real justice imposed in Ciudad Real, because the national government's control simply does not reach that far.

The character of Julia Acevedo (Fernando Ulloa's common-law wife also known as "La Alazana") perhaps best represents the difficulty of bringing the center's programs to the periphery, through the unexpected transition she undergoes while living in Ciudad Real. Educated in the best schools of Mexico City, she feels she doesn't need a husband, and even terminates a pregnancy in order to be free and independent. However, the longer she stays in Ciudad Real, the more she assimilates to their traditional and conservative standards. She eventually loses all of her cosmopolitanism in an effort to fit in with the aristocratic women of the town. In one prophetic conversation toward the beginning of her time in the town she comments, "Se pudre uno en Ciudad Real"[83] (135), prophetically demonstrating her gradual loss of idealism and leftist leanings she had acquired in the urban environment.

Indeed, Julia does seem to "rot" in Ciudad Real: she enters into an affair with the most hateful character of the novel, Leonardo Cifuentes, the powerful landowner. The affair occurs almost accidently: Julia "iba cediendo poco a poco, desbaratando los nudos de su

[82] "One thing is going to be very clear when all of this is over: the president will know that in Chiapas his laws aren't worth a pure and celestial heap of shit."
[83] "We're rotting away in Ciudad Real."

instinto hasta entregarse en un impulso total"[84] (199). Their affair at times seems to be emblematic of regional differences between the Chiapan provinces and the Mexican center of the city. For instance, when Leonardo tries to make her jealous by pretending there is another woman, Julia interprets this as the challenge of a peasant to her superior cosmopolitanism: "La ofensa hecha a Julia iba más allá de su persona: en ella la provincia estaba escarneciendo a la elegancia, al buen tono, a la superioridad, en fin, de la capital"[85] (205). The affair with Leonardo and the influence of Ciudad Real's society eventually convert her from a progressive feminist into just another superficial village *señora*. She eventually puts all her energies into becoming like the Ladina women, who put her through a harsh initiation process: they abuse her by eating all her expensive food and making a mess in her house when she hosts them. She persists in trying to please them, and finally is allowed into their exclusive group. As a result, Julia is privy to all of their gossip and discussions about the inner workings of Ciudad Real. Significantly, after she is finally allowed into their social clique, she suddenly feels fearful and guilty about her infidelities to Fernando, whereas before she had considered her adultery as almost inconsequential. When she realizes that Isabel, one of the most influential *señoras* of the village (and Cifuentes's wife) wrote a letter to Fernando denouncing her adulterous behavior, she suddenly loses hope and becomes full of fear: "Una noche desmedida se desparramaba por el cielo. Julia la contempló con los ojos dilatados de espanto"[86] (290). No longer does this urbane woman feel free and independent to break and question societal norms; instead, she sees "measureless darkness" as a result of her adultery and is full of fear in the space of Ciudad Real.

Julia also feels humiliated when she confesses to Leonardo that Fernando is not actually her husband (337), again demonstrating that the conservative and traditional values

[84] "Then she yielded, unleashing her instincts little by little until she gave herself over entirely."
[85] "The insult went beyond Julia personally: the provinces were scoffing at the elegance, the good taste and, ultimately, the superiority of the capital."

[86] "A boundless night was spreading across the sky. Julia watched it, her eyes wide with fear."

have infiltrated in her mentality, and the progressive ideas she had acquired in the capital have become irrelevant. In this way, Julia's character's evolution demonstrates the power of the space that is the high society of Ciudad Real: it is a place where the capital loses its potency, and causes a person like Julia to let go of her ideals of social justice and gender equality. The case of Julia's assimilation reaffirms the undermining of the Cárdenas government implicit in the text of *Oficio de tinieblas.* Her urban progressivism fails to transfer to the backward provincial life of Chiapas, demonstrating the lack of potency for all-encompassing change under his leadership. We can also perhaps even go as far as seeing an implicit critique of the current day (1962) ideals: the 1960s counter culture, or *La Onda,* represented in the leftist-leaning character of Julia, fails to extend to regions like Chiapas, a place heavily steeped in a long history of sexism. Julia finds herself forced to assimilate to the norms of drawing room gossip and dependence on the Ladino men, like Leonardo Cifuentes, instead of her idealistic partner, Fernando.

Indigenismo **and** ***Mestizaje*** **Demystified**

Indigenismo and *mestizaje* are two of the proudest cultural trends used to signify Mexican identity that were propagated by the revolutionary government. *Oficio de tinieblas* takes each trend and imbues it with pessimism. Let us first look at the *indigenista* movement and what Castellanos does with its tradition in her novel. The movement, which had its apogee in the 1920s and 1930s, tended to idealize the indigenous people and create of them a cultural symbol of mexicanness when the country was in need of a unifying cultural identity following the revolution (see Chapter One). Manuel Gamio, a famous anthropologist and *indigenista,* explained that "the revolutionary movements never took shape or rose up in the heart [of the Indian population], yet it was in that population that it found its primordial origin" (Quoted in Knight 77). The Indian population itself was not the prime catalyst for the *indigenismo* movement but rather the intellectuals that chose to use their plight as a

representation of cultural and societal problems in Mexico. Alan Knight explains the appropriation of the indigenous identity by the intellectual elite and its significance:

> Postrevolutionary *indigenismo* […] represented yet another non-Indian formulation of the "Indian Problem"; it was another white/mestizo construct […], part of a long tradition stretching back to the Conquest. Certainly it was a more enlightened and sympathetic formulation than its colonial or Porfirian predecessors. But, like them, it involved the imposition of ideas, categories, and policies from outside. (77)

Indigenismo was not about giving the indigenous people of Mexico a voice in society; it was about using them as a symbol for cultural identity, without evoking any substantial change to their socioeconomic circumstances.

Oficio de tinieblas takes the tradition of *indigenismo* and imbues it with a pessimistic realism, thereby undermining the *indigenismo* movement by denuding its presumed efficacy for the betterment of the Mexican indigenous. This comes out, in large part, through the representation of space and the Chamula characters' relationship to it. Whereas in *María Candelaria,* María and Lorenzo were presented as idealized, and fused together with the natural world, almost one with the landscape, cultivating plentiful crops of corn and lush tropical flowers, in *Oficio de tinieblas,* the indigenous people often encounter an oppressive and infertile landscape as a result of an ineffective government and an unjust society. The Tzotzil people mostly suffer as a result of the land's aridity, the infertile landscape, and the fact that they have to work almost like slaves to pay off debts instead of owning the land themselves. The land even tears indigenous families apart in this novel. In a somewhat ironic change of situation, *Oficio* imitates *María Candelaria*'s construction of the Indians' homeland as a part of their identity, yet the indigenous characters fall short of having this almost mythical connection to it. Instead, and more realistically, the characters are unable to grow anything from the land, due to societal obstacles that subjugate them, as well as the

land's aridity. The land of Chamula is described as "Tierra amarilla, suelta, de la que se deja arrebatar fácilmente por el viento. Vegetación hostil. Maleza, espinos retorciéndose"[87] (15).

The greatest example of the undermining of *indigenismo* in the novel is when Pedro González Winiktón faces immense frustration with the cultivation of his little plot of land. After spending an extended amount of time in Chamula serving as judge to the indigenous community, he returns to his small village of Tzajal-hemel. He and his wife Catalina come home to find an overgrown plot full of weeds and their little hut broken down and full of spider webs and dirt. He struggles to grow anything worthwhile from the land, and finds himself unable to pay rent to the Ladino owner of his plot who lives in Ciudad Real. The family goes hungry, a hunger intensified by the wailings of their adopted child, Domingo, who eventually stops crying out of exhaustion caused by starvation. Finally Pedro finds himself forced to travel to the region of Tapachula to work on an hacienda in order to make ends meet. The change in space described in his journey away from his homeland communicates a loss of indigenous identity and cultural specificity. The novel describes how Pedro, along with a group of Chamula men, lose their communal indigenous identities and fall into isolation as they change their geographic space from that of their own land, to that of the oppressor's:

> Desde el momento en que se alejaron de sus parajes se operó en los indios una extraña transformación. Dejaron de ser Antonio Pérez Bolom, tocador de arpa, avecindado en Milpoleta; o Domingo Juárez Bequet, cazador de gatos de monte y famoso pulseador; o Manuel Domínguez Acubal, entendido en cuestiones de encantamientos y brujerías. Eran solamente una huella digital al pie de un contrato. En su casa dejaron la memoria, la fama, la persona. Lo que andaba por los caminos era un hombre anónimo,

[87] "The earth is yellow and loose, easily blown away by the wind. The vegetation is hostile: weeds, curving thorns."

> solitario, que se había alquilado a otra voluntad, que se había enajenado a otros intereses.[88] (51)

The Chamula men go from having specific, nuanced identities, to becoming types, *indios,* laborers that are listed on a piece of paper, as if currency and not human beings. They become anonymous and isolated in their subjugation in a foreign space, under the control of a patrón.

The signifier *indio* is problematized in the novel, further undermining the *indigenista* movement. When Pedro protests the unjust treatment and low pay they receive as laborers on the *hacienda*, one fellow Chamula man responds: "¿Qué querías? Fue tu suerte de nacer indio"[89] (53). This word creates a distance between a group that had at one time been united in a specific culture of Tzotzil, Chamula, Maya. Now, they are simply *indio,* one and the same with all other tribes that can be found within the borders of Mexico, arbitrarily lumped together by the fact that they were all subjugated by the Spanish hundreds of years ago. It's a word created by Columbus which has come to mean any person indigenous to the continents of the Americas: groups of people who are vastly different culturally and historically suddenly are lumped together in this Eurocentric nomenclature. The word *indio* feels pejorative to Pedro, and creates a sense of alienation in his mind when his fellow man uses it with him:

> Indio. La palabra se la habían lanzado muchas veces al rostro como un insulto. Pero ahora, pronunciada por uno que era de la misma raza de Pedro, servía para establecer una distancia, para apartar a los que estaban unidos *desde la raíz*. Fue ésta la primera

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[88] "From the moment they walked away from their villages, a strange transformation came over them. They ceased to be Antonio Pérez Bolom, a harpist residing in Milpoleta, or Domingo Juárez Bequet, a hunter of mountain cats and a famous pulsetaker, or Manuel Domínguez Acubal, well-versed in questions of enchantment and witchcraft. They were only a fingerprint at the bottom of a contract. In their homes they left memory, reputation, personhood. What walked along the trails was an anonymous, solitary man who had rented himself out to another's will, who had become estranged from other interests."

[89] "What did you expect? It was your fate to be born an Indian."

experiencia que de la soledad tuvo Winiktón y no pudo sufrirla sin remordimiento.[90] (53, emphasis added)

When in Chamula, Pedro had considered his fellow tribe members as united "at the root," part of a same ground, grown from the same land. Now that they find themselves as outsiders, working tirelessly under a patrón, he finally realizes that he is completely isolated. He loses this cultural identity that was so rooted to the land itself. Thus, his forced estrangement from his homeland of Tzahal-hemel, coupled with the violence of the signifying word "indio" undermine his authentic identity. Through Pedro's story of isolation and loss of identity in his travels down the mountain, the novel subtly undermines the potency of the idealistic *indigenismo* movement in Chiapas: he cannot be united with the land, since it offers him nothing, and he must live estranged from family and homeland, under an oppressor.

In Tapachula, where Pedro and his fellow Chamula men would go to work, they experience a marked change in identity due to the change in the geographic environment itself. As they travel to the coast, the narrator describes the environmental change: "La sierra había ido dejando atrás sus moles abruptas, donde ni los ojos podían descansar, para resolverse en colinas suaves y por último en llanuras dilatadas, henchidas de un aire caliente de una densidad casi carnal"[91] (54). This "almost carnal density" demonstrates the ultimate estrangement of indigenous laborers from their homeland. The change they undergo, from *Chamula* to *indio,* from members of a homeland to aliens in a strange land, from individuals to types, converts them into the Other, the representation of the intellectual elite, rather than an individual in need of social justice. They can never be connected to this new space, never

[90] "Indian. The word had often been thrown in his face, an insult. But now, spoken by someone of the same race, it served to establish a distance, to divide those who were united *at the root*. This was Winiktón's first experience of solitude and he could not endure it without remorse" (emphasis added).

[91] "The mountain range had gradually left behind its steep volumes, where even the eyes could not find rest, to settle into soft hills and, finally, expansive flatlands, swollen with a warm air of almost carnal density."

cultivate anything of their own from it, and are forced to work far away from home and family, since their government's project of agrarian justice and educational equality has failed them. And this is in part due to the hypocritical ideals of the project of *indigenismo.*

There are other instances in which the novel demonstrates a rethinking of the cultural movement of *indigenismo.* One event undermines the almost mystic power that the Eurocentric representations of indigenous peoples often emphasized. María Candelaria, for instance, was portrayed as if more god than human in her juxtaposition with the Virgin Mary and her martyred death. In contrast, in Castellanos's novel, Catalina's character has a bizarre, seemingly magical moment in which she "gives birth" to idols made out of mud. Later, however, they prove to be completely useless. This event demonstrates a cynicism within the narrative toward the supposed magical powers attributed to indigenous peoples by the essentializing tendencies of *indigenismo.*

In addition, the narrator imitates the solemn voice of indigenous legends, yet this imitation actually seems to deflate the idea of an idealized indigenous peoples in the unraveling of the events of the novel. In many moments the narrator appears to take on a narrative style of legend similar to the *Popol Vuh,* which is the Mayan creation myth, translated as "The Book of the People" (Sommers 80). For example, in the first pages of the novel, the narrator describes the beginning times of the village. It tells of San Juan Fiador, and the legend of Chamula, and why the *caxlanes,* or white people, came to the region originally, as if telling a story of origins, much like the *Popol Vuh*. If we had any doubts as to this intertextuality, the epigraph of the novel comes from the *Popol Vuh* itself, leading the reader to believe that what she is about to encounter is a heartfelt piece of *indigenismo,* exacerbated by the legendary sounding first chapter that begins as if telling the history of the people: "San Juan Fiador, se inclinó cierto día a contemplar la tierra de los hombres"[92] (9).

[92] "San Juan, the Guarantor, stooped down one day to contemplate the land of men."

In *Oficio de tinieblas*, the reader encounters pessimism surrounding the idea of *indigentismo* thast the indigenous peoles were a perfect and mystical Other—an idea which would be more in the style of Fernández's *María Candelaria*—and presenting them as flawed and human. The best example of this appears in the penultimate chapter which describes a supposed new-found hope after the devastation of Chamulas' failed revolt. The chapter speaks of the Chamula people as a collective, echoing this populvuhian tone of the novel's beginning. They are described as immersed in suffering, eternally oppressed, and living without hope. However, they find a glimmer of hope inside an ark that contains a book that they consider sacred. The irony that only the reader understands is that the book is labeled, "Ordenanzas militares:" the text had been Leonardo Cifuentes' plan for the Ladinos to use aggressive and unforgiving force against the Chamula people in the event of an uprising. Since they are unable to read, they don't realize the futility and senselessness of converting a book that had originally been intended to plan their demise into a sacred object.

Oficio de tinieblas also demystifies the *mestizaje* ideal. The idea of *mestizaje* is another important aspect of the post-revolutionary hegemonic discourse of the PRI, and relates to *indigenismo* in that it represents a desire by the State to create an arbitrary sense of unified national identity in Mexico. The idea of the *mestizo* had been an important part of Mexican national identity since independence, incarnated in figures that had both European and indigenous heritage, like Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz. However, the idea of the *mestizo* gained in symbolic potency in the early post-revolutionary days, as Lund describes:

> [Mestizaje's] early twentieth-century reinvention in the wake of the Revolution would sublimate that same racialized identity as a way of universalizing Mexico. A certain fanaticism around *mestizaje* arose, one that would be brought to its greatest intensity with the publication of José Vasconcelos's megalomaniacal thesis about the 'cosmic race,' which placed Mexico's mestizo identity at the leading edge of the emergence of

> a universal antiracial (or hyperracial) race to come […]. Its impact can be felt from the slogan trumpeting the racial sprit of Mexico's (and possibly Latin America's) most important university—*por mi raza hablará el espíritu*—to prominent murals allegorizing the rise of the mestizo and then on to its export appeal, which would stretch all the way to U.S. civil rights struggles. (x).

In a shocking turn of events, Castellanos quite literally puts this obsessive universalizing concept of the *mestizo* to death in *Oficio de tinieblas* through the account of crucifixion of the little boy Domingo. His death signifies the death of *mestizaje,* since he himself is mestizo: he is the son of a Ladino, Leonardo Cifuentes, and a Tzotzil woman, Marcela Gómez Oso, who was raped by the former. Let us back up a little to understand the case of Domingo: at the end of the first chapter, Catalina Díaz Puiljá, the village *ilol*, or priestess, leads a group of women to Ciudad Real to sell their various products. However, they are attacked by a group of thieving lower-class Ladina women, and forced to scatter. Marcela, one of the Chamula women, finds herself alone and wandering the streets of Ciudad Real, estranged from her fellow travelers. Mercedes Solórzano, a mannish indigenous woman who is bilingual in Tzotzil and Spanish expresses interest in Marcela's pottery and invites her into her store. She tricks Marcela into going into the back room of the store for her payment, where Leonardo Cifuentes is waiting. He brutally rapes her, while Mercedes callously waits in the front of the store. We find out that Leonardo has an obsession with virginal Indian women, and Mercedes helps him find victims to rape. Mercedes pays Marcela the 12 *reales* in exchange for her pottery, and Marcela proceeds to throw the money in her face, and smash every piece of pottery she had with her. When she reunites with her friends, her mother, Felipa, chastises her for losing all the pottery and coming back empty-handed. Catalina seems to perceive by intuition what has happened to Marcela, and announces that she will take her in. Felipa has no choice but to accept, since Catalina is in a position of power as village *ilol*.

Marcela realizes she is pregnant when she is back home in Chamula. Catalina and her husband Pedro raise Marcela's son Domingo as if he were their own.

Marcela's story contains traces of the Mexican cultural phenomenon of *malinchismo.* The term comes from the story of Malintzín Tenépal (nicknamed *la Malinche)*, a Nahua woman who served as Hernán Cortés's translator in the 16th century during the conquest of New Spain. He had relations with her, thus supposedly converting her into the mother of the first Mexican mestizo, their son Martín. She has come to be considered the greatest betrayer of Mexican culture because of her union with Cortés, regardless of the fact that she most likely had little choice in the matter. The term *malinchismo* has come to signify any Mexican who embraces foreign tendencies and rejects their home culture.

Claudio Lomnitz notes that the post-revolutionary imagination of a nationalism characterized by *mestizaje* assumed a Spanish father and an indigenous mother: "the identification of the European with the male and the feminization of the Indian fit well with the formational of a nationalism that was at once modernizing and protectionist" (53). Embracing this ideal of *mestizaje* seems like a noble revolutionary ideal, until one considers its darker side, *malinchismo,* and the fact that the Indigenous culture is usually abused and forgotten in an effort to combine Spanish and indigenous heritages. Thus, *malinchismo* is like the black sheep that *mestizaje* refuses to recognize. Castellanos's novel boldly recounts this sinister aspect of *mestizaje* through Marcela's tragic story. Marcela, just like her predecessor, doña Marina, exposes the harsh truth behind the supposed revolutionary ideal of *mestizaje:* rape, abuse, and mistreatment of innocent indigenous peoples. Nuala Finnegan notes that Domingo is representative of Mexico itself, even calling him a "monster": "[t]he monster that emerges is indeed Mexico—result of a rape and a country engaged in a furious intellectual debate over its identity" (88).

Lund compares Castellanos's approach to the representation of the indigenous with Asturias's more traditional form of *indigenismo,* stating that her version criticizes the state ideology:

> If Asturias uses a stylized indigenous culture in order to make a claim on a more inclusive national identity, Castellanos stages that same stylized indigenous culture as part of a larger problematization of the politics of inclusion that serves as the ideological formation of the mestizo state. (80)

Domingo's character is quite obviously emblematic of a tradition of violence: "Desde su nacimiento lo marcaron con la cifra indeleble de la única ley que rige el mundo: la de la fuerza"[93] (322). If Domingo represents this tradition of oppression of the indigenous, or *malinchismo* that has been covered up by the mexicanness movement to promote idealization of miscegenation through *mestizaje*, then his crucifixion is a figurative assassination of the revolutionary government's faulty ideal.

Two events in the novel solidify the fact that the text works to undermine the ideals of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* through their representation of the grotesque combined with senseless violence: Domingo's crucifixion and the subsequent Tzotzil uprising. Let us first examine what occurs with Domingo's death: Catalina and the indigenous priest, Xaw Ramírez Paciencia, with the aid of other indigenous churchgoers, crucify Domingo on Good Friday. The scene described in the novel is shocking and disturbing, to say the least. Catalina and Domingo go to the church to be blessed with holy water, but Xaw accidently pours it all over Domingo. Because of this, Catalina has a sudden revelation: the Chamulas need their own Christ figure in order to feel redemption and power as a community. She decides, "Cristo tenían de más los otros. Cristo también tendrían ahora ellos"[94] (318). She decides to offer Domingo as a sacrifice. In a horrific and graphic scene, she gives up Domingo to the

[93] "From the moment of his birth he has been marked by the indelible cipher of the only law that governs the world: the law of force."
[94] "Christ was what the Ladino had over them. Now they would have Christ."

priests to be crucified, and he dies an agonizing and bloody death. Interestingly, as he begins to pass out from loss of blood, he becomes dazzled by a vision of the natural beauty of Chiapas: "Domingo deja que se abatan sus párpados y un paisaje de colinas defendidas por árboles, de llanuras lamidas de niebla, de charcos en que se duplica el azoro del ciervo, lo deslumbra"[95] (320). This semi-conscious moment demonstrates a longing to enjoy the landscape of Chiapas, as if entering into a heavenly sort of reverie in his dying moments. Heaven, for Domingo, is the idyllic natural world where he grew up.

This moment of illumination during his dying moments is not to last long. Concerned that his manner of death is too peaceful, Catalina decides it needs to be bloodier, more traumatic, more akin to the account of Christ's death in the Bible. When Domingo starts to pass out, she grabs the holy water and pours it all over his face so that he wakes up. Then blood gushes from his side, just like the Christ, right into Catalina's eyes, blinding her with blood. Again he begins to pass out, and this time the sacristan pours a bitter drink into his mouth so he wakes up. He realizes he needs to play along with their game, and starts to writhe in protest. They lift up the cross that he is tied to, and his blood, instead of gushing, now slowly drips. The priests and Catalina lick up the blood that falls down. When he finally dies, the Chamulas see themselves as equal to the Ladinos, redeemed through Domingo's sacrifice: "Su nacimiento, su agonía y su muerte sirven para nivelar al tzotzil, al chamula, al indio, con el ladino"[96] (324). They now feel that they have spiritual justification necessary for an uprising. Instead of peaceful and docile nature-lo vers like Maria Candelaria and Lorenzo Rafael, here the indigenous are brutral and reovlutin, committing a heinous crime against an innocent boy. This scene strips away the notion of the Indians as virtuous that was propagated by *indigenismo.*

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[95] "Domingo lets his eyelids droop and is dazzled by a landscape of hills guarded by trees, clearings licked by mists, puddles that mirror the stag's bewilderment."

[96] "His birth, his suffering and his death have placed the Tzotzil, the Chamula, the Indian on the same level as the Ladino."

In an equally shocking and disturbing chain of events, the Indians ravage the countryside, seeking revenge for all the injustices they have suffered. Thinking themselves immune from death because of what they deem a redemptive crucifixion of poor Domingo, they deliberately stand up to a Ladino man holding them at gunpoint. The man proves them wrong by shooting a Tzotzil man dead at point-blank range. They try to ignore this piece of evidence that disproves their sudden empowerment, and continue with their carnal revenge, killing a group of children who were dressed in rags. They enter a peaceful town where all the women, children, and elderly are hiding in the village church, hiding from the danger. The scene that follows is full of carnage: the Indians cut people in half with machetes, rip women's clothing off, throw children up, and kill them with a sword as they come down, kill the elderly as they beg for mercy, and they rape women, be they old, young or even pregnant. The scene is so despicable and grotesque that it, like the event of Domingo's crucifixion, most likely takes away any idealization of the indigenous people that the reader may have had. Indeed, they are ironically equalized with the Spanish heritage of Mexico, since during the conquest the Spanish performed similar atrocities on indigenous victims. If we hadn't been convinced that the idealization of the Indian and the *mestizo* was dead, we are now. With the brutally evil scenes evoked in the late pages of the novel, the reader loses any sense of idealization of these racial symbols of Mexican identity.

Perhaps also, if we look at the novel's moment of publication, the scenes of disillusionment with the concepts of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* demonstrate pessimism toward the 1960s ideals of equal rights for all people. As David LaFrance observes, Mexican development after Cárdenas's presidency was focused mostly on urban centers, while the rural populations suffered increasing poverty (219). Castellanos presents a veiled critique of this selective modernization by presenting the indigenous peoples of Chiapas as perpetually oppressed. While the works from Chapters One and Two of this dissertation appeared during

times of overwhelming urbanization, the appearance of *Oficio de tinieblas* occurs after a period of staggering population growth: between 1940 and 1960, Mexico's population grew from 20 million to over 35 million people, many of whom lived in the countryside (La France 215). Despite the growth of the peasantry, justice did not find them, and the wealth stayed in the hands of the powerful upper class citizens in urban centers.

Through these two scenes—the death of Domingo and the subsequent Chamula uprising—*Oficio de tinieblas* creates a discourse of a deteriorated revolution. When the uprising fails, the Tzotzil people are even more subjugated than before, because the Ladinos retaliate in a more violent fashion, massacring as many Tzotzil as possible. Those who escape hide away in caves in the difficult high terrains of the mountains. Their suppression is complete, and they come to realize that they are part of an endless cycle of persecution, as long as the Ladinos are present: "Desnudos, mal cubiertos de harapos o con taparrabos de piel a medio curtir, han abolido el tiempo que los separaba de las edades pretéritas. Ni existe ni antes ni hoy. Es siempre. Siempre la derrota y la persecución"[97] (362). They go back to their trades, as if they were eternally subjugated: "El pastor, la paridora, el alfarero, repiten su oficio como la tierra repite el ciclo de sus estaciones, como los astros recorren los puntos de su órbita. Por sujeción a la ley, por fidelidad"[98] (363). According to Castellanos, their subjugation is as relentless as the earth's rotation: they are ironically connected to nature in the fact that they are doomed to an eternal existence of unrelenting helplessness. What's more, their revolution, instead of returning their homeland to them, turned their crops into ruin: "Las rancherías convertidas en pavesas, las siembras arrasadas, la estampida incontenible de los rebaños"[99] (332). Through the violence of revolution motivated by Domingo's horrific murder, they continue to struggle with the injustice of having no land

[97] "Naked, barely covered with rags or loincloths of half-tanned leather, they have abolished the time that once separated them from bygone ages. Neither before nor today exists. It is always. Always defeat and persecution."
[98] "The shepherd, the midwife, the potter repeat their trades as the earth repeats the cycle of the seasons, as the stars revisit the points of their orbit. Out of submission to the law, out of fidelity."
[99] "The settlements became heaps of ashes, the planted fields were razed, the flocks were sent stampeding."

from which to live and thrive. It's as if a learned helplessness is doomed to follow them through the rest of their existence. In the early 1960s, at a time when Fidel Castro had recently led a (supposedly) successful and organized revolution in Cuba, this novel demonstrates the complete inefficacy of the Mexican one which had occurred almost fifty years earlier, through the eternal estrangement of the Indian from his land, and his subjugation to the Ladino landowners in the peripheral space that is Chiapas.

II. Rejected Motherhood and a Failed Feminist Project in *Oficio de tinieblas*

There is an aspect of this novel that I have barely touched on, yet it is perhaps the work's central theme: the struggles of each of the female characters. In a poem that was published posthumously, "Autorretrato," Castellanos writes, "Sufro más bien por hábito, por herencia, por no / diferenciarme más de mis congéneres, / que por causas concretas."[100] For her, suffering seems to be a shared existence between her and her female counterparts, a way of life that is difficult to stop. The female characters of her novel are no exception: suffering characterizes each of their lives in the narrative—Idolina sits in bed feeling melancholic constantly, Isabel feels anger toward her husband and never acts on it, Catalina ruminates incessently on her barrenness. In the same poem, Castellanos goes on to say "me enseñaron a llorar. Pero el llanto / es un mí un mecanismo descompuesto, / y no lloro en la cámara mortuoria / ni en la ocasión sublime ni frente a la catástrofe. // Lloro cuando se quema el arroz o cuando pierdo / el último recibo del impuesto predial."[101] Here the poetic voice expresses a uselessness of her emotion of sadness and weeping: she weeps for trivial things, like her poor cooking or losing an important paper, instead of the large and momentous events that should really be cause for great emotion. This characteristic suggests that she is kept apart from the momentous things of life, and forced to ruminate on the useless everyday

[100] "I suffer more out of habit or tradition / or not to differ from my fellow humans, / rather than for any of the right reasons." (translation by Maureen Ahem)
[101] "they taught me how to cry. But crying in me / is a broken-down mechanism; / I don't cry at funerals, / on sublime occasions, or when disaster strikes. // I cry when I burn the rice or when I lose / the latest tax receipt." (translation by Maureen Ahem)

domestic occurrences, as if as a woman she does not merit deep emotion for powerful happenings.

In a similar way, the women of *Oficio* are by far the most developed characters in the novel, yet they are marginalized from the masculinized and historicized projects of revolution, land reform, and politics. Instead, on the outskirts of the political action of the novel, they struggle with their own demons of trying to find small ways of attaining agency in a world in which they are oppressed and deemed irrelevant. Many critics have pointed to the fact that this novel is more about the subjugation of women than the subjugation of indigenous characters. What I wish to add to the critical conversation about *Oficio de tinieblas* are some thoughts about the negativity and pessimism surrounding motherhood that each of the female characters exhibits. This pessimism is significant, since it seems to undermine a central ideal of the impending second wave of feminism, which was in germination at the time of the novel's publication. Through the characters' rejection of motherhood, the novel seems to subtly criticize the faulty feminist ideal that woman should simply try to act as much like a man as possible: acting like a man meant rejecting motherhood, through birth control, abortion, and prioritizing a career above having children, but Castellanos seems to show in her novel that this is a mistake for modern women, not a solution.

The importance that Castellanos places on the feminine condition in this novel represents an important step forward in post-revolutionary discourse: it proves that there are other pressing issues to consider, and that nationalism, ideology, and land reform were no longer the only things worth debating in Mexican society. The ideals of social equality that many began to embrace in the 1960s allowed women to rethink their place in society. *Oficio de tinieblas* demonstrates the mistakes that many women tend to make in the process of

finding agency as a subaltern group, and in addition offers hope for how woman can "write her self."

"Naturalized Woman"

In the cultural constructions of the Western world, women are frequently presented as related to and connected with nature. María Candelaria is the perfect example of this tendency, constantly caressing the flowers, running through cornfields, contemplating the moon, and cradling a baby pig in her arms. Kate Soper hypothesizes that this tendency to connect women and the natural world is rooted in the appraisal of women's reproductive traits: the fact that they are mothers—bearing and birthing children, nursing them to life—makes them somehow more animalistic. For Soper, there is an "assumption that the female, by virtue of her reproductive role, is a more corporeal being than the male" (139). She adds, "The dominance of woman's biology in her life as a consequence of her role in procreation has been responsible for her allocation to the side of nature, and hence for her being subject to the devaluation and de-historization of the natural relative to the cultural and its 'productivity'" (139). She quotes Simone de Beauvoir, who wrote that woman is "more enslaved to the species than the male, her animality is more manifest" (139). Hence, the rejection of motherhood in Castellanos's novel, it stands to reason, could mean rejecting the culturally imposed connection of women to the natural world, de-emphasizing her corporality, her "animality." For Soper, this connection of women to nature excludes them from the world of culture, which is why women are often marginalized from consideration in high art (140). Since mainstream culture tends to exclude women by virtue of her maternal and thus natural proclivities, if a woman were to reject her maternal side, perhaps she might find equal status in patriarchy. This is indeed a societal pressure even today. Motherhood is not congruous with success in a patriarchal society. Women who are mothers receive lower salaries for the same jobs as women who are not and are even viewed as less competent than

their counterparts (Correll 1297). In the U.S., there is no guaranteed paid leave provided for working mothers who have recently given birth, and Mexico only guarantees six weeks of leave for new mothers. It seems that rejecting motherhood would be the answer for success and a fairer opportunity in this society that tends to equate motherhood with animality, and estranges mothers from mainstream success. Hélène Cixous speaks of this problem of what she calls "phallocentrism," or the ordering of society in which male traits are prioritized and applauded:

> Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallocentrism. (879)

Rejection of Motherhood in *Oficio de tinieblas*

Oficio de tinieblas questions the utility and necessity of women rejecting maternity through its depictions of the failures and inadequacies of the female characters in their attempts to reject motherhood. The 1960s in Mexico represented a time of hunger for modernity and change. Yet, this change tended to center itself in the city centers, and often didn't extend its influence to provincial Mexico. Monsiváis explains that beginning in 1959, Mexican culture is submerged in,

> el estallido que puede ir de la entronización de los supermercados, la desaparición de lo "típico" y la solidificación de la TV a la consagración avasalladora de una sensación difusa, sensación que se concreta en los círculos culturales mexicanos no como la gana de revolución sino como el redoblado anhelo de modernidad. Modernidad no política, sino social, cultural y sexual. Los sectores ilustrados esquivan, en este período febril que va de 1959 a 1968 aproximadamente, cualquier uso de la tradición y creen […] en la ruptura a la que entienden como su

> incorporación a lo más audaz del siglo. […] El "provincianismo" cambia de signo y se vuelve el término peyorativo por excelencia. La cultura es propiedad exclusiva de la capital, la cultura es una orgia de reconocimientos, el afán de disponer no de una tradición (entendida como un corpus creativo e ideológico) sino de antecedentes prestigiosos. Avasalla el modo de vida urbano y se nulifican parcialmente […] las categorías sentimentales de la provincia y el hogar, sin que sus jerarquías esenciales pierdan todo imperio y vigencia.[102] (1038)

In the 1960s, then, Mexican culture in general turns its focus to modernity, and the modern space *par excellence* is the city. It is in the urban centers of Mexico where the people sought social, cultural and sexual revolution, and in general the idealization of or nostalgia for the countryside tended to fade in significance.

Oficio de tinieblas, although it takes place in peripheral Chiapas, was written by Castellanos in Mexico City, a place lauded as the center of progress and, as Monsiváis says, "rupture" with tradition characteristic of the 1960s. She expresses a desire for modernity throughout the text in that she takes up the plight of marginalized groups, specifically women and Indians. One of the main issues of many of Castellanos's works is the enduring sexism inherent to society. As Poniatowska observes, not much had changed in Mexican society for women's rights during Castellanos's moment of writing: "A tres siglos de distancia Rosario puede decir lo mismo que Sor Juana: la comunidad humana no le ayuda a la mujer a

[102] "the explosion that goes from the enthroning of supermarkets, the disappearance of Mexican tradition and the solidifying of TV to the overwhelming recognition of a general feeling, a feeling that is summed up in the cultural circles of Mexico not as the desire for revolution but rather as the doubled longing for modernity. Not a political modernity, but rather a social, cultural and sexual one. The learned sectors avoid, in this febrile period that goes from approximately 1959 to 1968, any use of tradition and believe in rupture as what they understand as their most audacious incorporation of the century. "Provincialism" changes its meaning and becomes the pejorative term *par excellence.* Culture is the exclusive property of Mexico City, culture is an orgy of recognitions, the effort to get not a tradition (understood as a creative and ideological corpus) but instead prestigious precursors. The urban style of life dominates and the sentimental categories of province and home are partially nullified […], but without their essential hierarchies losing total empire and validity" (translation is mine).

realizarse"[103] (53). In her trajectory as an essayist, Rosario struggled with women's position in Mexican society. In her Master's thesis (for which she was ridiculed by her evaluating committee) "Sobre cultura feminina" which she wrote at age 25, she argues that women, since they have the ability to find transcendence through motherhood, don't desire the same kind of agency and recognition that men feel they must find in society. In her later essays of *Mujer que sabe latín,* which were published in 1973, she becomes much more adamant about the oppression of women in society, influenced in large part by Virginia Woolf's ideas from *The Three Guineas,* citing the lack of opportunities as the reason for women's subaltern status in society. In her famous poem, "Válium 10," she describes a day in the life of a woman who struggles to balance life as a mother and professional, who in the final stanza tries to fulfill her feelings of loss, sadness and the idiocy of life by taking a Valium before going to bed. As Castellanos matured as a feminist thinker, it seems she became increasingly disturbed by the oppression of women in Mexican society, letting go of any notion of actual inferiority of the female sex.

Like her characters, Castellanos herself struggled with an ambivalent attitude toward motherhood and its relation to her own identity. She suffered various miscarriages and lost a son and daughter. Gabriel, her one son who did survive to adulthood, decided he preferred living in Mexico with his father, rather than with her abroad. Castellanos felt that her body was full of her dead children, as expressed in her four-part poem, "De la vigilia estéril."[104] In it, the poetic voice describes the dead as if traveling through the waves of her own blood: "Suben hasta mis ojos para violar el mundo, / se embriagan de mi boca, respiran por mis poros, / juegan en mi cerebro. […] Todos los muertos yacen en mi vientre."[105] She calls

[103] "Three centuries later Rosario can say the same thing as Sor Juana: the human community does not help woman accomplish her dreams" (translation is mine).
[104] "Of the Sterile Vigil" (translation is mine).
[105] "They climb up to my eyes to rape the world / they get drunk from my mouth, breathe through my pores / they play in my brain. […]. All the dead rest in my womb." (translation is mine).

sterility, "el tema exasperado de mi sangre:"[106] it is a part of her own blood, her own body. For Castellanos, her corporality is directly linked to her (loss of) motherhood, which is directly linked to her identity. She refuses to deny the role that her children and her loss play as a part of her identity. It's not a question of whether women should or shouldn't reject motherhood. It appears that for Castellanos, the truth is that they cannot reject motherhood, since it is a part of their blood, their physical makeup.

How do these views appear in *Oficio de tinieblas?* Each female character—from the repressed Chamulas Marcela and Catalina to the privileged Ladina women Isabel and Julia—grapples with the idea of her maternal self. Each of them tries and fails to reject her maternal self in various ways in an effort to gain agency and power in their patriarchal society. Let us analyze each case, and how each woman encounters obstacles when attempting to reject their maternal corporality. This aspect of *Oficio* seems to suggest that rejecting motherhood is one failure of a misguided form of feminism.

First is the case of Marcela Gómez Oso, who is raped and impregnated by Leonardo Cifuentes. When she finds out she is pregnant, she rejects the child she bears. She sees its presence inside her as foreign. When Catalina points out that Marcela is pregnant, her reaction is one of disgust and hate toward the "gelatinous mass" that she feels within:

> Instintivamente se llevó las dos manos al vientre como para detener eso que iba creciendo, implacable, dentro de ella, hora tras hora, más y más, y que terminaría por devorarla. Empezó a sentirlo: *eso* se movía, golpeaba, asfixiaba. Un espasmo de asco, último gesto de defensa, la curvó. Un ansia incontrolable de arrojar la masa gelatinosa que pacientemente roía sus entrañas para alimentarse; un deseo de destruir esa criatura

[106] "the exasperated theme of my blood" (translation is mine).

> informe que la aplastaba ya con el pie del amo. […] Y la cosa, aquella cosa, continuaba allí, abultando de manera grotesca su vientre, pesando.[107] (46)

While pregnant, she even runs off into the woods and collapses, "junto a una piedra anónima"[108] (47), desirous of a miscarriage. It is only because of the careful attentions of Catalina that she succeeds in giving birth to a healthy child. When Domingo is born, she rejects her own son for his mestizo appearance: "Tenía la piel de color firme, los ojos en almendra, tenaces, de su raza. Pero los cabellos eran crespos como los de un caxlán. Entonces Marcela sintió repugnancia, lo rechazó"[109] (49). When Domingo is crucified at age ten, she and Lorenzo (Catalina's brother who marries Marcela) barely react: "La visión de Domingo desnudo, desguanzado, no los asombra, no los alarma"[110] (320).

Marcela's callous attitude, even repulsion, toward Domingo is understandable: he is the fruit of a heinous act. A Caxlán (which is the Chamula word for the white man or outsider) had brutally raped her, treating her more like an object than a human being, taking away her dignity. The unfortunate aspect of Marcela's case is that she takes her anger out on Domingo, an innocent child, rather than on a more deserving source, such as the rapist himself, Leonardo. Since she is powerless to enact revenge on Leonardo, she directs it within, at the fetus growing in her womb, almost killing it. She turns and takes the abuse enacted on her by Leonardo—treating her like an object—and directs it toward her son. Through Marcela's story, the violence of the rape begets more violence toward her own son, who is innocent. Leonardo, the true culprit, suffers no consequences for his crime, and is even

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[107] "Instinctively she raised both hands to her belly as if to stop the thing that was growing within her, implacable, hour by hour, more and more, and that would end by devouring her. She began to feel it: that thing was moving, kicking, suffocating. A spasm of nausea, her last gesture of defense, doubled her over. An uncontrollable longing to tear out the gelatinous mass that was patiently nourishing itself by gnawing at her entrails, a desire to destroy the formless creature that was already crushing her down with a master's heavy foot. […] And the thing, that thing, stayed in there, swelling out her belly grotesquely, weighing her down."
[108] "next to an anonymous rock"
[109] "The skin was a sturdy color and he had the tenacious almond-shaped eyes of her race. But the hair was curly, like a Caxlán's. Marcela was repulsed; she rejected him."
[110] "The sight of Domingo naked and almost lifeless doesn't astonish them, doesn't alarm them" (translation is mine, as this excerpt does not appear in Allen's translation).

ignorant of the child's existence. Leonardo's violent act causes Marcela to give up on any agency in her life, a technique that seems to serve as a coping mechanism for the trauma she has suffered under don Leonardo. Her existence is one of a constant stupor: "una gran paz—la paz que tiene párpados de sueño—había untado las coyunturas de la muchacha: en el lugar donde dolía la memoria, en el lugar donde va a doler la esperanza. No es una víscera sangrante ya lo que palpita sino un momento, este momento maravillosamente vacío" (45). She treats her pregnancy with the same resignation: "Observaba los preparativos para el parto, sin interés, sin curiosidad siquiera, como si se tratara de un acontecimiento que no le concerniese" (47). This resignation and passivity is reminiscent of what Cixous claims that men cause women to do: hate themselves:

> Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs. They have made for women an antinarcissism! A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for what women haven't got! They have constructed the infamous logic of antilove. (878)

Marcela falls into anonymity and silence as a result of her inability to accept her own child, driven from caring for him because she is repulsed by his origins of violence and injustice. This "antilove" has been generated by Leonardo's act, and can never be undone. Her repugnance for her son's mixed race features also could be interpreted as signifying a repugnance for the mexicanness movement, the realization that there can be no symbol of mexicanness, since the history of European and indigenous Mexicans is one of rape and exploitation.

In the second place, Felipa, Marcela's mother, rejects motherhood in favor of greed, only to encounter emptiness and isolation as a result. She insults and beats Marcela after she comes back empty handed from Ciudad Real, not realizing that her daughter had been raped.

Catalina says she will take Marcela under her care, and Felipa gives her up with almost complete indifference, considering only the benefit of having one less mouth to feed. Her first question to Pedro is, "¿Cuánto va a pagar por ella?" (39), treating her like an animal for sale rather than as a human being. For Felipa, in this moment, economic stability, another value traditionally related to male power, is more important than caring for her own daughter. However, she almost immediately regrets her decision to let her daughter go. Once Marcela is under Catalina's care, Felipa obsesses about her daughter and constantly plots revenge against Catalina, but there is nothing she can do about it, as Catalina knows, "las costumbres no la autorizaban a tener voz propia" (44). In this way, Felipa is driven from motherhood with the hopes of monetary gain, but realizes this is an empty endeavor.

A third example takes the form of Mercedes Solórzano, the *alcahueta*[111] who helps Leonardo get virgin indigenous women to rape, who evades maternity by being large, brutal, lying, and mannish. She smokes a cigar, emphasizing her virility. She is first described as, "una mujer cuarentona, obesa, con los dientes refulgiendo en groseras incrustaciones de oro. Estaba sentada en una sillita de madera, con las enaguas derramándose a su alrededor. Fumaba un largo cigarro envuelto en papel amarillo"[112] (17). Solórzano is a grotesque figure, completely devoid of any traditional notion of femininity, exacerbated by the fact that she holds a phallic cigarette, and puffs on it "placenteramente" (18). She abuses the trust of other women time and time again, aiding Leonardo in his perversities. Instead of being a victim, she copes with the sexism of her society by helping the victimizer find victims. For her, this position of power trumps any kind of maternal or protective instincts she might be tempted to embrace in herself. Her excessive time spent in Ciudad Real and desire for power have made her indifferent to helping her fellow Chamula women, and instead she betrays them, as is

[111] An *alcahueta* is a woman that works as an intermediary to help someone cover up an illicit romantic or sexual relationship (*El Pequeño Larousse Ilustrado,* 59).

[112] "A woman in her forties, obese, her flashing teeth garishly inlaid with gold […]. She was sitting in a small wooden chair with her skirts spilling out around her, smoking a long cigarette rolled in yellow paper."

evidenced in the way she deceives Marcela. Motherhood, for Mercedes, it stands to reason, is something that is far from possible. She prefers deception and violence in exchange for the economic support of Leonardo Cifuentes.

Catalina Díaz Puiljá is the most problematic character of the novel. More than any woman of the story, she desires to be a mother, and constantly feels insecure because of her infertility. She is only 20 years old, but is already like an old woman, "reseca y agostada"[113] (12). She defines her lack of fertility in terms of an inability to be more connected to the land itself:

> cuando las compañeras con las que hilaba Catalina, con las que acarreaba el agua y la leña, empezaron a asentar el pie más pesadamente sobre la tierra (porque pisaban por ellas y por el que había de venir), cuando sus ojos se apaciguaron y su vientre se henchió como una troje repleta, entonces Catalina paló sus caderas baldías, maldijo la ligereza de su paso y, volviéndose repentinamente para mirar tras de sí, encontró que su paso no había dejado huella.[114] (12)

As Soper notes, maternity is represented as bringing the woman closer to the natural world, more connected to the earth itself. Catalina calls her hips "baldías," an adjective also used to speak about barren land. Her inability to conceive coincides with an estrangement from the land itself, in the fact that she cannot leave a deeper footstep, and that her body cannot produce a child, as if an analogy for land that cannot produce vegetation.

Unlike other female characters of the novel, Catalina tries in various ways to embrace her maternal self: she adopts Domingo, and cares for him as if he were her own. When he begins to be more interested in Pedro than Catalina, she explores other options for maternity by figuratively giving birth to idols made of mud. When the idols become irrelevant after

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[113] "dry and withered"

[114] "when the companions with whom Catalina spun, gathered wood and carried water began to settle their feet more heavily onto the earth (because they walked for themselves and for the child to come), when their eyes filled with peace and their bellies swelled like granaries after the harvest, then Catalina probed her fruitless hips, cursed the lightness of her step and, turning suddenly to look back, saw that her feet left no mark behind her."

Father Mandujano ridicules their uselessness, she becomes desperate. She longs for power and prestige in her community, and decides to crucify Domingo—a crazed effort to be viewed as relevant among her peers, and the ultimate rejection of her maternal self. However, all of her efforts fail miserably, and she begins to feel haunted by her violent act toward her adopted son, thinking she sees his ghost everywhere in the natural world: "A veces, en un momento de reposo, Catalina veía—en la forma de una peña, en un cristal de agua, en una nube fugitiva—la imagen de un niño crucificado"[115] (343).

When her attempts at mothering (the idols or Domingo) fail, Catalina ruminates on her inability to have children. She describes her infertility in terms of metaphors with the natural world, as if it is a nut that never allows a seed to grow from within, or an ugly, motionless rock:

> Mujer sin hijos. La nuez que no se rompe para dar paso, crecimiento y plenitud a la semilla. La piedra, inmóvil, fea, con la que se topa el caminante. El puño que aprisiona el pájaro y estrangula sus últimos estertores. […] Un hijo. Éste era el nombre de su soledad, de su desvalimiento, de su fracaso.[116] (316)

In this way, her lack of maternity is presented as the same as the lack of connectedness to the environment, demonstrating a rejection of her very nature. What's more, she feels dead, rotten and already buried after Domingo's death, as if somehow his loss were in part a loss of her own body:

> La que tuvo el maravilloso hallazgo en la cueva lo había olvidado; la que con sus propias manos dio figura a unos ídolos remotos, quizá ya inexistentes; la que en su

[115] "Sometimes, in a moment of repose, Catalina saw—in the shape of a crag, in the mirroring surface of a body of water, in a fugitive cloud—the image of a crucified boy."
[116] "A childless woman. The nut that does not break open to make way for the growth and fullness of the seed. The rock, ugly and immobile, against which the passer-by stumbles. The fist that imprisons the bird and strangles its death rattle. […]A child. That was the name of her solitude, her destitution, her failure."

> aridez se alegró con la cercanía de una infancia. Y ésta era la parte de Catalina más muerta, más enterrada, y más podrida.[117] (343)

It seems that Catalina's story represents a Catch 22 for women in society: neither is she able to be a mother, nor is she able to have power and agency in her society. As a result, she ends up in state of living death. In an essay that was published posthumously, "La mujer y su imagen," Rosario Castellanos describes maternity as the key to being relevant in contemporary male-dominated society: "de una manera tácita o expresa, se le ofrece [a la mujer] así la oportunidad de traspasar los límites en un fenómeno que si no borra, al menos atenúa los signos negativos con los que estaba marcada; que colma sus carencias; que la incorpora, con carta de ciudadanía en toda regla, a los núcleos humanos. Ese fenómeno es la maternidad"[118] (*Poesía* 14). Since Catalina lacks what Castellanos deems the key to relevance in patriarchy, she turns to what might be considered traditionally masculine ways of obtaining relevance: striving for prestige as an all-important leader, and even embracing a god-complex in which she seeks reverence from her peers as the *Ilol,* or priestess. Her turn away from the expected female role, however, results also in despair, just like her rejection of motherhood. Unconnected to the land and unconnected to her community, she finds no solace in her life. This perhaps could be considered a veiled criticism of Mexican society: even if women completely abandon hopes for motherhood, as Catalina does with the crucifixion of Domingo, they will still live a life of suffering, unable to compete and find a respectable place in the world dominated by men. Catalina is incredibly ambivalent: desiring everything

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[117] "The woman who had made the marvelous discovery in the cave had forgotten it, the woman who, with her own hands, gave shape to some distant and perhaps already nonexistent idols; the woman who, in her barrenness, rejoiced in the proximity of a childhood. And that was the part of Catalina that was most dead, most buried, most rotted away."

[118] "either tacitly or expressly, woman is offered the opportunity of crossing boundaries through a phenomenon that if it does not erase, at least attenuates the negative signs with which she is marked; that calms her worries; that incorporates, with a completely valid form of citizenship, to the human nuclei. That phenomenon is maternity" (translation is mine).

but receiving nothing, wanting motherhood and then murdering her adopted son. In all of her efforts she ends up more subjugated and irrelevant than ever.

Many critics have commented on Julia Acevedo, Fernando Ulloa's partner who accompanies him to Ciudad Real. A progressive, educated and independent feminist from Mexico City, she begins to lose her agency in Ciudad Real, as mentioned earlier. Finnegan notes that Julia "exemplifies Castellanos' inability to realize the radical potential of her white female characters, choosing instead to strip them of their early power and ensure their enforced submission and textual death" (78). In this way, each of Castellanos's female characters fall into irrelevance as a result of patriarchy. I would argue that not only her white female characters, but also many of her indigenous female characters fall into a similar fate. In any case, Julia, like the other female characters, rejects motherhood. Her technique is more modern: she aborted her child with Fernando when they were living in Mexico City, an action which she justifies in the following excerpt:

> Julia no había querido tener [hijos]. Para entregarse por entero a Fernando. Para no ceñirlo con un nudo más. Y también porque temía la propia esclavitud. No, no era miedo ni al dolor ni al peligro. ¿No era peor un aborto que un parto? Y sin embargo ella abortó. Deliberadamente. Y tan sin remordimientos que jamás la había atormentado la necesidad de compartir, ni siquiera con Fernando, su secreto.[119] (139)

Julia views motherhood as a type of slavery, and values her independence too much to be yoked together with a child. Julia's character is unexpected in that she never expresses any sort of regret for terminating her pregnancy. As Finnegan notes, she embodies the "new empowered bourgeois woman [who] refuses the ties of marriage choosing abortion over motherhood with no regrets" (75). However, as mentioned earlier, the longer she stays in the

[119] "Julia hadn't wanted [children]. In order to give herself fully to Fernando. In order not to tie him down with yet another knot. And also because she feared her own enslavement. No, it wasn't fear of the pain or the danger. Wasn't an abortion worse than a birth? Nevertheless, she aborted. Deliberately. And with so little remorse that the need to share her secret, even with Fernando, had never troubled her."

backwards environment of Ciudad Real, the more she begins to let go of her desire for female empowerment and independence, and tries to fit in with the traditionalists. At the end of the novel, she disappears: Fernando ends up imprisoned, framed by Cifuentes for supposedly being the mastermind behind the Chamula revolt, and no one knows what happens to Julia. Some suspect she is back in Mexico City, and others speculate that she is in hiding somewhere in Ciudad Real. In any case, her efforts at living as a liberated woman cannot succeed in such an insular and close-minded society. For Julia, her early decision to embrace liberty through her right to abortion ends up being useless in Ciudad Real, where she falls into obscurity as a result of their backward society.

On a biographical note, Castellanos's mother also expressed ambivalence about mothering a female daughter. When Rosario's brother, her only son, died of appendicitis at a young age, Castellanos's parents lamented wholeheartedly. One family friend was reported to have empathized with them, saying, "¿Por qué murió el varón y no la mujercita?"[120] (Poniatowska 91). As a result, Castellanos grew up in a home where she felt her mother did not care for her. At one time she wrote, "Mi madre en vez de leche me dio el sometimiento"[121] (Poniatowska 94). This biographical experience appears to inspire in part the character of Isabel, Idolina's mother and Leonardo Cifuentes's wife. Over the course of the novel, Isabel slowly retreats into herself, afraid of her daughter's knowledge that she abetted Leonardo in the murder of her husband (Idolina's father), Isidoro. Scared of Idolina and her knowledge of the crime, she avoids her at all costs, allowing the indigenous nanny, Teresa, to raise her instead. For Isabel, the desire to enact revenge on Leonardo (motivated by her feelings of powerlessness and fear of punishment for acting as an accomplice in the murder of her first husband) overshadows what little motherly affections she might have maintained for her daughter. Her character is almost altogether repellant, since she exhibits

[120] "Why did the male child die and not the little lady?" (translation is mine)
[121] "My mother instead of giving me milk gave me subjugation" (translation is mine)

only selfishness and cold-blooded racism toward the indigenous race through her treatment of Teresa.

Hope for the Feminist Movement: Teresa's New Order of Subversion

Marcela rejects her baby and retreats into silence. Catalina crucifies her adopted son and falls into irrelevance. Isabel lives a life separate from her daughter and is made a cuckquean by her husband, many times over. Julia aborts her only child and fades into irrelevance at the end of the novel. The only character who breaks this cycle of rejection of motherhood to disappearance and irrelevance is a unique one, who lives a life very distinct from these four women: Teresa Entzín López, Idolina's indigenous nanny. She is the one character who offers a glimmer of hope, not for female agency, but for something nobler: love and selflessness. She is the only one who breaks the trend of trying to fit into patriarchy through male power and embraces her maternal self, letting go of any desire for self-promotion, self-preservation or prestige, in a way much dissimilar to the other female characters of the novel. Finnegan notes how each of the female characters of *Oficio de tinieblas* begins as powerful but retreats into silence (72). However, she doesn't seem to acknowledge Teresa's role as speaker in the novel when she claims that, "Castellanos sees the lancing of the abscess [speaking out] as good, yet all her female characters end their textual lives in stupefied silence" (99). Teresa, Idolina's indigenous nanny, treats Idolina with unconditional love, no matter how poorly Idolina reciprocates her affections. Idolina orders her around, acts sullenly, and even abandons Teresa for a spell in favor of Julia's attentions, but Teresa firmly supports her, and even when they are estranged for a time, misses her dearly.

What's more, Teresa lost her own baby, since Isabel had forced her to nurse Idolina instead of her own child. Teresa's own daughter dies of starvation, and she has no choice but to stay with the Cifuentes family and continue caring for Idolina. Isabel defends her cruel

treatment of Teresa in terms of ethnic superiority: "Teresa no es más que una india. Su hija era una india también."[122] (140). Instead of seeking revenge for Isabel's bigotry, Teresa nurses Idolina and brings her up, and begins to love her as if she were her own child. For instance, she meticulously prepares Idolina her breakfast each morning, and tells her so many stories that Idolina learns Tzotzil before Spanish. Teresa has no options for power or prestige in her life, and thus resigns herself to caring for Idolina, a spoiled and ungrateful brat.

Teresa, however, never retreats into silence, and the novel closes with a most significant occurrence: Teresa tells Idolina an odd legend. In it, she seems to be telling the story of Catalina, but only names her as the *ilol.* Briefly summarized, Teresa's legend tells of a powerful *ilol* who lived in a cave with her son made of stone. The *ilol* is brought to Ciudad Real and asked to demonstrate her powers. She proves able to escape violent beasts, go through ice and fire unscathed, and break through chains. As the *ilol* gains power, she becomes increasingly prideful. She and her son begin to devour the first-born child of each family. The leaders of Ciudad Real try to reason with her, but she devours them as well. They try to battle her, but she evades them, and all bullets bounce off of her and murder the shooter. An old sacristan comes up with the idea of telling the *ilol* that her son is cold; they wrap him in a shawl, and he begins to crumble and die. The *ilol* breaks her head against him in frustration and dies as well. Their cadavers bring death and pestilence to the region. For this reason, her name must never be mentioned and her memory should be erased. Teresa tells the story as Idolina falls asleep, and then returns silently to her corner where she watches over the young girl. The novel ends with the following sentence from the narrator: "Faltaba mucho tiempo para que amaneciera"[123] (368), demonstrating perhaps that Teresa's story represents a small yet hopeful step toward progress: women can speak out, even if it is in an outlet as seemingly insignificant as telling a story to a young girl who is completely

[122] "Teresa's no more than an Indian. Her daughter was an Indian, too."
[123] "It was still a long time before dawn."

powerless. No matter whom they speak to, they must continue to speak. Embracing motherhood, instead of rejecting it, is the way in which Teresa is able to continue to have a voice in the narrative, even as the novel comes to a close.

Most critics have interpreted this final myth as a rewriting of Catalina's story, forcing her into obscurity with the fact that she is never specifically named. However, the fact that Catalina is never named in Teresa's legend makes one wonder: who is this legend really about? This is especially so since Teresa emphasizes that her legend is from long ago, before even Idolina or she were born. With this in mind, the story seems intended to tell of the plight of any woman who tries to embrace a greedy desire for power—it appears that the result of this endeavor is the death of their children. One cannot be both a mother and powerful. The *ilol* of Teresa's legend had a fake demonic son, one made of stone who cast curses on the entire community. He was killed, and she died as a result. One could look at Teresa's legend as the problem of all the other women of the novel: they look to societal prestige, power over others, pride, and other ideals of the masculine, and ignore their own bodies. Through this creation of history into Indian legend, Teresa ignores any desire for power and embraces her maternal self through the telling of a story to her surrogate daughter, Idolina.

In Castellanos's essays, her thoughts on maternity follow an intriguing trajectory. As I mentioned earlier, her thesis *Sobre cultura feminina,* argues that men produce cultural objects to transcend their worlds while women are able to do this through maternity. Thus, they don't need to produce culture in order to have a legacy in the world (24). However, as Castellanos matured as an intellectual, she began to see women's role in society in a more nuanced way, emphasizing the problem of sexism and inequality in the subjugation of women in her essays from *Poesía no eres tú. Oficio de tinieblas* seems to fall somewhere between these two lines of thought: it refutes Castellanos's master's thesis through its very existence: it is a great piece of cultural production, produced by a woman who is also a mother. At the same time,

themes in the novel appear to warn against rejecting maternity, and emphasizing women's need to embrace their maternal selves, which include their own bodies, in order to transcend their societies' oppressive tendencies.

Throughout the novel, Teresa finds an inner power by never rejecting her maternal self, and creating her own alternative version of history. This being said, I would have to disagree in part with Jean Franco's interpretation of Teresa's myth. She claims that,

> [t]his […] myth illustrates the failure of orally transmitted legend to provide a collective memory around which further resistance could be mobilized […]. The ending of Castellanos' novel seems to reflect a belief that subaltern cultures (including that of women) cannot become counterhegemonic because they do not have access to writing, and because even their oral culture is penetrated by myths of submission. Teresa's mythic interpretation of Catalina's actions, transmitted not to her own people but to Idolina, who belongs to another social class and race, demonstrates the fact that all transculturation is destructive to the indigenous community and that woman's bid for power, when it is not linked to national consciousness, can have devastating results. (144)

Franco makes an excellent point: that Teresa's legend is not useful to her ethnic community. However, the legend she tells is not devoid of hope: it seems that through sharing the story with Idolina, Teresa provides an opportunity for the invalid girl to reconnect to her own body, which is a source of torture to her throughout the novel. Teresa's example of embracing her maternal self, can hopefully be passed on to Idolina, despite the terrible example of maternal rejection embodied in her biological mother, Isabel. Teresa offers hope for Idolina's future: a surrogate mother's love may enable her to go on to tell stories, to her future children. Instead of the failure of oral transmission of history, I believe that Teresa's legend offers a glimmer of hope for woman's reconnection to her body. It could even be

considered a form of oral *écriture*, a term coined by Cixous. Cixous argues that the agency of the female voice requires a connection to her body. Through this connection to one's body, one can defy the masculine order and patriarchy:

> [W]oman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement. (875)

Cixous also advocates an embracing of a maternal self, in the sense that women should unite in a collective sort of lesbianism or self-love in order to stop denigrating one another:

> In women there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation; a force that will not be cut of but will knock the wind out of the codes. We will rethink womankind beginning with every form and every period of her body. The Americans remind us, 'We are all Lesbians'; that is, don't denigrate woman, don't make of her what men have made of you. (882)

The case of Teresa represents a radical embracing of her maternal self: she embraces all types of motherhood, through caring deeply for her own child, as well as for Idolina, the daughter of her nemesis, the cause of her biological daughter's death. While Catalina murdered her surrogate son Domingo, Marcela rejected the "thing" growing within, and Isabel gave over her daughter's care to another, Teresa breaks the unhealthy trend by fiercely fighting for her biological daughter, and then even embracing the privileged girl she was forced to care for.

Oficio de tinieblas demonstrates the dangers of trying to fit into the patriarchal order and over-idealizing the stereotypically "masculine" way of doing things characterized by

greed, individualism, egotism, pride, power, and prestige. It suggests a different, alternate way of writing women's selves into history. As Naomi Lindstrom observes, a major theme in Castellanos's prose is "the ambiguity of the woman who may be guilty of complicity in her own subjugation" (60). Teresa's story offers a way for women to stop being complicit in their subjugation, embrace their unique identities and gain power by a different way of finding relevance in their society: creating legend, converting history into something more subjective.

Conclusion

Oficio de tinieblas expresses deep disillusionment with the revolutionary government in its representation of the peripheral and repressive Chiapan highlands, which are portrayed as too distant from the Mexican center (the capital) for any real change to happen, even under Lázaro Cárdenas. While *María Candelaria* and *Al filo del agua* were strategically set before the revolution so as not to blatantly criticize the PRI hegemony, Castellanos's novel is more audacious: set in the 1930s, the text implicitly criticizes the president who was lauded as a hero of land reform and nationalism: Lázaro Cárdenas. The novel also demonstrates a step further in how writers were contemplating the national issues: no longer is the revolution the only issue of cultural importance. Instead, this text also questions and puts into center stage the feminist movement: it questions the patriarchal order, and criticizes women who blindly try to embrace a naive brand of feminism by rejecting their maternal selves.

The result of Castellanos's novel itself could be labeled a sort of *écriture:* she is often not considered part of the "Boom" of Latin American Literature, since her novel is neither experimental nor fantastic, but instead realist. Castellanos chooses to "write her self" as woman, exploring the topics that matter deeply to her and ignoring, to a certain extent, the literary trends of her time. Her independence from the narrative trends of the 1950s and 1960s demonstrates her own way of finding female power without conforming to and over-idealizing typically "masculine" traits. She writes *Oficio de tinieblas* as a pessimist in a time

of idealism, as a woman during times of male-dominance in the literary scene, and as a prudent and practical thinker in times of fantasy and experimentalism.

Chapter Four: Undoing the Grand Metropolis, Privileging the Periphery: Mexican City and Countryside in Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*

Jesusa Palancares, the protagonist and narrator of Elena Poniatowska's 1969 testimonial novel,[124] *Hasta no verte Jesús mío,* lives in permanent estrangement from her homeland of Oaxaca. From her old age, she tells her entire life story to a silent interlocutor in her home in the slums of Mexico City. Jesusa's feelings of powerlessness and stagnancy are directly related to her urban environment in Mexico City, a place full of materialism, inequality, and what she views as an overall mindset of moral depravity. What's more, her life journey from a relatively free childhood in Oaxaca to a confining and impoverished existence in the D.F. epitomizes the unraveling of the revolutionary ideals, and represents the general disillusionment of the nation post-Tlatelolco. Again, geography plays an essential role in determining identity, since the space in which Jesusa fnids herself direcly relates to her physical and mental self.

Poniatowska's intriguing and utterly unique character Jesusa and her novel's ambiguous genre have been subject to a great deal of critical analyses and discussions, which I will briefly summarize here. Critic Gustavo Pellón explains well how this novel fits into the context of the novel of the revolution, observing how the text contributes to what traditionally had been a male-dominated genre:

> probably the most important contribution the book has made is to correct and add to the image of the Mexican Revolution by giving a woman's account. In some ways *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* is the obverse of *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) [*The*

[124] Poniatowska herself labeled her book a "testimonial novel" in a later essay ("Hasta…" 10).

> *Death of Artemio Cruz*]. If Fuentes's novel tells the story of how a peasant betrays and uses the Revolution to rise to a position of great wealth and power by adopting the philosophy of the conquerers: "chingar o ser chingado" ["screw or be screwed"], Poniatowska gives voice to a woman, a "chingada," who outwardly seems a casualty of life but who has always remained proudly true to herself. The image of the *soldadera* in Mexican literature from Azuela's *Los de abajo* (1916) [*The Underdogs*] to Fuentes's *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* and *Gringo viejo* [*The Old Gringo*] is forever altered by the addition of Poniatowska's Jesusa. (286)

Many of the studies on *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* focus on the ambiguous genre of the text and how it came to be written. For about a year between 1963 and 1964, Elena Poniatowska, a privileged young writer from the wealthy side of town, visited Josefina Bórquez, a 63 year-old woman who lived in the slums of Mexico City. Poniatowska would "interview" her subject for two hours every Wednesday afternoon. However, since Josefina wouldn't allow Poniatowska to use a tape recorder (since she said Poniatowska would be stealing her electricity) or even take notes, Poniatowska had go home each week and try to remember the conversation from her session with Bórquez that afternoon. In 1967, Poniatowska spent a year in Paris, where she put together the text of *Hasta no verte Jesús mío.* She ended up taking many more creative liberties than she had initially anticipated. An oft-cited quote from a later essay by Poniatowska explains her writing process:

> como no soy antropóloga, la mía puede considerarse una novela testimonial y no un documento antropológico y sociológico. Utilicé las anécdotas, las ideas y muchos modismos de Jesusa Palancares pero no podría afirmar que el relato es una transcripción directa de su vida porque ella misma lo rechazaría. Maté a los

> personajes que me sobraban, eliminé cuanta sesión espiritista pude, elaboré donde me pareció necesario, podé, cosí, remendé, inventé. ("Hasta…" 10)[125]

The text, then, is neither fiction nor non-fiction. As Beth Jorgensen observes, it is confusing, which is one reason it has incited so much analysis and discussion (28). The work seems to fall between the genres of the novel and the Latin American tradition of the *testimonio*[126], and many critics see the creation of the character of Jesusa Palancares as a curious amalgamation between Elena Poniatowska and the woman she interviewed for the novel, Josefina Bórquez. Poniatowska has commented extensively about how the novel came to be, and many critics take her comments into serious consideration in their analyses of the work (Lagos-Pope 1991, Kerr 1991, Steele 1992, Kuhnheim 1995). The novel also lends itself well to feminist studies, since Jesusa comes across in the story as androgynous, or at least as a person who subverts societal gender norms (Hancock 1983, Lemaitre 1986, Thornton 2006). Others have opted to study the novel through the lens of class differences (Williams 1994), as a more realistic representation of an individual from a lower social class

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[125] "since I'm not an anthropologist, my [work] can be considered a testimonial novel and not an anthropological and sociological document. I used anecdotes, ideas and many idioms from Jesusa Palancares but I couldn't affirm that the story is a direct transcription of her life because she herself would reject it. I killed off characters that seemed excessive, I eliminated as many spiritualist sessions as I could, I elaborated where it seemed necessary, I trimmed, sewed up, darned, invented" (translation is mine).

[126] The testimonial narrative gained popularity in Latin America in the 1960s, and generally refers to texts that seek to represent those who do not have a voice in society. People from social groups that are marginalized or repressed usually have primacy in the testimonial narrative (O'Byrne 76). The movement seems to have begun with Mexican sociologist Ricardo Pozas' *Juan Pérez Jolote: biografía de un Tzotzil* (1948), the story of a Chamula man who is presented as a typical representative of his oppressed social group. For a valuable study on the genre of the novel, see María Inés Lagos-Pope's article "El testimonio creativo de *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*." In it, she cites two other important testimonials that serve as precursors to *Hasta no verte:* the first is Oscar Lewis' *The Children of Sánchez* (1961), which is the desolate story of a Mexican family living in poverty in the slums of Mexico City. The book was so negative that the PRI government banned it in Mexico when it first was published. Poniatowska actually worked with Lewis for a brief time, and used several of his techniques in transcribing her own text. The second important predecessor to *Hasta* is Cuban writer Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1967): Barnet interviewed Esteban Montejo, an escaped Cuban slave who remembers his life story from the age of 104. The narrative is told in the Afro-Cuban vernacular, and requires an extensive glossary in the back of the book in order for the reader to understand the colloquial language. In fact, the title itself includes the obscure word, *cimarrón,* which literally means a domesticated animal that becomes wild, but colloquially refers to runaway slaves that hide in the jungle of Latin America. Barnet's story creates an effect similar to that of Poniatowska's novel: the reader generally feels awkwardly aware of his/her status as privileged through the difficult-to-access language of a member of a different social class. Lagos-Pope cites Poniatowska's innovation in the fact that she used a great deal of invention in comparison to her predecessors. For Lagos-Pope, Poniatowska blurs generic lines in an effort to call attention to her writing, giving new allure to the testimonial genre (249).

instead of a stereotypical type (Shaw 1996), and by examining the difficulties of truly representing the subaltern (López 1998). Still others see *Hasta no verte* as an anti-modernization text (Franco 1989) or as an allegory of the nation's history (Martínez de Olcoz 1998). Another study has looked at Jesusa's morality and understanding of the *Obra espiritual* sect and the way in which this defines her identity (Caufield 2000). The unique vernacular of Jesusa's narrative voice also has called critical attention, and one critic claims this colloquial storytelling style is a way to create distance between literate and illiterate, reader and narrator (Martínez 2003). Another critic focuses on historical understandings of the Cristero Wars under the Calles regime and how this appears in the novel (Volek 2008).

Critics have spoken little or not at all of Jesusa's geographic identity and the way in which her different environments seem to affect her mindset. In the following chapter, I aim to add to the discussion that the disillusionment and powerlessness related to the revolution's failures are inextricably linked to Jesusa's geographic identity: the idea that she can never return to her homeland parallels the loss of ideals in Mexican politics and culture—this I attempt to establish in the first part of the chapter. Secondly, I agree with the assertion of many critics that the novel represents through Jesusa the failure of the revolution's ideals, but it seems that they touch on this subject only briefly, not going into specifics. What I do in part two of this chapter is explain step by step how each of the PRI/revolutionary government's boasted achievements is undermined by Jesusa's story and situation.

Part One: Jesusa's Gradual and Inalterable Estrangement from the Countryside

Jesusa Palancares's entire life is characterized by hardship. Wherever she finds herself, from Oaxaca to Guerrero to Chihuahua to Mexico City, she struggles to make her way and survive amidst adverse circumstances. Despite a childhood marred by jealous and despotic stepmothers, frequent beatings, abandonment, and the deaths of family members, Jesusa remembers her homeland in the state of Oaxaca fondly, referring to it repeatedly as *mi*

tierra. At various moments throughout the novel, she compares life in Mexico City with life in the countryside, invariably expressing preference for the latter. Her current self in Mexico City is an old woman crippled by powerlessness brought on by poverty, age, and her cold urban environment. She longs to return home to Oaxaca, or even again wander the countryside, as she did in the revolution, but almost inexplicably stays put in the city. This is despite the fact that she upholds the countryside as superior in every possible way to what for her is Mexico City's overly modern lifestyle.

An Age of Innocent Love for the Land: Jesusa's Oaxacan Childhood

It is important to highlight the differences between Jesusa's past and present, in order to better understand what exactly she esteems about her homeland and life as a nomad in the revolution and compare these to what it is she despises about her current urban existence. As Jorgensen notes, Jesusa is,

> a textually and ideologically split self; a seeing I, and an acting I, and a speaking I who exist not as coordinates of a stable identity but as forces engaged in a relationship marked by tension, contradiction, and separation. Jesusa Palancares is, by this view, not one but many subjects in constant conflict with society and with her own past and present selves. (31)

These "past and present selves" of Jesusa identify themselves in large part according to the environment in which they are found.

Let us begin with a study of Jesusa's childhood self: she grows up in prerevolutionary Oaxaca, a place in which she seems to enjoy a period of deeper, almost spiritual, connection to the land itself. From birth to about age 13 Jesusa lived between Santa María Mixtequilla in the Tehuantepec District and the port city of Salina Cruz in the southern state of Oaxaca. The state shares its Eastern border with Chiapas, and the two places share many similarities. Like Chiapas, Oaxaca is composed of mostly indigenous people. Its population is divided into 16

different ethnic groups, the Zapotec people being the largest (Chassen-López 30). Oaxaca has the highest biodiversity of both flora and fauna in the entire country of Mexico (Bastida-Zavala 329). And, again like Chiapas, it is a historically charged space: it is the birth place of both Benito Juárez, a Zapotec Indian and the liberal hero of the War of the Reform, who served as president for five terms in the mid-19th century, as well as heavy handed dictator Porfirio Díaz, who ruled Mexico from 1876-1910 and whose self-imposed reelections to a large extent inspired the revolution. Although it is a peripheral space, with most of its villages surrounded by mountains and many inhabitants living in poverty, Oaxaca is far from irrelevant to Mexican society. Its history of producing influential people, its celebration of age-old indigenous tradition, and its rich natural resources make it an important space, both geographically and culturally.

Jesusa holds her homeland in high regard in part because it is the only place where she was with her mother. In a way similar to Catalina from *Oficio de tinieblas,* who desired to be a mother related to a connectedness to the earth, Jesusa's recollection of her own mother is closely related to the land. Jesusa's mother died when Jesusa was young, and had a poor woman's funeral: not having enough money for a coffin, her family wrapped her in a *petate,* or woven bedroll used for sleeping, and covered her body with dirt. Jesusa, brokenhearted at her mother's burial, jumped into the ditch with the body, and was almost buried along with her, until her father Felipe noticed that she was missing:

> Yo no me quería salir. Quería que me taparan allí con mi mamá. Cuando me sacaron yo estaba llorando, toda entierrada. Entiendo que por haber agarrado aire del camposanto se me ponen los ojos colorados y cada que hace viento me lastiman porque desde esa época tengo el aire del camposanto en los ojos.[127] (17)

[127] "I didn't want to get out. I wanted them to cover me up in there with my mother. I was all covered with dirt and crying when they pulled me out. Ever since then, whenever it's windy, my eyes sting. They say it's because I breathed in cemetery air and that's why my eyes turn red" (This, and all subsequent translations from *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* comes from Deanna Heikkinen's 2001 translation, *Here's to You, Jesusa!* Heikkenen's

She relates her mother's memory to the land itself, tracing connections between the corn crop's growth and her mother's memory: "Cuando se hizo milpita y se vio muy alta, levantaron la cruz y la llevaron al camposanto donde estaba tendida. Quedó la cruz de milpa como señal en la tierra de la vida de mi mamá"[128] (17). The corn crop that is used here as a symbol of her mother's life on earth demonstrates Jesusa's view of the produce of one's homeland as an extension of the self.

This isn't the only moment when Jesusa connects human existence as congruent with the land itself. She also notes that children maintain a deeper connection to the earth itself since they see the land as something pure and unadulterated:

> Como no tenía pensamientos jugaba con la tierra, me gustaba harto tentarla, porque a los cinco años todavía vemos la tierra blanca. Nuestro Señor hizo toda su creación blanca a su imagen y semejanza, y se ha ido ennegreciendo con los años por el uso y la maldad. Por eso los niños chiquitos juegan con la tierra porque la ven muy bonita, blanca, y a medida que crecen el demonio se va a apoderando de ellos, de sus pensamientos y les va transformando las cosas, ensuciándolas, cambiándoles el color, encharcándoselas.[129] (19)

Into this important observation on her childhood understanding of the soil, Jesusa blends ideas from her odd belief system as a member of the spiritualist sect called *la Obra espiritual.* As a child, she loved earth since she saw it as something pretty, pure, and white. According to her beliefs, adulthood sullies one's view of the earth and soil. As adults, Jesusa claims, dirt appears dirty and black because we allow the devil to take over our view of the

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translation is accurate and eloquent, but, unfortunately, much of the colloquial feel of the language and all of Jesusa's unique Mexicanisms disappear in the translation).

[128] "When the corn got tall and began to sprout they took it to my mother's grave at the cemetery, where it remained as a sign of her life on Earth."

[129] "I played in the dirt because I didn't know any better. I really liked the feel of it, and when you're five years old dirt still looks white to you. The Lord made His whole creation white in His own image and likeness, but it's been getting darker over the years, from use and because of evil. That's why little kids play in the dirt; it looks very pretty and clean-white to them. As they grow older, the devil enters them and their thoughts. The evil transforms everything they see, making things dirty, muddy, changing the color."

land. One of the reasons, then, for her current powerlessness and tribulation has to do with age. The loss of esteem for the soil is congruent with the loss of innocence one experiences with the onset of adulthood.

When Jesusa's father can't find work in Tehuantepec, they move to the port city of Salina Cruz in Oaxaca. Jesusa describes this time of her life as one of the freest of her existence. She spends time on her own, climbing trees and running through the hills: "Yo era un animal mesteño. Tiraba para el cerro […]. Como desde chiquilla no me hallé sino con libertad, todo mi gusto era andar sola en el campo o arriba de un cerro"[130] (27). Happiness for her was exploring the natural world in the freedom of childhood; she even calls her childhood self a "wild animal."

Food is another important point of contrast between Jesusa's past and present experiences of life in Mexico. Time and time again Jesusa compares the abundance and good quality of Oaxacan food to the artificial and poor quality food of Mexico City. Living near the ocean in Salina Cruz, they eat raw oysters chopped with a machete from the rocks by the sea, as well as fresh turtle eggs that they would dig up in the sand. She compares this experience to the dearth of fresh seafood in the city, describing the oysters of Salina Cruz as "*vivitos*, fresquecitos. Yo aquí en México nunca los he comido. ¡Quién sabe cuántos meses tienen almacenados en el hielo! ¿Qué alimento tienen si ya están *muertos*"[131] (24, emphases added). The seafood of Mexico City is described as dead, one of many moments when she equates her current experience in her urban space to one of death or stagnancy, and her early childhood as full of life and vibrancy, despite her many trials and losses.

Jesusa also provides an Edenic description of the wide variety of tropical fruit that was easily available to her in Oaxaca. When she describes it, it sounds like a decadent feast.

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[130] "I was a wild animal. I took off for the hills. […] From the time I was little I'd had complete freedom and I just wanted to wander around the countryside by myself."

[131] "still *alive* and fresh. I've never eaten them here in Mexico City. Who knows how long they've been stored on ice? How good can they be for you if they're already *dead*?" (emphasis added).

All of it came directly from the land and in great abundance. The following excerpt demonstrates not only her idealization of Tehuantepec but also suggests a message to her narratee, or the person to whom she directs her story:

> Allá en Tehuantepec llegaban de las huertas las carretadas de frutas; plátanos, mangos, guanábanas, mameyes, a mí me gustaba mucho la fruta. Me gustaba y me gusta. Llevaba fruta a mi cama y allí comía plátanos, chicozapotes, guayabas. Era de noche y como todavía no acompletaba yo, comía mangos verdes con sal y chile aunque me enchilara. Yo no me enfermaba con la fruta verde. Un día me comí cien ciruelas verdes con sal. El mango tierno me lo pasaba con todo y hueso o sea la almendra, pues está blandita, y sabe buena. En mi tierra se da la naranja, el coco, el melón, la chirimoya y aparte de la fruta que me regalaba mi madrastra, yo sacaba de los canastos racimos de plátanos y mameyes enteros, caimitos, piñanonas y tiluyas. En el patio tenían atrincherada la sandía y se amontonaban las guayabas y las anonas. Todas las noches sacaba fruta de las canastas y escogía las más grandes, las que me llenaran más pronto.[132] (41)

The narratee to whom Jesusa directs herself most likely would feel alien to Jesusa at this moment: the urban, privileged woman with whom she speaks most likely is only vaguely familiar with the diverse fruits specific to Jesusa's homeland. It's as if she aims to make this narratee bitterly aware of the shortcomings of Mexico City, a geographic space with little access to the abundance of the earth's produce that one finds in Tehuantepec. Jesusa doesn't really know poverty and hunger until she arrives in Mexico City. Despite her poor upbringing

[132] "Carloads of fruit were brought to Tehuantepec from the fields: bananas, mangoes, guavas, mameys. I really liked fruit, I did then and I still do; bananas, chicozapotes, guavas. At night, since I was still hungry, I ate green mangoes with salt and chile even though it was spicy. Green fruit didn't make me sick. One day I ate a hundred green plums with salt. I ate ripe mangoes, seed and all, because the seed is soft and tastes delicious. Where I'm from they grow oranges, coconuts, melons, and chirimoyas, and besides the fruit my stepmother gave me, I took bunches of bananas and whole mameys, caimitos, pineapples, and *tiluyas* from the baskets. They had watermelon stacked up on the patio and piles of guavas and anonas. Every night I took fruit out of the baskets, picking the biggest ones, which would fill me up the fastest."

in Tehuantepec, a lack of good food was never part of her life there, but instead she was so in touch with the natural world and its produce that she enjoyed it freely.

Not only was natural food more abundant in Oaxaca, but also home-cooked food made with a great deal of care was much more prevalent in Jesusa's memories of the country. When Jesusa recounts her time working for her stepmother in the women's prison of Tehuantepec, she recalls the amazing food that they would cook from scratch for the prisoners. Again, food from her homeland contrasts starkly with that of the city in her comparison of Mexican hot chocolate in both spaces. She describes in detail how the hot chocolate was prepared when she used to live with her stepmother, the rector of a women's prison. The chocolate would be toasted in a clay *comal* and later ground in a *metate* with cinnamon and sugar. Then it would be molded by hand to take out the fat and flatten it like a pancake:

> Allá en mi tierra redondean las tablillas como sopes y luego se rayan en cruz con la uña para cortarlas. Aquí las hacen con molde. Luego se tienden a secar. Mi madrastra me enseñó a batir el chocolate con un molinillo, y lo hacíamos al gusto de cada cristiano de la familia y eran más de veinte, con agua o con leche […]. El chiste del chocolate es que esté espumoso y en su punto. Si no tiene espuma, no vale. Se tiene que batir fuerte con un molinillo de los de antes para que espume, porque nomás para agua de ladrillo mejor no tomo nada. Yo aquí no hago chocolate porque me canso demasiado. Pero sí me lo compro. El "Morelia" es el que está más pasadero porque "La Abuela" tiene mucha tierra. Lo he tomado y me queda como enlodada la boca. ¡Maldita Abuelita! Pero el de antes, nomás me acuerdo, ése era otra cosa.[133] (36)

[133] "Where I'm from (*lit. Back in my land*) they're made round like tortillas and scored with a fingernail, so they can be cut into four pieces, and put out to fry. Here they make them in a mold. My stepmother taught me to beat the choclate with a whisk, and we made it the way each person in the family liked it […]. The trick with chocolate is to make it foamy by beating it to just the right consistency. If it isn't foamy, it isn't any good. You have to really beat it with an old-time beater for it to froth, because if it's just going to be like muddy water it's not worthy drinking. I don't make chocolate now, because I get too tired. But I do buy it. The Morelia's is the

"Morelia" and "La Abuela" are both brands of store-bought Mexican chocolate. Obviously their quality cannot compare to making fresh chocolate from scratch. What's more, chocolate in Oaxaca is deeply rooted in tradition and history, being a food passed down from the indigenous tradition; it was originally considered the drink of the gods. In Mexico City, however, Jesusa describes this special drink as stripped of this tradition. All of the steps of the process of making chocolate—from toasting, grinding, to the use of the *molinillo,* or traditional wooden whisk—disappear in the context of the city. There, one simply buys the ready-made store brand that, according to Jesusa, tastes like mud, and can never replace the real, natural, and culturally charged beverage from her youth. The difference in chocolate production represents, on a small scale, the lack of cultural abundance in the big city.

Water sources are another source of divergence between city and country life. Jesusa comments on swimming in the Pacific in Oaxaca as an experience that makes her feel purified and alive, while the waters of Mexico City are characterized by death. She recalls,

> Me bañaba como a las cinco de la mañana o las cinco de la tarde, no en el rayo del sol. Nada más esperábamos a que la ola nos mojara y nos quitara la suciedad. Se iba la ola y uno esperaba la siguiente. Ahora no sé cómo se bañan porque hace muchos años que no voy al mar; dicen que se meten nadando hasta adentro. Para esas gracias me voy a bañar aquí en una agua encharcada que *está muerta*. No, el chiste es bañarse en la playa donde viene la ola que ve uno que se levanta en blanco y lo tapa por entero, resistir el golpe del agua en el cuerpo, vestido o encuerado, para sentir el agua *viva*. […] Cuando se va la ola, la arena se ve *limpia* […]. Es muy *sabroso* el golpe del agua del mar.[134] (25, emphases added)

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most tolerable. La Abuela's has too much dirt in it. I've had it and it feels like grit in my mouth. But the way they made it before, that was really something."

[134] "I used to swim at five in the morning or at five in the evening, never in the heat of the day. We'd let the waves splash over us and wash the dirt off. A wave would go out and we'd wait for the next one. I don't know how people swim now, because it's been many years since I've been to the beach. They say people get in and swim out into the water. I'd rather bathe here in a puddle, where the water doesn't move [*lit. the water is dead*]

Jesusa's current life in 1960s Mexico is characterized by dead and motionless pools that she scornfully refers to as puddles (*charcos)*, while her childhood ocean experience (in prerevolutionary Mexico) is characterized by cleanliness and an experience that she used to savor. The above-cited quote provides a sensory understanding of the idealization of the countryside, where Jesusa's entire body was refreshed with a "white" wave, washing away all of the grime on her body. By contrast, in the unappetizing sensory experience of bathing in a city pool, the water does not wash over you, it is completely motionless, and the freedom that comes with experiencing the ocean waves does not exist here. Throughout the novel we find a before and an after, a then and a now, and almost always, the joys of the past rural environment trump the shortcomings of the present urban one. While *María Candelaria* and *Al filo del agua* emphasized the shortcomings of a poorly governed pre-revolutionary Mexico, Jesusa's description of her childhood during the years between 1900 and 1910 represents this era as a time when the world was purer; she was more connected to the natural world then. However, Jesusa's longing for the country does, to a certain extent, continue the nostalgic longing of a lost rural past that was present in Fernández's film. The difference lies in the fact that Jesusa, like María, has indigenous heritage, but is not portrayed as an idealized martyr nor as a long-suffering and virginal mother figure. Here we encounter an authentic feeling lower class woman, whose character is based heavily on a real person, whereas María Candelaria was a stereotype of the noble savage, a type that served to affirm the revolutionary government's agenda.

Jesusa had to work just as hard in the countryside as in the city; it was not a perfect place, but she did feel much more connected to the space through traditional food, the wealth of produce available to her, and the purity and freedom she found in the land, hills, and sea of

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[…]. Swimming at the beach is the best, where a wave comes and you see it rise up white and foamy and it covers you completely, you brace yourself for the rush of the water against your body, dressed or naked, to feel the *living* water. […] When the wave rolls in, the sand looks so *clean* […]. The power of the say is amazing [lit. *tasty, delicious*]" (emphases added).

Oaxaca. Although her father abandons her there for a time, and she has to stay with cruel women who beat her (even getting knifed once), she remembers it as a geographic space far superior to her present one in old age in the artificial and materialistic urban environment of the *Defe,* as she calls it.

Jesusa Comes of Age during her Errant Life in the Revolution

One might argue that Jesusa's entire existence could be considered nomadic, since even during her youth in Oaxaca, she was moving constantly to different towns, different homes, and different living situations. However, she does deem Oaxaca as a nostalgic space, representative of home, as demonstrated through her constant references to it as *mi tierra*. The moment when she follows her father to fight in the revolution, therefore, marks the beginning of a long and difficult journey living an increasingly nomadic existence amidst the violence and senselessness of civil war. At the same time, she still seems to prefer life as a *soldadera* roaming the countryside to her current existence of sameness and isolation in the city. At one moment she even calls her days in the revolution "bendita" (101), [135] or blessed, since the experience helped her to develop into an adult. The beauty of the revolution is not what it did on a larger scale (overturned Díaz's dictatorship) but rather what it meant to Jesusa personally and even on a more physical and hedonistic level.

[135] Niamh Thornton's article "(Trans)gendered Lines in Conflict: Jesusa in Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío"* offers persuasive insights about Jesusa's life as a *soldadera* and her conflicting ideas about gender identity. She says that Jesusa's experience of personal growth and self-actualization as a result of fighting in the the revolution subvert the tradition of the revolutionary novel in Mexico. She claims that Azuela's *Los de abajo* and Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* are completely opposite to Jesusa's optimism about the war: "To have a character describe war as beautiful is at best controversial and at worst damning. In the context of the *novelas de la Revolución,* war is described as messy, bloody, chaotic and horrific. Characters are dehumanized by the experience and left scarred for life. […] With this literary precedent, Jesusa's conviction that her experiences of war actually gave her confidence and new found freedoms prove the uniqueness of this text within the canon of the *novelas de la Revolución.*" (98). Indeed, in her appraisal of the delicious food and the freedom of life in the countryside as I will describe in this section, one almost wouldn't believe that she was a part of the bloodiest war in Mexico's history. A staggering 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 people are estimated to have died as a result of the revolution, a fact which makes it seem incredible that Jesusa enjoyed it so much. I believe this speaks in part to her frank approach to death, she sees it as a natural part of life, not as shocking or tragic whatsoever.

For instance, when Jesusa begins her journey in the revolution by following her father, Felipe, to fight as *carrancistas*[136] in Chilpancingo, Guerrero, the most valuable experience for her was that of the fresh fried chicken they made at the revolutionary camp, still warm from its recent butchering. Again, in Jesusa's opinion, the food of the countryside continues to be superior to that of the city:

> Nos subimos a agarrar gallinas. Estaban en sus estacas y las pelamos así calientes, recién matadas, luego las tatemamos, las lavamos bien, les sacamos las tripas y cortamos los pedazos. Allí nos encontramos el recaudo y las pusimos a remojar con ajo y vinagre y pimienta y sal, luego colocamos una cazuela grande con manteca en la lumbre, echamos las gallinas a que se doraran y el pellejo hasta chisporroteaba… No he vuelto a comer gallina tan sabrosa como esa vez. Era comida a la carrera y seguro me supo tan rica porque teníamos mucho hambre. Ahora, como ya no tengo hambre, nada me sabe bueno…[137] (67)

It makes sense that a person like Jesusa holds gustatory pleasure in such high regard. Her current situation in the city is one in which she is perpetually unable to enjoy the food: she explains that she is never hungry, and, as a result, nothing tastes good to her. Knowing that she has enjoyed such succulent food in her past, and that she can no longer enjoy such homemade treats in her current existence emphasizes her current situation of powerlessness, longing, and nostalgia. In the above quote, the silences seem to speak as loud as the words themselves: in two moments of her recounting of her memory the reader is faced with ambiguous ellipses, which cause one to wonder: what is Jesusa doing at that moment—

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[136] Carrancistas were a revolutionary faction, and the term refers to the soldiers who fought supporting Venustiano Carranza's middle-class Constitutionalist army, which fought against the armies of Pancho Villa and Emilano Zapata (Joseph and Buchenau 11).

[137] "We climbed up and got chickens right from their roosts, and plucked them while they were still warm after just being killed. Then we cleaned them real good, gutted them, and cut them up into pieces. We found spaces and marinated the chicken with garlic and vinegar and salt and pepper, then put it on the fire in a big pot with lard and let it brown until the skin was crispy…I haven't had such good chicken since. We ate on the run and I'm sure it tasted so good because we were so hungry. Nothing tastes good to me now, since I'm not hungry anymore."

thinking, crying, turning away from her interlocutor to finish a chore? It is left to the reader to decide, since the entire text of the novel is solely in the voice of Jesusa and those she decides to quote. We are never privy to any descriptions save those that she herself chooses to give. Claudette Williams hypothesizes that "Jesusa might have felt constrained by her consciousness of her interlocutor to express particular views and ideas and to stifle or conceal others" (218). Critic Kimberle López even goes to the extreme of concluding that Jesusa's many silences are a way of standing up to the "violent" colonialism of Poniatowska as representative of the ruling class. She believes that

> [Josefina Bórquez] uses silence as a means of resistance in interviews with the very person whose intention is to rescue her from the silence of oppression […]. In the testimonial process, the implicit coercion in the gathering of ethnographic data and the process of editing the oral interview amounts to an act of violence against the very discourse the author is striving to bring out of silence. (32-33)

Perhaps López's consideration of the redaction of the novel as an act of violence against Josefina is somewhat hyperbolic, but she does make an excellent point in the fact that the silences are indeed significant and merit further analysis. We must remember that in *Hasta no verte,* Poniatowska has created a work of fiction, and whatever silences appear in the text, although based on a real person's account, also hold creative and narrative importance. The reader has the difficult task of attempting to read into the ellipses, almost in the role of detective, to try to draw out from the pauses what it is that Jesusa is withholding. In the above excerpt, I prefer to believe that the ellipses represent a moment of pain, regret, or powerlessness for her: she longs for the wonders of her past life and laments the impotence of her present situation. Perhaps she was too proud to lament this openly in front of her privileged interlocutor.

During her time as a *soldadera* in the revolution, music becomes another significant factor in the array of reasons that rural life supersedes that of the city. This appears in Jesusa's description of the corridos: Jesusa recalls, "en la noche, se hacían los corridos. Yo los canté, el del Mariscal y Julián Blanco; canté […] muchos corridos que ahora los pasan en el radio pero nomás unos cachitos, no los pasan enteros, ni a la mitad siquiera. Cantan nomás lo que les conviene, no lo que debe ser"[138] (74). Corridos are a type of Mexican ballad that became very popular during the revolution; they often tell of the bravery and tragic death of the revolutionaries. To this day, the songs are well known in Mexican culture. Their use in Mexico dates back to colonial times. Their origins can even be traced back to the Spanish tradition of the *romancero.* As Chew Sánchez notes, corridos "recount the historical circumstances surrounding a protagonist whose history embodies the everyday experiences and values of the community" (3). Mexican corridos tend to be long and drawn out: "El corrido de Julián Blanco" that Jesusa mentions, for example, has a written version that goes on for a staggering 176 lines in Alexandrine verse (14 syllables per line) (Ortiz de Montellano 217). In her appraisal of the city's way of singing corridos, Jesusa notices what for her is a moral shortcoming, saying they are not singing them as they "should be" (*no lo que debe ser).* Instead of long and detailed, they are chopped into radio-friendly segments. Instead of being sung at night, around the campfire, perhaps after a long day of fighting, the corridos are played remotely through the radio. For Jesusa, this feels wrong. The problem with the corridos as they appear in the D.F represents a microcosm of what's wrong with urban life in general: the city corridos are produced as separate from communal living, from the natural environment, and only are available through the use of modern technology, instead of in a face-to-face encounter. What's more, the purpose of corridos is to celebrate valor and brave deeds. It's as if in the city, Jesusa feels there is not time or people simply do

[138] "at night they made up *corridos.* I sang them, the one about Mariscal and Julián Blanco. I sang […] so many of the *corridos* that they play on the radio now, but they don't play the whole thing, not even half, just little bits and pieces. They sing only the parts they want to, not the way they should."

not care enough to properly celebrate the heroes of the past, a task which, for Jesusa, requires time, patience, and the hard work necessary to sing the entire corrido from beginning to end.

Tasks that require extra time and steps, like the killing, butchering and preparation of a chicken, the arduous process of preparing traditional hot chocolate beginning with the cacao bean, or the long and drawn out style of the corridos with their flowery language, are meaningful in Jesusa's estimation, and connected to rural life. In contrast, urban life devalues human connection, food, and tradition, converting them into easily promotable products, like store-brand hot chocolate or radio-sized corridos.

Jesusa's appreciation for good homemade food with natural ingredients is a recurring theme throughout the novel. Another case of this is her brief enjoyment of freedom apart from her unforgivingly abusive husband, Pedro. Pedro leaves Jesusa in Chilpancingo, Guerrero while he fights in the revolution. It is there where she finally enjoys a certain level of freedom from his violence and exacting control over her. This happy moment is in large part due to the enjoyment of delicious homemade food from the land. An old lonely widower who lives on a nearby farm offers Jesusa and her friends the best beans of her life: "nos tenía una olla de frijoles como no he vuelto a tomar otros iguales. Cocinados con pura leche en lugar de agua, ¡se imagina qué frijoles serían!"[139] (88). In addition, Jesusa enjoys the natural beauty of the countryside and the wealth of guava fruit available there to her and her friends: "por allá el campo es muy bonito, un campo verde; los guayabales tupidos de guayaba. Yo vareaba las guayabas y caían macicitas. Era un tiempo de aguas y nosotros andábamos entre los árboles que tenían hojas bien brillosas"[140] (88). Her description is full of abundance and natural beauty, nostalgic for a lost green space.

[139] "he had a pot of beans for us like I haven't tasted since. They were cooked with milk instead of water, so you can imagine what they tasted like!"
[140] "it was so pretty there, the green countryside; the guava trees full of fruit. I'd knock them down with a stick and tons of them fell. It was the rainy season and we'd walk through the trees with their shiny leaves."

Although the revolution is a relatively positive experience for her, living in camp, traveling around, eating fresh fried chicken, Jesusa still longs to return to her homeland. At one moment, when her father Felipe is angry with her and hits her, she rebuts: "para eso me trajiste de mi tierra para golpiarme… ¿Por qué no me dejaste allá donde estaba? Ahorita mismo quiero que me entregues a mi hermano vivo y me regreses a mi tierra"[141] (79). When Pedro dies in battle, she wastes no time in abandoning the troops and heading home for Tehuantepec. She is given her widow's pension, which is enough to get her back home, but tragedy befalls her in the train station of Mexico City. Robbed of all her money and belongings, she ends up trapped in Mexico City. Here begins a period of increasing powerlessness, exacerbated by the difficult urban environment in which she finds herself.

Middle and Late Adulthood in *el Defe*:

From the moment Jesusa sets foot in Mexico City, she is struck with a sense of isolation, abandonment, and even loss, which is a great contrast to her life in Oaxaca and as a *soldadera,* living in the countryside and enjoying the benefits of the land and rural life. When she is robbed in the train station upon arrival in the D.F., she likens her feeling of abandonment to a mother turkey who has lost her baby turkeys, looking around in anguish, with no purpose: "me quedé sola, abandonada aquí en México, rascándome con mis uñas. Parecía una guajolota a la que se le perdieron los guajolotitos, nomás estirando el pescuezo y volteando para dos lados. 'Cor… cor… cor…'"[142] (133). From this moment on, she would live a difficult life of solitude and need in the city environment. Jesusa goes from lonely and isolated, to hardened and resigned over the course of her time in Mexico City, demonstrating a loss the carefree attitude of her younger self, with its vigor and connection to the natural world.

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[141] "you dragged me away from home [*lit. my land*] to beat me…Why didn't you leave me where I was I want you to give my brother back to me alive and to send me home [*lit. my land*]."

[142] "I stayed there alone, abandoned, in Mexico City, scratching myself with my nails. I looked like a turkey that's lost her chicks, stretching out her neck and looking all around, crying, 'Gobble…gobble…gobble…'"

Without a cent to her name, 17 year-old Jesusa roams the streets of the city, hungry and jobless since she is unable to read the signs that announce job openings. This alienation persists to the present day of her older self as narrator, proven by her observation to her interlocutor: "los de aquí siempre me han tratado como extraña"[143] (60). This is possibly the lowest point of her story; it somehow even seems sadder than her beatings and sufferings as a child and in the revolution. Jesusa describes the alienating experience of walking around in the city: "[p]ensaba en el pasado, en todos los huizaches que atravesé, en lo que iba a ser de mí, en que la vida me tenía apergollada, bien apergollada, y me devanaba los sesos sin dar en el clavo. […] Así iba yo paso a paso, piense y piense puras tristezas"[144] **(**138). This is the moment when she seems to harden herself to the world, commenting on the fact that no one helped her or gave her food to eat during these months of alienation, hunger and isolation: "No, si no hay bondad, nadie tiene bondad, no se crea que hay bondad, no"[145] (142). She also realizes she can't let herself be vulnerable any longer: "Desde que me vine a México se me quitó lo tarugo. Dije: 'Bueno, relativamente mientras más se deja uno, más la arruinan'"[146] (154). She even claims that in illness she locks her door rather than have people take advantage of her: "Cuando uno es joven y sufre, se da, se vuelve muy mansita. Ahora cuando me enfermo, atranco la puerta de mi casa"[147] (197). Thus, life in the urban environment of Mexico City is directly related to a loss of innocence, happiness, and openness in Jesusa's character, demonstrating the potency of city life on her psyche.

There is a key moment at the end of Chapter 13 which exemplifies the monotony and isolation of living in Mexico City for Jesusa: she suddenly begins to tell of her life there in

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[143] "here in the city they treat me like a foreigner"
[144] "I'd think about the past, all the huisaches I'd crossed, what was going to become of me, about how life had me hanging by a thread, and I kept racking my brain but I just didn't know what to do next. […] one step at a time, thinking about sad things."
[145] "No, there's no such thing as kindness, nobody's considerate, don't you believe it."
[146] "I lost my foolishness when I got to the city. I said to myself: 'The more you let yourself be used, the more they ruin you.'"
[147] "When you're young and suffering, it happens, you get meek. Now when I get sick, I lock the door to my house."

the form of a rapid fast forward to the present, highlighting the sameness of her difficult effort to subsist in the harsh urban environment. This excerpt contrasts starkly with other sections on her childhood in Oaxaca and life in the country as a *soldadera*, where she took her time and gave several details in recounting the past. The format of the excerpt seems to suggest that life in the D.F. isn't worth pondering as much; it's better to summarize, since it lacks the meaningfulness of Jesusa's experiences of country life, whether as an errant revolutionary or as a child in Oaxaca:

> Y desde entonces todo fueron fábricas y fábricas y talleres y changarros y piqueras y pulquerías y cantinas y salones de baile y más fábricas y talleres y lavaderos y señoras fregonas y tortillas duras y dale y dale con la bebedera del pulque, tequila y hojas en la madrugada para las crudas. Y amigas y amigos que no servían para nada, y perros que me dejaban sola por andar siguiendo a sus perras. Y hombres peores que perros del mal y policías ladrones y pelados abusivos. Y yo siempre sola, y el muchacho que recogí de chiquito y que se fue y me dejó más sola y me saludas a nunca vuelvas y no es por ahí María voltéate y yo como lazarina, encerrada en mi cazuela, y en la calle cada vez menos brava y menos peleonera porque me hice vieja y ya no se me calienta la sangre y se me acabaron las fuerzas y se me cayó el pelo y nomás me quedaron unas clavijas por dientes, rascándome con mis uñas, pero ya ni uñas tengo de tantos uñeros que me salieron en la lavadera. Y aquí estoy ya nomás esperando a que den las cinco de la mañana porque ni siquiera duermo y nomás se me revela todo lo que pasé desde chiquilla cuando anduve de guacha y sin guarache, haciéndole a la revolución como jugando a la gallina ciega, recibiendo puros trancazos, cada vez más desmadejada en esta chingadera de vida.[148] (148)

[148] "And from then on, it was factories and factories and workshops and bars and taverns where they sold pulque and more taverns and cantinas and dance halls and more factories and workshops an laundries and annoying señoras and hard tortillas and more drinking; pulque, tequila, and spiked coffee in the morning for hangovers. And girlfriends and boyfriends who were worthless, and dogs that left me to follow their bitches, and men who

The monkey-like little girl who ate fresh oysters and guava, ran freely through the hills, climbing trees, swimming in the purifying waves of the Pacific somehow has become an embittered old woman, who is alone, forgotten, and stuck. The last 40 years or so of her life in Mexico City are full of hard work, abandonment, and aging in isolation. Jesusa has no family, no friends to speak of, but instead only an ever-increasing feeling of helplessness.

For a brief period, it might appear that Jesusa actually enjoys city life, almost contradicting her embittered feelings of a wasted and isolated existence in Mexico City. Indeed, Cynthia Steele observes that Jesusa is able to find pleasure in the city through her enjoyment of food, spiritual revelations and conversation (171). Jesusa reminisces about happier times in the city when she would stay out till the wee hours of the morning dancing with friends and having wild drinking competitions. However, one instance in which she befriends a *gringo* undoes all of these amusements of the urban lifestyle and she is again struck with a sense of longing for her homeland.[149] The gringo takes Jesusa and some other women to go eat corn in Xochimilco. Again food plays an important role in Jesusa's construction of meaning because upon eating the corn, she is struck with nostalgia and a profound longing for her homeland. Eating the corn causes Jesusa to reminisce at length about the mornings back in Oaxaca:

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were worse than dogs, and thieving policemen and abusive bums. I was always alone, and the boy that I took in when he was little left me and I was even more alone, say goodbye and never come back, and it isn't that way, María, turn around, and me, imprisoned in my pots and pans, but I'm not much of a fighter anymore or as mean on the streets now, because I got old and now my blood doesn't boil and I've lost my strength and my hair fell out and I just have pegs for teeth, I'd scratch myself, but I don't have any fingernails left after so many got ingrown and came out in the laundry sink. And here I am now, just waiting for it to strike five in the morning because I can't sleep and it all comes back to me, everything I've been through since I was little and I walked around barefoot, fighting in the Revolution like playing blindman's buff, being beaten, more unwrapped each time in this fucked-up life."

[149] Deboraw Shaw's compelling analysis of the novel, "Jesusa Palancares as Individual Subject," bucks against the critical trend of trying to analyze Jesusa as a subaltern other, claiming that critics are too quick to try to classify her, since her character in many ways resists classification due to her many incoherencies and inconsistencies. She cites a need to "de-essentialize marginalized groups to avoid seeing them as an homogeneous other, a conceptualization which has theorists relying on stereotypes while ignoring difference" (193). I do not wish to overlook any contradictions in Jesusa's character for the sake of coherence in argument. However, I do believe that the city vs. countryside dichotomy is a clear theme throughout the novel, despite moments when Jesusa seems to argue to the contrary. This confusion that this novel provokes, as Jorgensen has noted, is one of its most enticing aspects to critic

> A mí lo que más me gustaba de la paseada era salir a tomar el fresco hasta que amaneciera, ver el campito, la milpita que despunta; me acordiaba de mi tierra verde y azul. Siempre me gustó mañanear, aunque se me llenaran los pies de barro, porque en las madrugadas, con la neblina se moja la tierra y también se moja uno; queda uno embadurnado de pura agüita del cerro. Yo me limpiaba las lagañas con las hojitas tiernas de los árboles. Ése era mi despertar. Me sabía todos los matorrales de mi tierra y sólo regresaba a mi casa cuando ya estaba jajando de hambre. Un día de éstos me voy a ir sola para sentir la lluvia de nuevo, la de la montaña, no la de aquí que ni amaciza la tierra, nomás la ensucia.[150] (172)

For Jesusa, life in Mexico City can never be as special as the natural pleasures of Tehuantepec; even the rain was different there. While the mountain rain made the earth firmer and more solid (*la amaciza)*, the rain of the city only makes everything dirtier. For Jesusa, one of the few elements of the natural world that one is able to find in the city—the rain—is incapable of bringing any enjoyment, and instead just makes it dirty.

One may wonder why Jesusa does not simply abandon the city, if it's so full of isolation and suffering for her. She does, but with disappointing results: overhearing some of the soldiers speak of their experience fighting in the Cristero Wars, she becomes overcome with a need for the countryside:

> Habían recorrido muchos rieles: conocían mucha tierra, hartas tierras. Platicaban de la nieve y de la orilla del mar, de la reventazón de los ríos, de los jagüeyes y de las chachalacas, de los magueyales y de las nopaleras, del zoquite y de los tabachines de

[150] "What I liked about the rides was being out in the fresh air until dawn, to see the countryside, the corn sprouting in the fields; it reminded me of the green and blue of my homeland. I always liked to get up early even though my feet got muddy, because at dawn the ground gets wet from the fog and so do you; you get soaked with water from the hills. I wiped the sleep from my eyes with tender leaves from the trees. That was how I woke up. I knew all the brambly terrain of my homeland and returned to the house only when I was starving. One of these days I'm going back all by myself to feel the rain again, the rain form the mountain, it's not like the rain here in the city that doesn't even soak the ground, it just makes it dirty."

> la tierra templada. Platicaban, y yo sentía que los ojos se me habían llenado de polvo, de todo el polvo del Defe, y que ya era hora de ganar pal campo.[151] (206)

It's as if her soldier friends' stories about the vast, rich, and diverse Mexican countryside snap Jesusa out of her monotonous mindset brought on by her city lifestyle. She says her eyes were filled with all of the dust of the D.F., and this imagery makes it seem as if she is trying to express the fact that she is living a death on Earth in Mexico City. Interestingly, Poniatowska inverts the dichotomy that Yáñez creates in *Al filo del agua:* while in Jalisco, the rural village was a place of dusty and death-like landscape, in *Hasta no verte,* the city takes on this role as a place of death, monotony, and stagnation.

Inspired by her friends' tales of the countryside, Jesusa, then, returns to othe errant soldadera lifestayle, fighting for the federal troops during the Cristiada (wars between Church and State of 1926-1929), and returns home to Oaxaca with the soldiers for a brief time. However, her return renders her even more powerless, because she encounters hate and, as a result, placelessness. Her return home is nothing like her (somewhat) fond memories of childhood. She encounters greed and rejection from the little remaining family that she has living in Tehuantepec. Her uncle, she finds out, has come into the family inheritance, and wants nothing to do with Jesusa, since she might demand her right to the money as well. In telling this story, Jesusa characteristically goes into a long digression and reminisces about how the family had been divided by greed. Her mother had been so caring toward the ailing grandfather (Felipe's father) that he decided to leave everything to her. Furious, Felipe's siblings drove him and his family from their hometown, so that he and his wife could not receive this inheritance. At the time when they were fleeing their town, Jesusa's mother had a new baby, who died as a result of the long journey away from home. Jesusa blames the death

[151] "[They] had covered a lot of track; they'd seen a lot of places, a lot of the country. They talked about the snow and the seashore, about the flooding of the rivers, about the lagoons and the chachalaca birds and the maguey groves and fields of prickly pears, about the jacaranda trees and the royal poincianas in the temperate zone. As they talked, it felt like my eyes had filled with dust, all the dust of Mexico City, and that it was time to head for the countryside."

of her baby brother on the egoism of her family. Since her beloved mother, her favorite brother Emiliano, her father and husband are all dead, Oaxaca ceases to have its meaning of home and belonging as it was for her as a child. All Jesusa finds there is rejection from her odious uncle. Although it maintains its natural abundance, she never mentions this, since it appears that without her loved ones, she feels unconnected to the land. With nothing left for her in Oaxaca, Jesusa returns to Mexico City, feeling more powerless than ever about her situation. Thus, through her disappointing return trip home, the countryside and all of the carefree feelings of belonging that accompany that space, disappear as a possibility for Jesusa.

Jean Franco comments about Jesusa's placelessness, the fact that she finds no acceptance in her current society:

> What [Jesusa's] life reveals is the radical loneliness of the subaltern classes, a loneliness that should not be confused with individualism. The loneliness is related to her being a stranger on earth, on the fact that she belongs to the *vieja raza* that modernization has destroyed. […] [She forms] a stray consciousness whose solidarity is with the dead, and which leads to her repudiation both of the present and of Poniatowska herself. (181)

Materialism, one of the main symptoms of modernity, is certainly a sore spot for Jesusa regarding urban life. Because of this societal woe, she sees her current city as akin to a swamp or garbage heap, a place that reeks continually as a result of a godless obsession with things. It is a space that is rotten, beyond repair: "¡Y es que el mundo entero se ha materializado! En el Defe no hay cañerías ni vertederos. Todo huele, todo se pudre, puras calles jediondas, puras mujeres jediondas. Todo es un mismo pantano. Y esto es porque el

mundo material ha desoído al Señor"[152] (303). The obsession with money, a symptom of modernity, brings estrangement from the natural world. Seedy store-bought hot chocolate, refrigerated fish (instead of fresh from the ocean), the absence of natural beauty, are all the sad byproducts of this modern woe, and the great problem of life in Mexico City for Jesusa. Her acute observations about the pitfalls of modern materialism make her aptly named, Jesusa, which in Spanish is the feminine version of Jesus, the Christ. It's as if Jesusa were a preaching as a modern-day prophet, seeing through her society's unfruitful attempts at happiness, which in reality are an obsession with material wealth that only results in a more sordid existence.

Jesusa's odd and unequal relationship with her interlocutor also emphasizes her story's theme of alienation in Mexico City. Jesusa gripes at length to her interlocutor about the problems of modern existence in the city, and this person simply does not seem to understand her. For instance, when Jesusa complains about how the problem of materialism runs rampant in the city, the fact that she is completely alone, or that she has lost all hope for the goodness of humanity, her interlocutor seems to fail to understand. Jesusa, in several moments of frustration, chastises her silent interlocutor's naiveté on these topics: "¡No, hombre, no sea pendeja, no se haga ilusiones! Véame a mí, a mí es a la que me da lástima cuando sale usted con su batea de babas de que la gente es buena y de que la quieren a uno"[153] (313). Here, as in other moments of the text, the reader is given hints as to the identity of the silent interlocutor. She is evidently female, judging from Jesusa's feminine version of the pejorative term *pendeja,* and believes that people are generally good and loving. This fact leads one to believe that this woman is both innocent and privileged. Since there is never any clarification as to the interlocutor's identity within the text, it feels as if

[152] "The whole world has become materialistic! In this city they don't have sewers or dumps. Everything smells, everything rots, there are only stinking streets, the world has turned a deaf ear to the Lord."
[153] "Don't be an asshole [*pendeja*], you're kidding yourself! Look at me! It makes me feel bad when you spout off that slobber about people being good and loving you."

Jesusa were chastising the reader herself for holding on to any vain assumptions about the goodness of humanity.[154] This use of the second person throughout the novel and the way in which the reader herself feels as if she were being addressed (and chastised) directly, exemplifies John Beverley's description of the effect of the testimonio genre on the reader: "When we are addressed this way, directly, as it were, even by someone who we would normally disregard, we are placed under an obligation to respond; we may act or not on that obligation, we may resent or welcome it, but we cannot ignore it. Something is asked of us by testimonio" (1). It indeed feels like Jesusa is asking something of us as readers: we may feel impelled by her story to question the conveniences of modernity, or the way in which urbanization marginalizes subaltern subjects like her, or, in the context of Mexican society, the reader may question whether the revolution caused any benefit whatsoever. It seems that it didn't, since Mexico City, the country's lauded capital, center of supposed progress and forward thinking, is a repulsive place for Jesusa, who represents exactly the kind of person the revolution was intended to emancipate.

In the final line of the novel, Jesusa abruptly and assertively orders her interlocutor away: "Ahora ya no chingue. Váyase. Déjeme dormir"[155] (315). This final phrase of the novel impels us to act, *váyase,* and stop diverting ourselves with Jesusa's story of a life of hard-knocks. María Inés Martínez observes that this use of the formal second person *usted* with the interlocutor demonstrates through the use of oral language the enormous gap that exists between the privileged and subaltern of Mexican society: "La novela se cierra demostrando una profunda distancia entre el letrado y el iletrado, que la voz de Jesusa recalca con la forma

[154] In a variety of interviews, speeches and essays, Elena Poniatowska has commented at length on the way in which what she calls her "testimonial novel" came to be written. Lucille Kerr's "Gestures of Authorship: Lying to Tell the Truth in Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío"* discusses how Poniatowska in her later discussions of the novel functions as a "gestor," or inventor, and in so doing creates a new meaning for the identity of both Josefina Bórquez and herself, which is incarnated in the invented character of Jesusa Palancares. For Kerr, it is difficult to approach this text with the idea of the "death of the author," since Poniatowska has commented at length about the work and how it was written (392). For purposes of this chapter, however, I think the author does need to "die" a little, to explore the effect that Jesusa's use of the second person has on the incognizant reader.

[155] "Now fuck off! Go away and let me sleep."

imperativa de esta frase final"[156] (120). As literate readers of this piece of fiction, it seems that the novel is a call to stop turning subjects like Jesusa, and the subaltern, into an object of our fantasy, as it seems that this silent interlocutor has been doing all along. At the same time, it is also necessary for privileged readers to learn of stories of subaltern subjects like Jesusa. At the end of her poem, "Poesía no eres tú," Rosario Castellanos writes the following about what it accomplishes to give voice to "the other:"

El otro: mediador, juez, equilibrio
entre opuestos, testigo,
nudo en el que se anuda lo que se había roto.

El otro, la mudez que pide voz
al que tiene la voz
y reclama el oído del que escucha.

El otro. Con el otro
la humanidad, el diálogo, la poesía, comienzan.[157]

The narratee is the one with the voice: she is the one who has the power to publish Jesusa's story and dispense it to a literate audience. Despite Jesusa's annoyances with her interviewer, we benefit from this interaction between narrator and narratee: the novel makes the reader more human, more understanding, by exposing him/her to a story, mentality, and way of life that he/she otherwise may never encounter.

Living as a *vieja* in the D.F.: How the City Robs Jesusa of her Agency

[156] "The novel closes demonstrating a profound distance between the literate and the illiterate, that Jesusa's voice highlights with the imperative form of this final sentence" (translation is mine).
[157] "The other: mediator, judge, balance / between opposites, witness, / knot that binds up all that had broken. // The other, muteness begging a voice / from the speaker / claiming an ear from the listener. // The other. With the other / humanity, dialogue, poetry begin" (Translated by Maureen Ahern).

The fact that Jesusa is old and ill, that her family is all dead, that she continues to live in poverty, that she is completely isolated from any real friends or people that care for her—all of these things—render her powerless in her current situation. For these reasons, she lives a life of stagnancy in Mexico City. She admits she has no options in her current space, feeling as if she were simply a piece of garbage: "ya sé que no hay remedio para mí. No tengo ni un cachito bueno, estoy vieja, vieja, vieja, todo es vejez, pura vejez. Si Jesucristo se quejó porque no se pudo aguantar, cuantimás yo que no soy más que basura"[158] (307). This statement solidifies her lack of vitality in her urban environment. Even now, she still longs for the countryside, but her desire has matured into something more morbid: in the final pages of the novel, she expresses a desire to be eaten by buzzards in the countryside, rather than spend her dying moments in the city, where she supposes her neighbors will make a spectacle of her. An average person might think that having one's corpse eaten bit by bit by a vulture a most revolting idea, but Jesusa actually desires this end, as if she wanted her dead body to continue to live a nomadic existence in the countryside by flying around within the innards of a vulture:

> Cuando ya no pueda más, agarro mi morral y como sé que en el camposanto no hay pozo para mí, me voy al cerro a que me coman los zopilotes. Me caen en gracia desde chiquilla. Hablo mucho de ellos porque me gustan. Son animales que a lo mejor mañana, pasado, voy a ser su *pasto* y quiero que ellos me coman en el campo. Ya parece que los estoy viendo volar en ruedas cada vez más bajito, cada vez más bajito. […] Luego que me rodearan los zopilotes y ya; que viniera a preguntar por mí y yo allá tan contenta volando en las tripas de los zopilotes.[159] (emphasis added) (314)

[158] "I know I can't change anything. There isn't even a little piece of me left that's any good. I'm old, old, old, it's old age, just old age. If Jesus complained because He couldn't take any more, imagine how I feel. I'm only garbage."

[159] "When I can't go on anymore, I'll grab my bag and I'll go out to the hill so the vultures can eat me, since I know there isn't a hole in the ground for me in the cemetery. I've liked those birds ever since I was a little thing. That's why I talk about them so much. Tomorrow or the next day I could be their food, and I want to be eaten in

Interestingly, in this excerpt Jesusa expresses a desire for her corpse to become *pasto,* or pasture, the produce of the earth itself. What seems to tie together Jesusa's many ponderings on city life as opposed to that of the countryside and her homeland is that she desires a connection to nature, to become *pasto,* more than any human relation in the city. Her one hope is to die underneath a tree, and, as the novel closes, her desire to return to the countryside never becomes reality. This uncertain ending leaves Jesusa apparently fated to live in a state of eternal longing:

> Tengo muchas ganas de irme a morir por allá donde anduve de errante. ¡Que Dios se acuerde de mí porque yo quisiera quedarme debajo de un árbol por allá lejos […]. [Y]o no me quiero morir en el Defe sino por allí en una ladera, en una barranca como mi papá que murió en el campo abierto debajo de un árbol.[160] (316)

Given that Jesusa has been "stuck" in the D.F. for the past 30 yeears, the possibility that her dream of dying in the countryside under a tree seems highly unlikely. As a reader, we realize that little can be done to satisfy the final wishes of this woman. What's more, this desire to at least die in the countryside represents an extremely powerless moment for Jesusa: since she can never return to her homeland and the purity of childhood freedom and connection to earth, her only comfort is to ruminate about her death, hoping desperately to connect to the earth once again, even if only in the form of a corpse.

Up to this point I have been attempting to establish Jesusa's contrasting views of rural and urban life, and her powerlessness and stagnancy in her current living situation in the city. The second half of this chapter will broaden this analysis to include the sociohistorical moment of the novel's publication in 1969 and examine its potency for the reader of its day.

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the fields. It seems like they're already circling lower each time around. […] the vultures can surround me and that'll be the end of it. You'll come ask for me and I'd be over there, happy, flying in the vultures' bellies."

[160] "I really want to die over where I used to wander around. Please let God remember me, because I'd like to stay under a tree way over there! […] I don't want to die in the city, but out there, in a ravine like my father, who died in an open field under a tree."

Part Two: The Despair of Tlatelolco and Jesusa's Incarnation of the Revolution's Failures

October 2, 1968 marks the day of the tragic Tlatelolco Massacre in Mexico City. No one knows how many died exactly because the government covered it up, trucking away the bodies to be burned in an undisclosed location (Krauze 720). It didn't even appear in the papers accurately. That day, president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970) ordered military and police to open fire on a group of at least 5,000 students peacefully protesting in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in the Tlatelolco neighborhood of Mexico City. This event represents the ultimate suffocation of free speech and human rights by the PRI government. The activism and idealism of the 1960s came screeching to a halt as a result of Tlatelolco and the Mexican people reached a general apex of disillusionment with the revolutionary government. There was now no denying it: the PRI operated more like a repressive dictatorship than a government founded on the ideals of land reform, equality, democracy, national unity and the separation of church and state. Jean Franco explains that Tlatelolco was "a watershed dividing period when the nation was considered to be united in moving toward a common goal of greater equality and social justice from a 'postnational' period when the apparent homogeneity of the state was shown to be mere appearance" (176). Since it was followed by a transition that went from unity to division, idealism to pessimism, a nation to a fragmented community of different individuals, this event created a tipping point of building tensions and ever-increasing disillusionment.

Jesusa's story and the way she tells it in the novel couldn't appear at a more appropriate time in Mexican history, since it speaks on a deeper to level to a people that felt bitterly betrayed by their government. Her trials, her sadness, her complete isolation and anonymity in her social sphere solidify the fact that the revolution had failed the very people it meant to liberate: the lower classes. How exactly does this novel demonstrate the failures of

the revolution and the PRI government? The following section seeks to answer this question, and in doing so I aim to demonstrate that this sense of powerlessness rooted in her estrangement from the countryside that characterizes Jesusa's identity is an indirect result of a history of growing frustration in Mexican society with the PRI government. Indeed, Jesusa's life struggles in many ways parallel the history of struggle of Mexicans as a whole in the 20th century. Jill Kuhnheim describes *Hasta no verte* as a sort of national bildungsroman: "Jesusa's adolescence corresponds to the revolutionary years, and in her twenties she moves to the D.F.—echoing post-revolutionary urbanization […]. Her maturation coincides with the growth of Mexico" (165). Thus, Jesusa's character indeed has a certain level of nationwide relevance, especially in a disillusioned post-Tlatelolco society.

First Failed Ideal: Education for All

The first ideal of the revolutionary government that appears as a failure in *Hasta no verte* is the idea of education for all people. After the revolution, many presidents of the revolutionary government prioritized education, especially Alvaro Obregón (1920-1924), Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928), and Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). José Vasconcelos took over as rector of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) under President Obregón in 1920-1923, and began a new age in the promotion of Mexican education. Krauze explains, "As if they were soldiers or missionaries on a modern crusade, hundreds of teachers were sent into the remotest corners of the country" (393). Daniel Cosío Villegas wrote that "there was really a feeling in the breast and in the heart of every Mexican that educational action was as urgent and as Christian as satisfying thirst or staving off hunger" (Quoted in Krauze 394). Emilio Fernández himself represented teachers on a level with saints in his 1948 film, *Río escondido,* which proudly tells the story of a martyred schoolteacher who singlehandedly saves an ignorant village from corruption. The teacher, Rosaura Salazar, teaches the children about the courage of Benito Juárez, her eyes glistening with tears of joy.

After the revolution, teachers were indeed meant to be the heralds of modernization, stability, and national pride.

President Calles had been a schoolteacher himself in Sonora in the late 19th century, and as governor of Sonora (1917-1919) reformed public education, opening many schools and establishing an in-depth support system for teachers (Krauze 401). As president, Calles put the controversial Article 130 from the constitution of 1917 into action, closing all church schools, expelling foreign priests, and ultimately causing such enmity with the church that the peasant population rose up against the government in the Cristero Wars of 1926-1929. Lázaro Cárdenas's push to educate Mexicans was not as anticlerical as Calles's, mandating that, "From here on, there should be no antireligious propaganda in the schools. We must concentrate all our attention exclusively on the great cause of social reform" (Quoted in Krauze 460). However, as noted in the experiences of Rosario Castellanos in Chapter Three, his efforts at implementing educational reform were not as effective as his legacy might make them appear to be.

All of these revolutionary presidents' bold efforts at reforming the educational system prove to be complete failures when one considers them in the light of Jesusa's experiences and current situation. She is completely uneducated, and both the Church's and the state's efforts to educate her fail. When she arrives in Mexico City, she admits to being blinded by ignorance, remarking, "yo era muy cegada, muy cegada…"[161] (142). As a young girl, her father forces her to get a Catholic education since he distrusts Protestantism, which he equates with the secular education system. The Church school, according to Jesusa, is completely ineffective in large part because she never learned to read or write under the nuns' instruction: "Por culpa del maldito protestantismo no me mandaron a la escuela sino con las monjas que no me enseñaron nunca a escribir ni a leer. Nomás a rezar. […] Lo que yo quería

[161] "I was clueless, really clueless…"

era que me enseñaran a leer pero no se preocuparon. Ahora ¿ya para qué? Ya voy para el camposanto"[162] (52).

What's more, secular schooling also fails Jesusa. Later on in the novel some representatives of the state again attempt to give her their idea of an education. This occurs while Jesusa is working as a hospital assistant to impoverished women who have venereal disease in Mexico City: some teachers from the Ministry of Education come to give classes to her and her co-workers. Jesusa describes their pedagogical inadequacy: "Yo esperé que nos enseñaran letras o números o algo, pero solo nos empezaron a preguntar que cuántos árboles tenía la Alameda y cómo se llamaban los pellejos que los patos tienen entre las patas, puras jaladas y nada de lectura"[163] (201). She concludes, "Si así les enseña ahora la Secretaría de Educación, pues es la escuela de la babosada"[164] (201). She quits her job in the hospital and never studies again: "Y me quedé de burra pero muy contenta. Más vale rebuznar que hacerle al monje"[165] (202). Interestingly, by including these two examples of failed education, Jesusa describes the inadequacies of not only the Catholic system but also the State educational approaches. Both of these systems failed her particularly because she never learned to read or write. The ability to read and write means the ability to access knowledge and cultivate critical thinking skills. It appears that in Jesusa's experience, both the Church and the State's efforts at education leave her in her low place in society by keeping her ignorant to the written word. Her example, then, undermines what the revolutionary government had upheld as one of its great accomplishments. Jesusa, if taken as representative of the masses, has not been educated, but simply took meaningless classes under the guise of education, with no substantive results.

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[162] "[B]ecause of the damn Protestants they sent me to the nun's school, where they never taught me anything. Just to pray. […] I wanted them to teach me to read, but that wasn't what they were interested in. Now? What for? I have one foot in the grave."
[163] "I expected them to teach us letters or numbers or something, but they just asked us things like how many trees were in Alameda Park and what do you call the skin between a duck's toes, useless crap, and no reading."
[164] "If that's how the Department of Education teaches, then it's just a school for baboons."
[165] "And I stayed dumb as a mule but very content. I'd rather bray like a donkey than pretend to be a scholar."

Second Failed Ideal: A Triumphant End to Porfirio Díaz's Despotism

Francisco Madero, the first president who took over after Porfirio Díaz's ouster in 1911, had the well-known campaign slogan of "¡Sufragio efectivo, no reelección!"[166] that continues to be used to this day in Mexican political discourse as a founding ideal. The revolution's central motive was to put an end to Díaz's endless self-reelections, which lasted almost forty years, and his farce of a democratic government. However, especially after Cárdenas's presidency, the ideal of a purely democratic system began to fade. Historians Joseph and Buchenau explain that under President Miguel Alemán (1946-1952), the PRI party eliminated primary elections, which was "one of the ways that candidates at the regional and local levels could contest power. Henceforth running for office meant building a local power base and arriving at an understanding with a political patron at the next level above, rather than engaging in an electoral contest" (147). Jesusa is certainly not blind to what she considers a complete failure of the democratic system: for her, the government is full of corruption, banditry and *cabrones* (a word roughly translated to mean "bastards"). In a series of asides about the government's failures, Jesusa scathingly criticizes the revolutionary government's shortcomings:

> "¡Ah, los bandidos, ahora sí son ricos porque se roban los bienes de la nación!"[167] (135)
>
> "Pero Carranza se quedó con mi dinero, maldecido. A él sí lo mantuvo y sigue manteniendo a los revolucionarios que están en la gloria cobrando todavía los haberes de mi marido, de mi hermano, de mi padre y de todos los demás que murieron por su culpa, por tanto disparate que hicieron mandándolos todos al otro al otro mundo sin deberla ni temerla"[168] (136)

[166] "Effective suffrage, no reelection!"
[167] "The generals nowadays are thieves; they're rich because they steal the country's treasures!"
[168] "But Carranza kept my money, the bastard. The revolutionaries who had gone on to Heaven were supporting him, their pay continued going to him; my husband's, my brother's, my father's, and the pay of all the rest who

> "A mi esos revolucionarios me caen como patada en los…bueno como si yo tuviera güevos. Son puros bandidos, ladrones, de camino real, amparados por la ley […] ¡Puro revolucionario cabrón!"[169] (137)

Instead of being scathing about Díaz and how everything seemed to be terrible under his dictatorship (the viewpoint in Fernández's film and Yáñez's novel), Jesusa actually prefers some policies of the despotic dictator of the past. Although Jesusa refers to Díaz as a *perro asesino* at one point, she also seems to value his no-mercy ruling style, claiming that there was more order under his despotic regime:

> Esa costumbre de robar la agarraron en la revolución porque antes el perro asesino de Porfirio Díaz no admitía robadero. Al que robaba, lo mataban, al que mataba, lo mataban, al que destrozaba una muchacha, lo mataban, al desertor, lo mataban. Así es de que todo era puro matar. Él no andaba con que: "Dame tantos miles de pesos y vete a hacer otra, ¡ándale!" No. Había un poco de más temor. Se pensaba: "Si cometo una falta me matan, y mejor no".[170] (134)

If the revolutionary government aimed to prove Díaz's methods of ruling the country to have been insufficient, this governing ideology certainly didn't work on Jesusa. She describes current-day Mexico as full of corruption and crime: "Hasta la fecha son muy rateros los gendarmes. Son más sinvergüenzas que los rateros porque ni siquiera exponen su vida y no hay quien se los lleve presos, ni modo que unos a otros. La gente, con tal de que no se la

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died because of him, because of the mess he made that sent so many people to the next world for no rhyme o reason."

[169] "Those revolutionaries make me feel like I've been kicked in the balls…I mean, if I had balls. They're just bandits, highway robbers who're protected by the law. […]Those revolutionary bastards!"

[170] "People began to steal during the Revolution. Before that, Porfirio Díaz wouldn't allow that to go on. If someone stole, they were killed; if they murdered, they were killed; if they raped a girl, they were killed; if they deserted, they were killed. Díaz wasn't one to say: 'Give me so many thousand pesos and get on with your business!' No. There was respect and a lot of fear. People thought: 'If I commit a crime they'll kill me, so I better not."

lleven, le da a los policías todo lo que piden. ¡Bandidos!"[171] (214). Thus, Jesusa does not necessarily see current Mexican society bettered by the ouster of Díaz.

Third Failed ideal: Social and Gender Equality

The revolution was meant to be a battle for the rights of the people, especially those of the lower classes. Under Díaz's dictatorship (1876-1911), although the economy thrived, social inequality increased, as he favored foreign investment, big business, and promoted the feudalistic style of the haciendas in the countryside, which often had slave-like working conditions. In 1876, when Díaz began his rule of Mexico, there were 5700 haciendas, a number that grew to 8000 by 1910 (Krauze 219). There was hope for the revolutionary government to make real steps toward justice for the poor, which reached its apex under President Cárdenas, but quickly the populace began to realize that the PRI was more talk than action, especially beginning with the corrupt government of Miguel Alemán. Jesusa's story parallels this downfall of the ideal of equality: she receives no benefit from the societal justice supposedly implemented as a result of the revolution. In fact, she expresses nothing but contempt for Mexican society, past and present, which for her is riddled with injustices, saying they are more ruined than ever:

> Zapata no tiraba a ser presidente como todos los demás. Él lo que quería era que fuéramos libres pero nunca seremos libres, eso lo alego yo, porque estaremos esclavizados toda la vida. ¿Más claro lo quiere ver? Todo el que viene nos muerde, nos deja mancos, chimuelos, cojos y con nuestros pedazos hace su casa. Y yo no voy de acuerdo con eso, sobre todo ahora que estamos más arruinados que antes.[172] (78)

[171] "To this day the police officers are very thieving. They're more shameless than the thieves because they don't even risk their lives and there's no one that takes them prisoner; there's no way they would do that to each other. People, as long as they don't arrest them, give the police whatever they ask for. Those bandits!" (Translation is mine, since this section does not appear in Heikkinen's translation).

[172] "Zapata wasn't interested in being president like all the rest of them. He just wanted us to be free, but we never will be, that's what I think, because we'll be slaves all our lives. You want me to make it clearer? Everyone who comes takes a bite out of us, leaves us maimed, toothless, crippled, and they make their homes out of the pieces of us that they bite off. And I don't go along with that, especially now that we're worse off than ever before."

Her question in the above quote, "¿Más claro lo quiere ver?" is directed at her interlocutor, whom we can assume has asked Jesusa to explain herself more clearly. This interlocutor apparently doesn't automatically agree with Jesusa's assertion that Mexicans live in a state of life-long enslavement. This again seems to demonstrate the interlocutor's position of privilege: those of the upper class often cling to the illusion that they live in a free and just society, while the subaltern, Jesusa, holds a different perspective. Again Jesusa's narrative exposes the privileged class's naïveté about the harsh reality of Mexican society.

For Jesusa, one of the most senseless aspects of the revolution was that it increased poverty and hunger among those already suffering. She states that since the revolution was a battle between the poorest of society, it was a complete waste of their time:

> Yo creo que fue una guerra mal entendida porque eso de que se mataran unos con otros, padres contra hijos, hermanos contra hermanos; carrancistas, villistas, zapatistas, pues eran puras tarugadas porque éramos los mismos pelados y muertos de hambre. Pero esas son cosas que, como dicen, por sabidas se callan.[173] (94)

Also when, following the revolution, she returns with Pedro to his hometown, he is surprised to find out that the soldiers are still after him—he was supposed to be exonerated as a result of the revolution. When Pedro expresses his surprise, a friend responds, "La revolución no ha cambiado nada. Nomás estamos más muertos de hambre[174] (126).

One of the major ways in which inequality characterizes Jesusa's experiences is through the unbridled sexism she describes as characteristic of Mexican society. Many post-revolutionary leaders prioritized women's rights as a part of the advancement of Mexican society. Jean Franco cites the need to promote women's emancipation as part of establishing the revolutionary government's authority ahead of that of the Catholic Church (xix). She

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[173] "I think it was a misunderstood war because people simply killed each other, fathers against sons, brother against brother; Carrancistas, Villistas, Zapatistas, we were all the same ragged people, starving to death. But that's something that, as they say, you keep to yourself."
[174] "The Revolution hasn't changed anything. We're still dying of hunger."

explains that leaders beginning with President Venustiano Carranza, the first president after the revolution, tried to advocate for women's right to vote, and under Cárdenas, the first official women's organization was founded, *Frente Único Pro Derechos de la Mujer* (Franco xx). What's more, women participated as teachers in literacy movements, and gained the right to vote in 1953 (Franco xx). Despite the apparent advances and the governmental support for the advancement of women's rights in Mexican society, Jesusa again has experienced a completely different reality. For her, Mexico is a place where women have no place, and would be considered "blessed" if they could be a man, or even dress like one, as she often does. She explains:

> Para todas las mujeres sería mejor ser hombre, seguro, porque es más divertido, es uno más libre y nadie se burla de uno. En cambio de mujer, a ninguna edad la pueden respetar, porque si es muchacha se la vacilan y si es vieja la chotean, sirve de risión porque ya no sopla. En cambio, el hombre vestido de hombre va y viene: se va y no viene y como es hombre ni quien le pare el alto. ¡Mil veces mejor ser hombre que mujer! Aunque yo hice todo lo que quise de joven, sé que todo es mejor en el hombre que en la mujer. ¡Bendita la mujer que quiere ser hombre![175] (186)

Many critics argue that Jesusa has internalized the hegemonic ideology of her society. For example, Steele argues that "la formación de Bórquez [the real life model for Jesusa] había engendrado una internalización del autoritarismo, la violencia, el racismo y el rechazo de lo femenino"[176] (162). Williams concurs in terms of Jesusa's negative interpretation of the indigenous race, suggesting that Jesusa rejects her Indian ancestry since she "expresses the

[175] "It'd be better for all women to be men, for sure, because it's more fun, you're freer, and no one makes fun of you. A woman isn't respected at any age, because if you're a girl they tease you and if you're old they mock you, everything sags and you're the butt of jokes. On the other hand, a man dressed as a man comes and goes; there's no one to stop him. It's a thousand times better to be a man than a woman! Even though I did everything I wanted when I was young, I know that everything is better for a man than for a woman. God bless the woman who wants to be a man!"

[176] "the formation of Bórquez had engendered in her an internalization of authoritarianism, violence, racism, and the rejection of her feminine side" (translation is mine).

self-contempt of non-white peoples who have internalized the ideology of White aesthetic superiority" (218). While at other moments in the novel this seems to be the case, the above-cited quote from Jesusa expresses something different: she is perhaps more critically aware of her surroundings than she lets on. Jesusa desires freedom, and she cynically and resignedly seems to realize that one of the ways of accessing the freedom she so desires, is by being a male, the position of power in a patriarchal society. It doesn't seem that she believes men to be superior, only more privileged. For Jesusa, women who dress like men are able to attain more relevance and respect in a society where they are constantly criticized and ridiculed.

It seems relevant to end this thought on the inequalities of 1960s Mexico embodied in and expressed by Jesusa with a provocative thought from Cynthia Steele, who comments on the novel's subversion of the picaresque genre and its implications. Steele notes that while the novel includes many elements of the picaresque, what it doesn't have is the rags to riches aspect of the picaresque tradition, and, in this way, highlights the shortcomings of the revolution's ideal of social equality:

> If the classic picaresque hero's odyssey takes him "horizontally through space and vertically through society," Palancares' class movement is only slightly vertical (from servant to independent vendor and washer woman), emphasizing the radical absence of opportunities for social mobility in post-revolutionary Mexico. ("Gender…" 37)

Jesusa's comments and experiences demonstrate the rampant inequalities of Mexico—from sexism to the widening gap between rich and poor—thus undermining the hegemony of the PRI regime. What Steele adds here is that even the novel's format, through the manipulation of the traditional genre of the picaresque, demonstrates disillusionment with the government.

Fourth Failed Ideal: National Unity

As discussed in Chapter One on *María Candelaria,* an arbitrary sense of national unity, called Mexicanness, was one of the PRI government's biggest priorities, especially as leaders' policies distanced themselves from true land reform or justice for the poor. Critic Jill Kuhnheim explains that Poniatowska highlights the connection between Jesusa's life and the nation's history, "creating an alternative version and vision of the nation which emphasizes contention and irreconcilable difference rather than an essential uniformity" (166). Jesusa absolutely refuses to consider herself a Mexican, frequently referring to herself as an outsider.

Although Jesusa has lived in the D.F. for upwards of 40 years, she continues to feel like an outsider there because she is treated like "garbage" as a result of her low position in society. She confesses she can never identify with the idea of being Mexican, and this fact highlights a failure of the PRI government's attempts at creating national unity for all. She explains,

> Al fin de cuentas, yo no tengo patria. Soy como los húngaros: de ninguna parte. No me siento mexicana ni reconozco a los mexicanos. Aquí no existe más que pura conveniencia y puro interés. Si yo tuviera dinero y bienes, sería mexicana, pero como soy peor que la basura, pues no soy nada. Soy basura a la que el perro le echa una miada y sigue adelante.[177] (218)

What is odd about this excerpt is that in almost the same breath, Jesusa describes her deep connection to the land of Tehuantepec, Mexico. She claims it as her own, using the possessive *mi tierra,* as she so often does:

> Cuando quedé sola, mi intención era volver a mi tierra. Hubiera vivido mejor en Salina Cruz o en Tehuantepec y habría visto a mi madrastra, pero pasaron los años y nunca pude juntar para el transporte. Ahora menos. Ya estoy más vieja y menos

[177] "After all, I really have no country. I'm like the Hungarians, the gypsies: not from anywhere. I don't feel Mexican nor do I identify with the Mexicans. If I had money and property, I'd be Mexican, but since I'm worse than garbage, I'm nothing. I'm trash that the dog pees on and then walks away from."

> puedo, pero ésa era toda mi ilusión, porque yo he estado en bastantes partes y donde más he sufrido es aquí en la capital.[178] (218)

Thus, she does feel deeply connected to the land itself, but not at all a part of Mexico, seeing the nation as a social construction in which she has no place. It's almost as if she rejected the conquest and longs for a pre-Columbian world, where there were no European powers that suppressed the Indian peoples of Mexico. As Caufield observes, Jesusa "rejects her Mexicanness because Mexico has rejected her" (289). Her poverty and alienation as a result of city life have made it impossible to value her nation.

Jesusa's rejection of the label "Mexican" represents a great unraveling of the government's ideals, since she, a poor mestiza woman from the rural periphery, is exactly the symbol they were trying to promote as representative of national unity, especially in films like *María Candelaria* and in Rivera's murals. In his book, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth,* John Beverley discusses the problem of the subaltern voice that doesn't fit into the framework of the nation-state's project to promote unity:

> The equation between the nation-state and the modern rests on the fact that the problem of the state is to incorporate its population into its own modernity. The population—or sectors of the population—"lags behind" modernity […]. What the concept of ungovernability expresses is the incommensurability between the 'radical heterogeneity' of the subaltern and the reason of state. Ungovernability—the quality of resistance or persistence that is expressed in testimonial voice—is the space of resentment, recalcitrance, disobedience, marginality, insurgency. But ungovernability also designates the failure of formal politics and of the nation—that is, of hegemony. […] [T]he subject that speaks in testimonio […] "interrupts" the "modern" narrative

[178] "When I was left alone I intended to go back to my homeland. I'd have had a better life in Salina Cruz or in Tehuantepec and I would have seen my stepmother, but the years went by and I was never able to get the money together for bus fare. There's even less chance of that now. I'm older and can't do as much, but that was always my dream. I've been a lot of places, but I've suffered more here in the capital than anywhere else."

> of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the formation and consolidation of the nation-state, and the teleological passage through the different stages of capitalism. (18)

Jesusa most certainly does all of the things that Beverley describes here: she interrupts modernity with her disgust for the urban sphere, she lags behind modernity with her longing for doing things the old way, the way they did back in the country, and, most importantly, she represents the failure of the government through her powerlessness, isolation, and poverty in what was supposed to be an increasingly unified Mexico.

Fifth Failed Ideal: Land Reform

In 1911, when President Madero wasn't making enough changes to decrease social inequalities in Mexico, Emiliano Zapata, the only revolutionary hero held in high esteem by Jesusa, created the famous "Plan de Ayala" which called for the restitution of lands to communities and the division of the many large estates and haciendas of Mexico (Krauze 352). Land Reform, one of the central goals of the revolutionary ideology, is the biggest failure exemplified through the story of Jesusa. Like Castellanos's *Oficio de tinieblas,* which depicts the failure of Cárdenas's government to emancipate the Tzotzil people, Poniatowska's character also takes aim at this president who supposedly supported the repartition of land more than any other. In chapter 25 of *Hasta no verte,* Jesusa explains how she fell through the cracks during the creation of the *ejido* system (of which Cárdenas was the most powerful proponent) in Mexico City, and remains without any property to call her own to the present day. She criticizes the *ejidos* since they actually don't belong to the people:

> Los del gobierno les dijeron que tomaran el terreno que quisieran; que era regalado. Fueron a medirles tantos metros a cada quien y les hicieron sus escrituras. Como quiera que sea, Cárdenas les dio dado el terreno. Nomás que no tienen derecho de vender. Así se estén muriendo de hambre, no pueden vender. La tierra sigue siendo

> del gobierno. Mientras ellos viven, tienen su casa, pero si se mueren y no hay quien represente a la familia, la pierden. El gobierno es el dueño.[179] (268)

Like Castellanos's *Oficio de tinieblas,* Poniatowska's work also exposes the shortcomings of Cárdenas's term as president: the government owns the land; people are still not free to have their own plot of land with their name on it. As a result, *Hasta no verte* portrays Mexico City as a place of stagnancy, powerlessness, and social inequality bordering on slavery for the subaltern groups. The reader is faced with these truths through Jesusa's story, even if this unreliable narrator does "lie in order to tell the truth," as Kerr observes. The revolution changed nothing, the poor are poorer, and even more stuck, since, like Jesusa, many have lost some or all of their families to the revolution. Many have abandoned their rural homelands, full of abundance and life, for the oppressive existence of the urban centers. Jesusa's voice exposes the lies, the façades, and the supposed successes of the revolutionary government. Poniatowska uses her character, her bluntness, and her story to do what Beverley says about testimonio: "this voice […] comes to us from the place of an other, an other that is repressed or occluded by our own norms of cultural and class authority and identity. It has the force of what Freud called the uncanny (that sensation of uncanniness is part of the aesthetic effect of testimonio)" (2). The novel makes the reader starkly aware of his/her privilege by demonstrating that the supposed successes of modernity have completely bypassed certain sectors of society.

Conclusion

While *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* presents Jesusa as a woman stuck in the monotony and alienation of urban life, it also offers some level of societal hope for change in the extratextual encounter between silent interlocutor/reader and narrator. Jesusa's story is dire, but it also compels the reader to recognize the harsh realities of Mexican society, in a similar

[179] "Cárdenas did give them the land. They just don't have the right to sell it. So if they're starving to death, they can't sell, because the land still belongs to the government. As long as they're alive the house is theirs, but if they die, or there isn't anyone to represent the family, they lose it. The government owns it."

way that the massacre of Tlatelolco created a tipping point in the Mexican people's understanding of their government: there was a general feeling that hope for reform had disappeared, Mexican society had reached a new low point, and, especially, that the revolution had been a waste, a disappointment. However, in acknowledging Jesusa's life, the bourgeois reader perhaps may feel inspired to do something. She addresses us—Elena Poniatowska, Mexicans, all of the privileged literate people reading the text—directly, defying us to ignore her, defying us to pretend that we live in a just world with the knowledge that the lowest of society live lives of suffering and stagnation. Perhaps Poniatowska's dire depiction of Jesusa and her representation of the government's failed ideals sends the message that if only we could realize some of the failed ideals in Mexican society—equality, literacy, democracy—then Jesusa and those like her could go back to where their heart is, their homeland, and have a place of their own, land not owned by the government, but in their own name. Perhaps what Jesusa's story suggests is that when true land reform happens in Mexico, then all the people there, including the Jesusas, will truly feel Mexican, because they will return to having a deeper connection to their *tierra*.

Conclusion

At this point, it seems appropriate to consider the elaboration of environment and its relation to identity as it has been examined throughout this thesis, and take into consideration each work studied and its relation to the final one, Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío.* In so doing, one may notice a progression of ideas, from idealization and the acceptance hegemony of the revolutionary government, to utter disillusionment with it in *Hasta no verte*. This also has important implications for the understanding of environment and its relation to cultural, national, and personal identities in Mexico.

María Candelaria (1943)

Let us begin with *María Candelaria,* Emilio Fernández's tragic film from 1943, which is set in Xochimilco, the picturesque river village on the outskirts of Mexico City. Both *María Candelaria* and *Hasta no verte* represent the rural countryside as a place of natural abundance, where the protagonists seem to have a deeper connection to the land and the natural world. Both works have mostly tragic outcomes: *María Candelaria* closes with the stoning and death of María Candelaria by angry townspeople, while *Hasta* ends with Jesusa in a state of continual isolation, awaiting her death in the dirty environment of Mexico City's slums, never returning to her beloved homeland of Oaxaca. In both situations, the female protagonists cannot return to or enjoy the beauty of the natural world because of the corruption of society. The central difference, however, between these two works is the historical moment in which they take place. *María Candelaria* is set in 1909, just before the revolution. As a result, despite the martyrous end of María's character, there is yet hope for change through the implementation of a new government. Thus, Fernández's film remains loyal to the PRI's goals for creation of a sense of national unity among the viewers of the film. In contrast, Jesusa's childhood before the revolution represents a time of connection to the land and abundance of natural life, while her post revolution life in Mexico City is full of

hopelessness and stagnancy. Thus, her story inverts Fernández's idealization of post-revolutionary Mexico, by presenting the past as superior to the PRI regime's control of the moment of narration.

Another key difference between these two works is the representation of the female protagonists: both María Candelaria and Jesusa come from the poorest sectors of Mexican society, but while María is presented as god-like, with the film's imagery that juxtaposes her with the Virgin of Guadalupe, presenting her character as idealized, and as a symbol of Mexican nationalism, Jesusa's character plays with this symbolism. Jesusa is also presented as god-like, yet in an ironic way, almost poking fun at Fernández's trope of the submissive and pure Mexican woman. Jesusa's name itself, the female version of Jesus, equates her with the deity. However, unlike María, who seems as pure and perfect as a goddess, Jesusa is strikingly realistic, presented with warts and all, her character having been based on extensive interviews with a real person. She even uses the authentic and uncouth language of the lower class Mexican society. *Hasta no verte* takes Fernández's traditional model of the Mexican woman and turns it into something more authentic and realistic, but at the same time equally tragic, since Jesusa's life ends with her wishing to die in complete solitude, and concluding that there is absolutely nothing good about her society. As she says in the penultimate paragraph of the novel, "Yo no creo que la gente sea buena, la mera verdad, no."[180] (316). Thus there is an attitude of cynicism and pragmatism behind Jesusa's representation which is not present in the portrayal of María Candelaria's character.

***Al filo del agua* (1947)**

Like *María Candelaria*, Agustín Yáñez's 1947 novel, *Al filo del agua,* takes place before the revolution and places its hope in the reforms that would supposedly be put into play by the revolutionary government. The novel takes a different approach to legitimizing

[180] "I don't think people are good. Truthfully, I don't."

the PRI than Fernández's film, by presenting the Jaliscan land as an arid and lifeless place before the revolution, with latent passions that seep through the repressive environment in the form of flowers, music, and religious fervor. Unlike *María Candelaria* and *Hasta no verte*, *Al filo del agua* de-emphasizes class differences and the problem of inequality, and exaggerates the issue of the Church's repressive power over all townspeople, regardless of social class or race. The novel, though innovative stylistically, is politically submissive, since it seems to stand by the PRI agenda of pushing national unity and the successes of revolution through demonstrating a need to allow "freedom" to embrace one's passion and not be limited by the Church's dogma.

Hasta no verte is the antithesis of Yáñez's novel: a central theme of Poniatowska's novel is the difference in social class between the narrator and the narratee as well as the implied bourgeois reader, while Yáñez downplays the social inequalities inherent to Mexican society. *Hasta* criticizes every single ideal of the revolutionary government through the story of Jesusa, while Yáñez, like Fernández, expresses hope for a changed Mexican society through the supposedly more just government that would take over after the revolution. *Hasta* is written completely in the vernacular of the lower social class of Mexican society, while Yáñez's text is full of flowery descriptions of an almost aristocratic society in rural Jalisco, and is completely devoid of indigenous characters. *Hasta* indirectly calls for a change in agrarian reform through the placeless existence of Jesusa, while Yáñez barely mentions the plight of the poor in his text. While Yáñez's novel promotes loyalty to the Alemán government by never criticizing current society, Poniatowksa's compels the reader to act for social justice, or at least to ponder why a person like Jesusa is so forgotten by both government and society.

***Oficio de tinieblas* (1963)**

After examining these two works of the 1940s, this thesis jumps ahead to 1963, with Rosario Castellanos's novel, *Oficio de tinieblas.* At the time of the novel's publication, the idealism of the Cuban Revolution and the 1960s *La Onda* movement began to permeate the society of Mexican intellectuals. Ideologically, *Oficio de tinieblas* shares the most in common with *Hasta,* perhaps in part because Poniatowska admired Castellanos so much. As Poniatowska mentioned in one speech, "Yo amo profundamente a Rosario Castellanos."[181] In their own ways, both *Oficio de tinieblas* and *Hasta no verte* criticize the harsh inequalities of Mexican society and highlight the subaltern status of women in a society that tries to force them into the mold of the *abnegada mujercita mexicana*. Jesusa, like many of the female characters of *Oficio,* rejects the idea of motherhood ("Yo nunca he deseado hijos, ¿para qué?"[182] (312)). Regarding the child she takes in, Perico, Jesusa is quick to negate the idealistic notion, apparently suggested by her interlocutor, that she could be considered his mother, seeing motherhood as solely a biological status:

> El dicho ése de que es más madre la que cría que la que nace es enteramente una mentira. Eso de que se apersonen de los hijos ajenos no está bien. Yo sí se lo tomo a mal a la gente que se vanaglorea con lo que Dios no le ha concedido. Que lo criaron a uno, pues muchas gracias, muy agradecido, pero que no tomen el lugar que no les corresponde.[183] (282)

Jesusa takes in several children and even animals, and cares for them, but she cynically expects nothing in return, not even emotional attachment. She does her duty as a caregiver almost coldly, cautious not to allow herself to become too attached. Unlike the

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[181] "I have a profound love for Rosario Castellanos" (translation is mine).
[182] "I've never desired children of my own, what for?" (Translation is mine, since this sentence does not appear in Heikkenen's translation).
[183] "The saying that the one who raises a child is more its mother than the one who bears it is a complete lie. It's not right to take other people's children as your own. [I take offense to the people that pride themselves in a child that God hasn't given them. If you raised someone else's child, well thank you very much, but don't take credit for a position that is not yours]." (The translation within brackets is my own, since Heikkinen's version unfortunately eliminated that part of the text).

nanny Teresa, who put her heart and soul into caring for an ungrateful Idolina in *Oficio,* Jesusa cares for Perico, yet irreverently admits that he only lives with her so that he can take possession of all her things when she dies. Instead of opening herself up to loving a child, she has an emotional barrier built up around her, in large part due to the urban existence which has hardened her to relationships, since she lives in a place where no one cares for her, and her homeland is an increasingly distant and impossible memory, love becomes something that is hard to attain.

The women of Castellanos's novel seem to hope for societal change, while Jesusa resigns herself to a social position that she is convinced will never change. In *Oficio,* the female characters are so disturbed by their lack of power as second-class citizens that they murder innocent children (as Catalina did Domingo), take other mothers away from their child so that their baby dies (what the *patrona* Isabel did to Teresa, the indigenous nanny), and even aid and abet rapists who attack their countrywomen (as the unfeeling Mercedes did to the unsuspecting Marcela). Jesusa's account of social injustice is more matter-of-fact and completely dismisses any idealism whatsoever. A baby dies, she moves on. Someone fires her, who cares? School is inefficient, she'll just move on to the next job. She is resigned to her fate, accepting powerlessness as a natural part of her life. In *Oficio* the women are desperately trying to grasp some level of agency in an unequal society, seeming to cling to the hope that their audacious behavior could instill change. Conversely, Jesusa resignedly accepts her fate as a lower class female, and does what she needs to do to get by. In one moment of the novel she admits, "yo no soy de palo,"[184] but from the way she recounts the past, it seems like she is. Very little affects her emotionally: "Yo no sé lo que es la tristeza. Nunca he tenido tristeza. Me habla en chino porque yo no entiendo de tristeza"[185] (295). While Jesusa lives in this resigned mental state of learned helplessness, the women in *Oficio*

[184] "I'm not made of wood."
[185] "I don't know what sadness is. I've never been sad. You're speaking in Chinese to me."

maintain a glimmer of hope in overcoming their situation. The only thing Jesusa desires in her old age is to die out in the countryside and have the vultures eat her body. Her mentality resembles that of Mexican society of the moment: the disillusionment at the atrocities of Tlatelolco represents a death to the ideals of *La Onda.* The revolution now decidedly offers no hope to those of the lower class, the forgotten ones of Mexican society.

In this thesis, I have tried to examine how identity relates to environment in the creation of identity in post-revolutionary Mexico, and the way in which each of the four works grapples with the repressive and almost dictatorial government that appeared after the fighting of 1910-1920 finally ended. Environment's role in the creation of identity is by no means a new concept, authors have written on the natural world and its influence on those in it for hundreds of years. However, I hope this study adds to the understanding of an important time in Mexican society, and how these four creators used the landscape, both urban and rural, to grapple with their identity as a people. Their government restricted them, but each work manages to express the primacy of land and people's interconnectedness to demonstrate important societal trends.

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