LA GENTE BIEN: LITERARY AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE MEXICAN ARISTOCRACY FROM THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

By

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation studies novelistic, mass-media representations as well as reproductive models of a particular, yet elusive sector of the Mexican elite frequently labeled as "*gente bien*" ("well-to-do") a cultural construct in which perceptions of race and heritage confer distinction to a network of families of European descent. In my study, I claim that the literary and film production after the 1950's decidedly questions the traditional Mexican national discourse that populist administrations (from the Institutional Revolutionary Party, "el PRI"), imposed for most of the Twentieth Century. In developing my arguments for a new reading of some major works in Mexican fiction and film, this dissertation explains why it is essential to understand some of the literary responses to the Mexican post-revolutionary discourse by resorting to notions of cultural capital and class distinction in Mexican narratives, anchoring these concepts to the postcolonial perspective of social elites, the performativity of their rituals, and their strategies of social and biological reproduction.

Since the late-1950's a significant number of Mexican novelists and filmmakers have sought to capture the consequences of the Revolution on individuals and communities in works that depict Mexican society, especially the reality of a recognizable aristocracy. My dissertation examines the ways in which these authors seek to represent and comment on the decline of the landowning aristocracy *vis-à-vis* the upward social mobility of the industrial bourgeoisie, the newly-formed ruling elite, the aspiring middle classes; and most recently, media celebrities.

The introduction hosts a theoretical framework that traces the genealogy of the Mexican aristocracy and maps out its presence in society. Chapter one concentrates on the early narrative of Carlos Fuentes and discusses the literary representations of the Mexican aristocrats and the process of imitation and social intermingling in the 1950s. Here, I compare several models of social reproduction that aristocrats use to preserve their status by making their social distinction a commodity.

Chapter two studies the cinematographic portrayal of the Mexican elites in the second half of the Golden Age of Mexican Film (1950-1958). This chapter offers a close analysis of audiovisual status symbols that distinguish aristocratic characters. Since it was during this time that films sought to legitimize a post-revolutionary national image, here I question the historical and sociological referents presented as Mexican national culture and the artistic roles of Mexican film directors stars.

Chapter three focuses on narrative works by Elena Poniatowska, Guadalupe Loaeza, and José Emilio Pacheco, all of whom published novels that depict social mobility and criticize the official discourse of the 1950's in Mexico City. These novels, published in the last two decades of the Twentieth Century, present the manner by which aristocratic distinction is instilled and reproduced during childhood.

Chapter four analyzes contemporary representations of the Mexican elite in television and social media. The first part concentrates on a collection of newspaper articles and vignettes that present comedic portrayals of wealthy women. This dissertation concludes with a critique to current trends in Mexican media, which has appropriated the aristocratic discourse and has extended it to characterize actors, elected officials, and other public personalities.

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In loving memory of my greataunts Soledad González Garrido and Leonor González de Rábago.

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La Gente Bien: Literary and Cultural Representations of the Mexican Aristocracy from the Mid-Twentieth Century to the Present

Introduction

Mexican novelists and thinkers have produced some of the most influential literary texts during the complex Latin American Twentieth Century. Although the corpus of critical theory which has discussed these works is vast, scholars tend to favor the cultural representations of groups, which were and are traditionally marginalized. A quick look at the curriculum of American universities which offer programs on Spanish or Hispanic Studies shows that a majority of courses that deal with Mexican literature tend to focus on women writers, indigenous testimonials, as well as border and queer studies. As a graduate student who took several of these seminars, I noticed that the counterpart of the misrepresented minorities, that is, the Mexican elite is often overlooked and oversimplified. In many scholarly debates and conversations, the tendency is to categorize anyone with wealth, influence or political power with the label of dominant class. However, a closer look of the cultural production allows us to see that the elite is not a homogeneous social class by any means. Even inside what is called the upper crust, there are levels of 'class', conflicts of interest; but most of all, there are rules of exclusion and strategies of admission. As this study intends to discuss, in Mexican society being wealthy does not necessarily translate into being classy, being powerful doesn't guarantee admission into exclusive parties.

In the eyes of traditional academia, however, it could be argued that a study of the Mexican elite would invariably grant importance to a group, which has brought oppression and pain throughout the centuries. It could even be said that paying any attention to the representations of the traditional oligarchy would in consequence imply a glamorization of that social class. Indeed, the object of study of this dissertation is a group that has historically

benefited from the exploitation of the dispossessed. The consequences of that oppression are patent in today's society and are precisely the area of interest of many scholars. My project does not seek to praise or glorify the elite. This study departs from the premise that this social class -- supposed to have been overcome by the defeat of the Second Empire-- (1867) and the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) is well-represented in contemporary society and culture. This dissertation seeks to analyze the factors that determine class distinction and its rules of inclusion and exclusion as depicted in contemporary Mexican literature and visual arts. By studying different media, this dissertation hopes to defy simplistic categorizations of the Mexican elite and explore the strategies of reconstruction of the so-called *gente bien*, which has become a model for the new, global, neoliberal Mexican society.

I. Why study the elite?

Currently and during the past two decades, Mexican literary criticism has been majorly nourished and delimited by postmodernity, cultural studies and post-colonial theories and models of analysis and scholarly reflection. The advent of Latin American studies has therefore ignited a tradition of constant revision and re-thinking of the definitions with which US academia defines, catalogues, and differentiates the creations, representations, and symbolic productions of literature, art, and popular culture. Consequently, cultural studies as well as other sociological disciplines like historiography allow us to have new readings of texts and other cultural expressions that had traditionally focused their aim at the study of Latin American subalternity, poverty, and marginality. However, and almost paradoxically, the same models of analysis that have made it possible to study subalternity in the cultural production of the Hispanic speaking societies of the Americas become equally advantageous in the study of the other end of the social spectrum; that is, a particularly reduced group within the upper class whose complex and

strategic modes of reproduction are narrated and represented in the literary and cultural production since the1950s. The behavior of this peculiar social class has been a peripheral theme in the works of consecrated novelists such as Carlos Fuentes, Elena Poniatowska as well as other non-canonical authors like José Emilio Pacheco and the controversial Guadalupe Loaeza. From novels, to film, to television, and nowadays social media; there seems to be an atypical inquisitiveness about the Mexican elite, the so called *gente bien*, a social label which not only confers prestige and high distinction, but which is also the result of Mexico's long history of oppression and economic inequality. Through the descriptions and narratives dealing with this social group in literary works and other cultural products, it is possible to start a debate about their origins and reproduction practices. Consequently, by looking into these inner dynamics, the question of how they are related to power and how they establish social borders of inclusion and exclusion reveals another layer in the complex issue of Mexican identity, and in Nitzchean terms, their will to power.

In today's world, the issue of social class has become more and more slippery. Before the introduction and development of postcolonial, gender, and performance theories in the late 1980s, social class was generally defined in economic strata or by Marxist terminology. The big problem with these classifications is that they tend to divide society in clear-cut categories without taking into consideration factors such as the individual's ethnicity, family history, but most especially, their (in)ability to perform acts associated with status. In other words, such terms 'upper class', 'bourgeois', or 'proletarian' result challenging, especially in a changing world in which the post-industrial production and consumerism have had a profound effect in the neoliberal economies of Mexico and the rest of Latin America. The current body of critical theories allows us to study the phenomenon of '*gente bien*' by observing the ways in which they

are represented in the cultural and literary production, and by carefully reading the signs and meanings that articulate their distinction in society.

Therefore, a study of the Mexican elite through their representations in contemporary literature would, in principle, allow us to better understand the Mexican experience, some of its conflicts, contradictions, and the similarly difficult issue of Western modernity in a society submerged in racial, gender, and economic inequality. Such a study would also shed light into the question of 'being distinguished' by reading elite markers not as essential characteristics of an ontological category, but rather, as a series of carefully performed acts which carry and produce new meanings. The ways in which Mexican culture sees and represents these meanings is patent in the cultural production; and becomes therefore, a corpus of analysis of its signifiers such as appearances, behaviors, speech acts, family connections, and other intangible markers. It is no longer just a question of 'being' *gente bien*, but rather, a question of what are the 'meanings' evoked by the *gente bien* label.

The corpus of novels, films, comic books, and TV sketches analyzed in this study were selected for two reasons. On the one hand, they illustrate the theme of class distinction in various degrees and different historical contexts, thus revealing the authors' knowledge (or assumptions), of the Mexican social class system. On the other hand, these texts present a heterogeneous sample of authors, genres, and media, which suggests that the preoccupation of distinction permeates across literary genres and cultural styles. Even though the genesis of '*gente bien*' can be traced back to the times of the Spanish Conquest, this study extracts cultural texts produced during the second half of the Twentieth Century and the new millennium. This corpus includes canonical texts of the Latin American Boom, novels of the post-Boom, films of the golden era, a comedy Television program of the 2000s, and a series of comic books and tweets.

II. Context

This study of the Mexican elite and its *gente bien* subgroup follows two main routes of investigation. The first situates the *gente bien* families during and after the Mexican Revolution. This historical event disarticulated and later reshaped Mexican social, economic, and political structures; but most notably, it served as the ideological foundation for the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party).[1] In the international background, Mexican social structures were also rearticulated with the emergence of the United States as the indisputable hegemonic force after the 1950s. This influence culminated with the signing of International Trade Agreements between Mexico, the US, and Canada. The privatization of services formerly provided by the state as well as the globalization of the 1990s also restructured the distribution of wealth, and thus influenced social mobility. The second line of research of this dissertation uses literary and cultural analysis as tools to dissect the Mexican elite and map out the subgroups that conform it. By studying the narratives of elite literary characters, it becomes possible to delineate their modes of reproduction, as well as their strategies of negotiation and defense among other wealthy subgroups.

III. Literary predecessors

The theme of social distinction and class mobility appeared in nineteenth-century Mexican literature in José Francisco Fernández de Lizardi's novel *El Periquillo Sarniento* published in 1816. Although this novel does not mention the terms aristocracy or *gente bien*, it constantly refers to the class system of colonial society where *criollo*s, that is people of Spanish ancestry, enjoyed privilege. [2] The novel narrates the life of Pedro Sarmiento, alias Periquillo, a

[1] I will refer to this political party by its popularly known acronym 'el PRI'

[2] Criollos according to Benedict Anderson are the offspring of Spanish migrants whose American birth "consigned [them] to subordination —even though in terms of language, religion, ancestry, or manners he was largely indistinguishable from the Spain-born Spaniard" (*Imagined Communities* 58).

self-identified, wellborn *criollo* from Mexico City. Influenced by a pretentious mother, the protagonist follows a series of attempts to make fortune without working. This subject would be repeated in his second novel *Vida y hechos del Famoso Don Catrín de la Fachenda* (1820), which also depicts a society that privileges elitism, appearances, and class pride. Both works present a critique of the colonial order and hierarchies. What is remarkable here is that in telling the trials and tribulations of Periquillo and Don Catrín, Fernández de Lizardi also delineates distinct processes of upward and downward social mobility in a society undergoing profound changes from colonial rule to independence.

The social distinction phenomenon was by no means not exclusive to Mexican literature. During the nineteenth century and the early Twentieth Century, a slew of emblematic Latin American writers also dealt with the topic of *criollo* privilege in the face of social change. Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841), tells the story of a Cuban mulatto slave who falls in love with Carlota B, the *criollo* daughter of his master. Although Sab is described as the perfect match for Carlota, the social norm dictates that she is ethnically superior. The young woman ends up marrying an American heir with a dowry provided by Sab himself. Gómez de Avellaneda depicts colonial system of ethnic segregation where *criollos* are regarded as racially superior, civilized, beautiful, and desired.

Chilean author Alberto Blest Gana's *Martín Rivas* (1862), also alludes to the social upward movement of its protagonist, a man who finds acceptance in the elite due to his merits. As narrated in this novel, Santiago de Chile witnesses the ascendance of an aristocracy of money, whose economic might has temporarily suspended disdain towards the new money.[3] The influence of *criollo* networks is also evidenced in Peruvian Clorinda Mato de Turner's novel

[3] Doris Sommer describes this moment as a: "…restless, stressful, sometimes violent change as cultural codes collide in the Americas…" (*The Places of History* 5).

Aves sin nido (1889). Here, the conflicts between liberal and conservative are mediated by Lucía de Marín y Doña Petronila, two notable women who seek to solve feuds between antagonist factions after finding a common ground in their *criollo* upbringing[4]. Venezuelan writer Teresa de la Parra's first novel *Iphigenia: Diary of a young lady who wrote because she was bored*, (1924) also deals with the question of class distinction. María Eugenia Alonso the narrator and main character of *Iphigenia*, is presented as an educated young woman whose inheritance was dilapidated. At the mercy of her oppressive *criollo* grandmother, her strategy to afford a life of luxury is marrying the wealthy prospect chosen by her family.

In the introduction of *Transamerican Literary Relations*, Anna Brickhouse argues that the literary period known as American Renaissance, echoes the nationalisms that emerged in the nineteenth century and reflects an anxiety to start a new and *pure* national genealogy from ground zero: "...the American Renaissance [...] is inherently dependent upon and sustained not only by nationalist discourses but by the underlying transnational desires and anxieties that such discourses seek to mask" (33). These novels reveal that in principle that generation sought to differentiate itself from the Spanish colonial social class system, but instead of creating an effectively American model, it only imitated its Spanish predecessor. What is particular about these novels, is that they inform this dissertation of three central factors discussed in the following chapters, and which influence the social structures of the worlds depicted therein: The *de facto* privilege attributed to a *criollo* or white European bloodline, the belief that worth is displayed through luxury, the possibility to obtain wealth through marriage.

[4] Sarah Chambers argues that "women's role in nurturing friendships that transcended partisan factions as a justification for their ongoing influence as mediators, in republican politics...It must have been costumary, therefore, for prominent ladies to take the first steps toward bringing together rival factions" (*Women Writing the Nation* 82).

IV. Meet the Mexican *gente bien*

Although the phenomenon of social mobility and class distinction is present in Mexican Twentieth Century literature, the elite is rarely referred to as an aristocracy, but rather as a bourgeoisie, or an oligarchy. The elite characters in previous literature, define their class distintion in terms of moral superiority, decency, and manners. The preferred terms are *gente decente* (decent people), *gente educada* (well-mannered people), and *gente de bien* (law-abiding people). Besides the linguistic shortening of the phrase *gente de bien*, the choice can also be explained by what German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche alleges in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. According to him:

> Much rather has it been the good themselves, that is, the aristocratic, the powerful, the high-stationed, the high-minded, who have felt that they themselves were good, and that their actions were good, that is to say of the first order, in contradistinction to all the low, the low-minded, the vulgar, and the plebeian. The distance between a higher, dominant group and a lower class is the origin of the antithesis of good and bad. (3)

For Nietzche, the concepts of good and evil ('bien' and 'mal' in Spanish) correspond to ethical categories constructed by the powerful in a society in a specific time. Power gives authority to the elite, and consequently, the privilege to assign meanings to social categories. Thus, the behaviors and looks of the powerful –the good- become the model that other classes imitate.

In Mexico, the first author to discuss the label *gente bien* in Mexican literature was journalist and media personality Guadalupe Loaeza. After a brief career in fashion business, Loaeza began writing a series of vignettes on Mexican left-wing newspaper *Unomasuno* in the summer of 1983. These short texts briefly describe different categories of *niñas bien*, that is, young women

who self-identity as members of the Mexican elite so-called *gente bien*.[5] Although the columns of *Niñas bien* are literarily simplistic and formulaic --often written as conversations filled with slang and hyperbolic language-- they made Loaeza a publishing success in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Many of Loaeza's subsequent works such as *Manual de la Gente Bien* (1995), *Compro, luego existo* (1992), and *Las reinas de Polanco* (1986), also talk explicitly about *gente bien*. In the introduction of Volume I of *Manual de la Gente Bien*, the author opens the question of who are Mexican *gente bien* and begins her description of this label as she reconstructs scenes from the 1930s. Loaeza states that being *gente bien* in the 1930's "significaba poseer uno de los trescientos apellidos más viejos de la aristocracia mexicana, haber heredado propiedades, muebles, joyas, cultura; haber estudiado en excelentes colegios en el extranjero y en el país, y ser sumamente educado" [meant to have one of the three hundred oldest las names of the Mexican aristocracy, having inherited estates, furniture, jewels, culture; having studied in excellent schools in Mexico and abroad, and being extremely well-mannered] (*Manual de la Gente Bien* 21).[6] According to her, the term resulted from the shortening of the previously used 'gente de bien', which was attributed to a cluster of roughly three hundred families descended from Colonial nobility. Loaeza borrows the term "los trescientos y unos más" coined by genealogist Ricardo Ortega y Pérez Gallardo in his *Historia genealógica de las familias más antiguas de México* (1908). This collection, divided in three lengthy volumes, compiles the family trees, nobility titles, and the coats of arms of selected families:

[5] Loaeza clarifies that not all *gente bien* are at the same level. The author suggests, for instance, that two women may have a similar family ancestry, but the one with economic power belongs to the category "niñas bien-bien", whereas the one whose fortune has dwindled is aptly called "niña bien, pobretona".
[6] All translations in brackets are mine.

> Al hacer esta obra, me he esforzado por que comprenda la historia genealógica de las principales familias de la sociedad de México desde que, consumada la conquista española hace cerca de cuatrocientos años, empezó a formarse la raza criolla mexicana, hasta nuestros días; período ya largo en que esa raza ha producido muchos hombres ilustres para la sociedad, para las ciencias, para el Foro, para el Gobierno y para la Iglesia. Estas familias y sus descendientes, animados del espíritu caballeresco y emprendedor, característico de la raza española, continuaron la obra de la nacionalidad que encontraron empezada. (Ortega ix)
>
> [the principal families of Mexican society from the Spanish conquest circa four hundred years ago, when the Mexican *criollo* race began to take shape, until our times; a long period in which that race has produced many notable men in society, science, public forum, government and Church. These families and their offspring, nurtured by the Spanish knightly and enterprising spirit continued the work of nation building that they found already started].

Ortega's definition alludes to the concept of family and visibility in the public sphere. It also points out the merits and achievements of these people since the Conquest. But what calls our attention is that it indicates a correlation of two important conditions, a *criollo* ethnicity and historical ties with the Spanish nobility. Needless to say, this categorization excludes Native Americans, mestizos, Africans, and also European migrants with no nobility connections.

Based on Ortega's genealogies, Loaeza offers a point of departure in the study of *gente bien*. Several of her early works describe to some the behaviors, social activities, rules, and looks of this subgroup of the elite at different points in the Twentieth Century. In a satirical imitation of magazines and manuals of etiquette, such as the popular *Manual de urbanidades y buenas*

maneras by Manuel A. Carreño (1859), her descriptions abound in details of clothes, accessories, make-up, and hair styles. She also creates categories, conversations and inner monologues of *señoras bien*. Loaeza tells the reader that these individuals are categorized according to economic and social variables such as the number of languages they speak, the neighborhoods where they live, the type of work they do, and their rapport with members of the working class. For instance, *niñas bien* most likely live in exclusive places like Mexico City's Polanco and Lomas de Chapultepec, they speak English and preferably French without a thick Mexican accent, and they maintain a cold distance in their interactions with people outside of their social circle.

Even though, Loaeza's descriptions and dialogues illustrate the activities, expectations, and speech of *gente bien*, the author fails to provide a convincing definition of what elements constitute this category. In describing the parameters to identify a member of this group, she compares and contrasts using celebrities as referents; or simply indicates undesirable traits, Loaeza writes:

> ¿Quiénes eran los pelados […] para estas familias? los que NO tenían tipo de "gente decente" (los prietos), los que habían hecho dinero demasiado rápidamente, los que NO sabían comer en la mesa, los que pertenecían al gobierno, los que NO se sabían vestir con gusto, los que NO conocían París, los que NO conocían al "todo México" (el suyo), aunque también los parvenus o arribistas." (*MGB* 22)
>
> Who were the lower class for these families? those who did NOT look like "decent people" (dark skinned), those who had made money too fast, those who did NOT know how to eat properly, those who worked for the government, those who did NOT know

how to dress with style, those who did NOT travel to Paris, those who did NOT know "everyone in Mexico" (theirs), but also the *parvenus* or social climbers.]

The definition above is problematic for two reasons. First, because it seeks to define a category in negative terms. Secondly, because the absence of a minimum requirement implies that *gente bien* may not be an ontological category, but rather a behavior that encompasses multiple variables. Albeit illustrative, Loaeza's satirical description of *gente bien* results too vague to be used as the theoretical ground of this scholarly exercise. In the absence of any critical or theoretical literature dealing with the essential characteristics and conduct of this so-called *gente bien*, it becomes imperative to observe this group in relationship with other members of the elite.

In *Nueva Grandeza Mexicana*, social chronicler Salvador Novo observes distinct social layers in 1940s Mexico City. In this piece, Novo walks through the city with a fictional friend and describes the old and new residential areas, while he narrates the day-to-day activities of the city's inhabitants. Furthermore, he discusses the middle class anxiety for acquiring status, but also delineates social sectors in function to their purchasing power, neighborhood, and taste:

> Por tradición asumimos en México la coexistencia de tres capas sociales que llamamos la baja, la media y la alta. Baja y alta parecen susceptibles de mayores subdivisiones: a) los desheredados absolutos y b) los proletarios harían las dos ramas principales de la clase "baja". La "alta" ofrece aun mayor diversidad, si en ella reconocemos c) a la vieja aristocracia, d) a los "nuevos ricos" y e) a los extranjeros avecindados entre nosotros, transitoria o definitivamente. En medio neutra en apariencia: disputada por los extremos, f) la "sufrida clase media" cumple su vida. (165-6)
>
> [Traditionally, in Mexico we assume the coexistence of three social layers that we call the low, the middle, and the high. Low and high seem susceptible of further subdivisions: a) the dirt poor and b) the proletarian would make up the two branches of the "low" class. The

"high" class offers even more diversity, when we recognize c) the old aristocracy, d) the "new rich" and e) the foreigners living in Mexico transitorily or definitively. Between them, apparently neutral: disputed on both extremes, f) the "suffering middle class" lives its life.]

Novo's description incorporates a more nuanced set of categories, which alludes at factors such as wealth and family genealogy. Interestingly, Novo remarks the division between the aristocrats and the "new rich," but assumes that his readers know the distinguishing factor that sets them apart. His use of the adjective old most likely suggests a link with the Colonial nobility.

However, it would be imprecise to label *gente bien* as nobility, because even though their history links them to Spanish nobility and royalty; in Mexico, all nobility titles were first abolished in the Constitution of 1857, and again with the Constitution of 1917. Despite this group's relationship with power and wealth, it would also be inaccurate to categorize them under the Marx and Engels' term bourgeoisie, because their distinction is not based on the possession and investment of capital, but rather on behavioral and physical attributes. In fact, the relationship between *gente bien* and the bourgeois class may often be antagonizing in Mexico, because the latter earn their fortunes, while the former inherit estates. Equally problematic is the term ruling or governing class, most especially in Twentieth-Century Mexico, where the strongest political force was the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), a party formed by the victors of the Mexican Revolution, and very distinct from the offspring of the New Spain *criollo* nobility network. However, there is a social class whose behavior and values coincide with what Loaeza describes as *gente bien*, and which also differentiates it from other elite groups; namely the aristocracy. Because the Mexican Revolution is the historical event that changed the political and economic structures that affected class distinction, it is necessary to review the history of the so-called *gente bien* from the ratification of the Mexican Independence to the presidency of Porfirio Díaz.

V. Before the Mexican Revolution: A genealogy of *gente bien*

As Loaeza, Novo, and Ortega indicate, the dominant elite at the end of the nineteenth century had a strong cohesion and direct family ties to the *criollo* nobilities of colonial New Spain. Upon its independence from Spain, Mexico had two periods of monarchical rule, the First Mexican Empire under José Agustín de Iturbide (1821 to 1823), and the Second Empire under Austrian-born Maximilian of Habsburg (1863 to 1867). The restoration of the Cádiz Constitution in 1820 guaranteed Spanish citizenship to all natives of the Spanish territories in both sides of the Atlantic, including criollos, mestizos, and Indians. This precipitated the alliance between the Spanish troops led by Agustín de Iturbide and the remaining insurgent groups under Vicente Guerrero dissolving the viceroyalty of the New Spain and ratifying Mexico's Independence. Iturbide became Emperor with the support of both, the criollo elite and the Catholic Church in a failed effort to keep the liberals at bay (Joseph and Henderson 192). Following the fall of the First Empire and the dictatorship of Santa Anna, the Constitution of 1857, Article 12 established that: "No hay, ni se reconocen en la República, títulos de nobleza, ni prerrogativas, ni honores hereditarios. Sólo el pueblo legítimamente representado, puede decretar recompensas en honor de los que hayan prestado ó prestaren servicios eminentes a la patria ó á la humanidad" (García 57). [The Republic does not grant and does not recognize any nobility titles, prerogatives, nor inherited honors. Only the people, legally represented, can grant awards in honor of those who have or will have served eminent services to the county or to humanity].

In 1862, as a result of the French Intervention and the establishment of the Second Mexican Empire, the Constitution was suspended. Promoted by the powerful and conservative elite of Mexico's hacendados, with the support of the French, Austrian and Belgian crowns, the intervention attempted to bring back the monarchical system in Mexico. The Mexican Congress

approved a referendum which confirmed the coronation of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Habsburg as Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico. Support came mainly from conservative Catholics, and the main sponsors were the former Mexican nobility, who aimed to promote stability and end the constant cycle of civil unrest. In their 1863 *Offer of the Crown to Maximillian*, the Junta of Conservative Notables expresses that: "The institution of monarchy is the only one suitable to Mexico, especially in our current circumstances, because it combines order with liberty and strength with the strictest justification. Thus it is nearly always capable of imposing order over anarchy and demagogy, which are essentially immoral and disruptive" (264). During the Second Empire, the former nobility and the Catholic Church managed to keep economic control and possession of the land. The French and Austrian influence, however, made it easier for Western Europeans to move into Mexico and integrate themselves into the nobility system. Benedict Anderson argues that the bureaucratic apparatuses of colonial empire, "permitted sizable numbers of [European] bourgeois and petty bourgeois to play aristocrat off center court: i.e., anywhere in the empire except at home" (*Imagined Communities* 150). In 1867, the federalist government of Benito Juarez overthrew the Empire and restored the Constitution of 1857.

Although the restored Republic under Porfirio Díaz did not recognize nobility titles, it was instrumental in the composition of a distinctive Mexican aristocracy. During the rule of Díaz, the *criollo* elite managed to adapt into the liberal capitalist trends from the United States and Western Europe, while preserving their class distinction. As Michael Johns observes:
The traits that emerged over three centuries of colonial rule, and during the two tumultuous generations that followed independence, were shaped into a national character by the advanced

machinery of economy and state that could develop only when Mexico attached its fate to a growing world driven by the United States and Western Europe. (*Mexico in the Age of Diaz* 2) Victor Macías-Gonzalez observes that Díaz aligned himself with the Mexican conservatives in an effort to preserve stability. He accomplished that first by marrying Carmen Romero Rubio, a descendant of the old nobility, and by not enforcing the secular reforms of the Constitution of 1857. Díaz consolidated his power by supporting the reelection of his political allies; and also with the profits from foreign investment. As a result, the population expanded, and with it a new urban middle class was formed, an atmosphere of modernization flourished throughout the country (Macías-González 6-7). Díaz statesmanship and image were praised overseas. The famous article that American journalist James Creelman published in Pearson's Magazine in 1908 depicts him almost as a progressive monarch:

> There is not a more romantic or heroic figure in all the world, nor one more intensely watched by both friends and foes of democracy, than the soldier-statesman, whose adventurous youth pales the pages of Dumas, and whose masses of Mexico, oppressed by centuries of Spanish cruelty and greed into a strong, steady, peaceful, debt-paying, and progressive nation. (*President Díaz* 287)

Creelman, characterizes Díaz as a hero-like figure, by depicting him as a force driving Mexico into progress and Western modernity. However, this picture hides the repressive methods under which Díaz controlled opposition to his administration. Thus, this "steady and peaceful" country that Creelman saw, was most likely the result of the exploitation of the masses of peasants and poor city dwellers.

The downside of this so-called Belle Époque was costly. Mexican society in the 1890s heavily resembles what Franz Fanon observed during the mid-Twentieth Century dissolution of colonial empires:

> [Local elites] are identifiable by their small numbers, their concentration in the capital, and their occupation as traders, landowners and professionals. The national bourgeoisie in the underdeveloped countries is not geared to production, invention, creation, or work. All its energy is channeled into intermediary activities. Networking and scheming seem to be its underlying activities. (*Wretched of the Earth* 98)

Fanon claims that upon the decolonization of the third world, local elites simply replaced the former colonial rulers, but kept the economic and political systems of oppression intact. Moreover, local elites imitate and favor their former masters. The Mexican case is peculiar, because of the multiplicity of foreign models. Culturally, the Spanish language and institutions continued to be influential; however France and the United States also exerted a strong effect during the *Porfiriato* years. As we shall see in the chapters ahead, this cultural multiplicity had a profound impact in class affiliation and *gente bien* distinction.

VI. *Gente bien* in the aftermath of the Revolution

The harmony and stability that characterized the *Porfiriato*, the Díaz regime, were superficial. The peace and progress depicted by James Creelman was the result of a systematic exploitation of peasants, miners and the recently-formed class of factory workers. The unequal distribution of wealth favored mainly international investors and the long-established land-owning aristocracy. However, the armed conflict that became the Mexican Revolution brought about a myriad of changes to the landed aristocracy. Díaz and a slew of families fled the country and relocated in the United States and Europe. Many hacienda owners who stayed perished

during the assaults of the revolutionary factions. Those who survived faced a new political order in which their influence was highly diminished. Moreover, those whose who relied on agriculture and cheap peasant labor faced or suffered the expropriation of their properties. David Cannadine discussed the adaptations of the elites when faced by historic events: "there is a danger in giving, as a result, too static, too un-nuanced, and too uninflected a picture, which unthinkingly accepts the aristocracy's own self-image of antiquity and permanence, and which thus fails to recognize its remarkable capacity to renew, to re-create and to re-invent itself over time" (10). This new scenario forced the tight and cohesive aristocratic clans to open up their doors to Revolution caudillos and the new political elite, many of whom came from mestizo backgrounds. For instance, the now legendary Pancho Villa, who led the Revolution in Northern Mexico is described by American journalist John Reed: "Francisco Villa was the son of ignorant peons. He had never been to school. He hadn't the slightest conception of the complexity of civilization, and when he finally came back to it, a mature man of extraordinary native shrewdness, he encountered the Twentieth Century with the naïve simplicity of a savage" (*Pancho Villa* 365). Then, surviving aristocratic families saw an opportunity to negotiate with the *caudillos* of the Revolution. In order to maintain their class privilege, they allowed some powerful *mestizos* to mingle in their exclusive circle.

When the turmoil of the Revolution finally settled, Mexico's political, economic, and social conditions had been altered. In 1929, General Plutarco Elías Calles founded the Partido Nacional Revolucionario, which would later be renamed as Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the strongest political entity. Calles's successor, General Lázaro Cárdenas brought many of the most emblematic populist policies. Supported by a PRI-dominated Congress, Cárdenas allowed a myriad of agitators, union leaders and the "government class" to profit from both former

landowners and peasants. Mexican writer Fernando Benitez describes a conflict during the Agrarian Reform carried out by President Lazaro Cardenas in Northern Mexico's La Laguna region:

> Cardenas arrived with a group of engineers and began to distribute land. The landowners' arrogance disappeared as if by a magic spell. The President made them see that if they used any violence, the government would arm the campesinos, and the landowners fearful of losing everything, folded their cards and resigned themselves to the inevitable. (*The Agrarian Reform in La Laguna* 446)

President Cardenas and his PRI supporters recognized that it was essential to have the support of the peasants and workers in order to maintain political power and guide the economy towards industrialization. It is precisely in the late 1930s that the class struggles between the old aristocrats and the heroes of the Revolution begin to appear in Mexican film. Novelists like Juan Rulfo, Rosario Castellanos, and Carlos Fuentes began writing about the Revolution during the strong populist PRI presidencies of Manuel Ávila Camacho 1940-1946, Miguel Alemán Valdés 1946-1952, and Adolfo Ruiz Cortines 1952-1958.

VII. Are *gente bien* a Mexican aristocracy?

The Real Academia Española Dictionary defines the word aristocracy as: "Clase que sobresale entre las demás por alguna circunstancia. En ciertas épocas, ejercicio del poder político por una clase privilegiada, generalmente hereditaria" (*Diccionario lengua española*). This definition is too general, and similarly to Loaeza's, it cannot withstand academic scrutiny. The common denominator between *gente bien* and aristocracy is the coupling of privilege and distinction. French social thinker Pierre Bourdieu postulates that nobilities and aristocracies function as a modern corporation whose objective is to secure privilege for its current members

and for the generations to come. In order to fulfil this objective, such corporation must have cohesion among, and control of its rules of inclusion and exclusion. However, what its members distinguishes this group from other social classes is that they possess social capital, a term that Bourdieu defines as: "[…] the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (*Distinction* 119). He goes on to affirm that, contrary to popular belief, aristocracies constantly invest time and resources to maintain a healthy network of connections so as to accumulate more social capital. This processes create an antagonism with those people outside the aristocratic network who wish to enter their circle. Ironically, the value of social capital is driven by the desire of outsiders to penetrate the aristocratic encirclement; simply put, aspirants are those who confer value to the aristocrat.

Some of the elements that constitute aristocratic social capital are tangible items like historic buildings and landmarks, precious jewels, and works of art. However, these can be acquired, bought, traded and even stolen by virtually anyone. The possession of large fortunes is a topic that preoccupies aristocrats, but it is not a *sine qua non* condition for distinction. Bourdieu explains that a vast part of social capital is symbolic, a capital that exist for cognition and recognition ("La Noblesse: Capital Social" 389).[7] and thus intangible. It consists of a system of codes and behaviors with assigned meanings. Thus, social capital consist of the ability to decode, understand, and reproduce this linguistic code. This language includes observable manifestations such as behaviors, (gestures, postures, voice intonation, good manners), but also the discursive and immaterial like a genealogy and kinship. Aristocratic distinction is enforced through the reproduction of these behaviors and beliefs in the form of public and private rituals.

[7] Original French quote: "un capital qui existe par la connaissance et la reconnaissance."

An aristocracy can have control of its membership, and thus maintain its distinction, due to the fact that intangible features, such as one's genealogy or ethnic features, are non-transferable.

VIII. Aristocracy as a performative act

Bourdieu's work offers a theoretical matrix which contemplates both the interplay of agency through social hierarchies, and knowledge as capital. Also, Bourdieu's theory establishes that social capital is manifested through the embodiment of an individual's differentiated behaviors in specific social fields. The social position of an individual is determined by material resources, but also by their endowment of social capital (the body of knowledge, attitudes, specific family upbringing, etc.). Thus, what aristocrats wear and the way they wear it, what peasants eat and the way they eat it, are particular examples of the embodied expression by which individuals are perceived and differentiated. The sum of the values attached to these behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes becomes an apparatus that can advance or constrain an individual's opportunities in life. It is thus clear that the reproduction of these specific practices is a performative act.

Therefore, if social distinction is performed, it can be theorized analogously with other cultural labels whose categories are also performed, namely sex and gender. Upon the publication of her revolutionary book *Gender Trouble,* Judith Butler opened the scholarly discussion on categories that traditionally have been considered stable. Butler begins with the claim that modern Western cultures have classify human beings into two and only two categories using phenotypically visible sexual markers as criteria: "The desire to determine sex once and for all, and to determine it as one sex rather than the other, thus seems to issue from the social organization of sexual reproduction through the construction of the clear and unequivocal identities and positions of sexed bodies with respect to each other" (141). She argues, however,

that those criteria are culturally constructed and driven. Any given society categorizes under a set of perceived traits predetermined by that society's cultural mechanisms. In other words, we classify according to what we perceive through our senses, but some person(s) decided a priori what marks we must look for; the absence or presence of those traits carry attached meanings. This system of classification resonates with Bourdieu's concept of social capital, because, similarly to sex, social status is governed by the recognition of specific embodied traits. As Butler explains:

> …acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (185)

Aristocratic distinctive markers are carefully produced performances, created by a class with power. But for this class to have cohesion, longevity, and exclusivity, these markers require certain conditions. Eric Mension-Rigau also identifies aristocratic distinction in terms of beliefs and behaviors, he describes:

> L'inscription de l'individu dans un lignage, le souci d'ériger les qualités du groupe en privilège du sang, les réticences à l'égard de l'argent, ou la pratique d'une certaine désinvolture – dans le savoir-vivre ou le langage notamment – apparaissent plus nettement comme caractéristiques d'une appartenance aristocratique. ("Conserver l'identité nobiliaire dans la France contemporaine" 16)

> [The inscription of the individual in a lineage, the concern to elevate the qualities of the group as blood privilege, and the reluctance to talk about money, or the practice of a certain casualness (in the manners or in the language in particular) mostly seem to be characteristics of belonging to the aristocracy.]

In addition to Mension-Rigau's explanation, other conditions must be met for an aristocracy to be prosperous. First of all, distinction must be performed constantly so as to appear natural, effortless, and inherited; almost like a biological trait that is difficult to acquire or learn. Second, the 'owners' of those traits must conspire to make their distinctive characteristics coveted by the other classes. Finally, the aristocrat must create new distinguishing features as soon as the aspiring classes begin to imitate and reproduce a specific behavior. For instance, the so-called 'good taste' is actually only a set of values over which the elite has fierce control.

The behaviors and practices of *gente bien* have a biopolitical character in contemporary Mexican society. According to Homi Bhabha, the colonial encounter is characterized by its ambivalence and hybridity, as it constitutes a liminal space in which cultural differences and identities are articulated (*The Location of Culture* 122). Through the texts analyzed in this dissertation, one can see that the Mexican aristocracy imagines and presents itself as a permanent, invariable, and even necessary social class. The aristocratic characters in this corpus of study perceive their class as a depositary of tradition, a rightful heir to Western civilization, as well as a watchdog of etiquette and good manners. Thus, by asserting themselves in a higher ethical platform, it is consistent to label themselves as *gente bien*, the prototype of a superior "better" person, whose norms and values must be preserved and imitated by the rest of society. For many, the looks and values of *gente bien* have become the schemata of imitation and mimicry. As Loaeza puts it: "Pero lo que resultaba más difícil de imitar y más acentuaba la

diferencia con los que no pertenecían a las muy principales familias era 'la facha', es decir, la apariencia física. Tener 'clase', 'buen tipo' y 'buen gusto' era imprescindible para pertenecer a ese gran mundo" [The look or physical appearance was the most difficult aspect to imitate, and it accentuated the differences between the principal families and those who did not belong. To have 'class', 'nice features', and 'good taste' was mandatory to belong to that world] (*Los de arriba* 22). One only needs to walk through the streets of Mexico City to witness the ubiquitous images of European-looking models in the advertisements of airlines, exclusive shopping malls, and even luxury tequila brands.

To understand the centrality of European standards in contemporary Mexico, Santiago Castro-Gómez supports Enrique Dussel's theses on the myth of European modernity. Castro-Gómez explains that Latin American eurocentrism and modernity derive from an admiration of Europe's developments in philosophy, science, and technology since the discovery of the Americas and the age of Illustration ("Postcoloniality for Dummies" 271). In discussing Latin American perspectives of modernity, he goes on to argue that the European standard was established as superior both through authoritarian and ideological means: "It was not only about physically repressing the dominated populations but also about getting them to naturalize the European cultural imaginary as the only way of relating to nature, the social world and their own subjectivity" ("Postcoloniality for Dummies" 281). Thus, since the times of the conquest, Mexican society has functioned as a system of perceived ethnic and cultural differences that favors European trends.

Therefore, it can be argued that the advent of a *mestizo* bourgeoisie became a threat to the *criollo* aristocrats. After the Revolution, large haciendas, mines, and Mexico City mansions were no longer the monopoly of the privileged *criollo* class. In the post-revolution social scenario that

Mexican literature and film offer, it is also seeming that the new mestizo class with money became able to *performatively reproduce* a great many of their social rituals; but also, and most importantly, they were able to *reproduce biologically* through selective marriage. Thus, if the body of elements that constitute *gente bien* distinction can be acquired at both the performative and biological levels, it becomes evident that the label *gente bien* has no ontological status outside of the Mexican social imaginary.

IX. Organization of this dissertation

This dissertation is divided into four thematic chapters. Of these, the first and third deal with the novel, while the second and fourth analyze film, television, and social media. Although all can be read in any order, they do follow a chronological order. The primary text selection varies, but reflects the theme of *gente bien* from different points of view, epochs, and literary styles.

The first chapter addresses the issue of race and reproduction in post-revolutionary Mexico. It begins with an analysis of aristocratic representations while it looks at the processes of hybridity and mimicry from the onset of the Revolution up to the 1950s. The literary selections for chapter one were Carlos Fuentes's best sellers published between 1950 and 1960. This corpus offers examples of marriages between *criollos* and *mestizos* in the aristocrats' struggle to keep privilege; such is the case of Carlota Bernal and Artemio Cruz in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962). The conflicts of marriage and reproduction between classes is also narrated in the lives of the characters in Fuentes's *Aura* (1962) and *La región más transparente* (1958).The literary analysis draws heavily from Post-Colonial Theory and the allegories that social thinkers find between Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* and the colonial encounter. This chapter explains how female characters become powerful political agents in a male-dominated

society by taking advantage of their embodied aristocratic distinction and sexuality. Also, the examples in this chapter show that the post-revolutionary elite groups adapt to different models of exogamy and endogamy.

Chapter two focuses on the issues of gender and race in cinematographic texts from the Golden Era of Mexican Film (1940-1959). The first section questions the representations of elite characters in mainstream Golden Era productions, in the midst of the PRI populist national discourse. The analysis presented in this chapter challenges the ideas of the Mexican national image recreated in these films by looking at how 1940s movie stars, *criollo* actors, portrayed Indigenous, *mestizo*, and *criollo* characters. The chapter begins with historical-realist films set in the times of the Revolution, by renowned directors Emilio Fernández *Flor Silvestre* (1943) and *Enamorada* (1946), and Ismael Rodríguez's *La Cucaracha* (1958). The last section studies *Escuela de vagabundos* (1956) a comedy by mainstream director Rogelio González.

Chapter three studies novels that were published in the last quarter of the Twentieth Century. These text narrate events of the 1950s and show the class conflicts of their characters. The privilege of a criollo background and the contradictions that arise in a changing economy are narrated in Elena Poniatowska's *Paseo de la Reforma* (1998) and *La flor de lis* (1988); Guadalupe Loaeza's *Las yeguas finas* (2003); and José Emilio Pacheco's *Las batallas en el desierto* (1981). This chapter reexamines the role of aristocratic women and their perceived higher value in the social sphere. Moreover, the memories of these characters show the process of education and instilment of values that articulate an aristocratic mind-set.

Chapter four, focuses on the image of *gente bien* in contemporary Mexican mass media. Neoliberal efforts to produce a new model of globalized Mexicans seem to form part of a greater capitalist agenda, which uses the *gente bien* label as a commodity. In the era of international

trade agreements, the image of the elite became a central element in the process of propagating the North American and European models of social, economic, and material development. The analysis presented here focuses on the comedic representation of hedonism and high consumption of luxury goods and adoption of foreign values by both *gente bien* and those who wish to be included in their social circle. Finally, this chapter examines several episodes of *Las chicas VIP* a segment of cable TV shows *Desde Gayola* (2002-2006) and *Nocturninos* (2008-2013), as well as the world of *Cindy la Regia*, the main character of comic books and Twitter feeds by caricaturist Ricardo Cucamonga.

Chapter One

Aristocratic Re-Production in the Early Narrative of Carlos Fuentes

Undoubtedly, one of the most renowned Twentieth-Century Mexican novelists, Carlos Fuentes and his literary production have been the object of a tantamount of literary, political, cultural, and criticism. The amount of scholarly books and articles that deal with Fuentes's work is incommensurable, and a great number of these studies mainly address the author's life and influences as well as the purely literary and aesthetic aspects of his narrative. However, the advent of postmodern and post-colonial studies opened a field of discussion in which several Latin American writers became the target of harsh criticism and Fuentes was not the exception. One of his most famous critics has been Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar through his seminal essay "Caliban: Notes towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America." This essay published in 1974 denounces Fuentes as a traitor to the Cuban Revolution and basically expresses that his literature does not reflect Latin America's subaltern idiosyncrasy and reality. Meanwhile, other scholars such as Raymond L. Williams see Fuentes's work in a very different light and praise him for his role in constructing a new Latin American identity. In any case, critics and scholars have dealt with issues of identity and national formation in Fuentes's early novels and focus primarily in the representation or misrepresentation of the *mestizo* subaltern. But isn't class and identity formation the result of a differentiation to an 'other'? In answering this, we are immediately confronted with the question of what factors play an essential role in the negotiation between the elite and the subaltern classes in Fuentes's literary work. Moreover, we must also ask ourselves whether we should categorize with the label of 'subaltern' the wealthy and powerful *mestizo* characters depicted in Fuentes's works. Although critical work has long

examined the subaltern classes in Fuentes, no major critical work has explored the fact that the Mexican aristocracy played an essential role in the formation of a Mexican identity after the Revolution of 1910, essentially because the *mestizo* political elite that resulted in the aftermath of the conflict, ferociously sought to acquire an aristocratic distinction.

1.1 *The Tempest* allegory

In dealing with distinction in the colonial world, perhaps the most frequently studied and cited texts in post-colonial studies is William Shakespeare's masterpiece *The Tempest*. Many Latin American critics such as Roberto Fernández Retamar argue that the characters of this play allegorically represent European colonialism and that Caliban is an example of *mestizo* America. One of the points that Retamar mentions and that other critics develop in more depth is the sexual prohibition between Miranda and Caliban.[8] After an insinuated rape attempt that could have resulted in a *mestizo* population of Caliban's native island, he replies to his oppressor: "Oh ho, O ho! Wouldn't had been done! Thou didst prevent me –I had peopled else this isle with Calibans" (*The Tempest* act 1 scene 2). Postcolonist thinkers like Anne McClintock and Ann Stoler suggest that the sexual prohibition of which Caliban and all other colonial subjects, are victims, is a direct consequence of early-modern European colonial policies that sought to establish a White prestige using White women as a medium of sexual and reproductive control. Within this colonial scheme that seeks to maintain a clean European bloodline and subsequently preserving European prestige, Miranda the representative of European women must never have sexual relations out of wedlock, and under no circumstances procreate with Caliban, the ethnically marked subject. This scheme along with its sets of prohibitions has been implemented,

[8]For the purposes of this work, *The Tempest* here is seen as a traditional allegorical scheme in which a set of characters are interpreted on a one-to-one table of correspondences. For instance, Caliban corresponds to the colonial subject, while Prospero is the colonizing agent, and so on.

observed, questioned, challenged, and violated in the societies that resulted from Spain's huge colonial presence in what is nowadays the Latin American world.

This analysis of Fuentes's early works allows us to observe that the *criollo* aristocracy represented therein is decidedly gendered, and at the same time reaffirms the notion that the female body is the mechanism for its biological and cultural reproduction. However, the female characters in these novels still find themselves subjected to the patriarchal discourse and heterosexual normativity. For instance, all the female characters analyzed in this chapter have agency and participate actively in securing a wealthy husband, but none of them at no time indicate or even contemplate the desire to pursue wealth or happiness independently. In concordance with Miranda from *The Tempest*, these *criollo* women exploit their wits and scheming skills with the sole objective to marry well and become reproductive entities. Fuentes presents us with a representation of mid-Twentieth-Century Mexican high society in which women are reduced to the common denominator of biological and class reproductive functions. Although it can be argued that they dynamically work toward securing power and wealth, in the end it is a power and wealth that rests in their husbands' hands.

In order to enforce rules of sexual reproduction in the *criollo* elites in the former colonies of Latin America, it becomes imperative to establish and implement cultural mechanisms that control the ways in which women of European origin see themselves and construct their own identities. The effectiveness of such mechanisms, however, comes into conflict when major historical events or significant changes in the economic system trigger an unexpected upward social mobility of the *mestizo* populations. Such is the case in Latin America, where events like civil wars and *revoluciones* have changed the *mestizo* man's political and economic position, thus allowing him to negotiate politically with the *criollo* elite.

Thus, would Prospero the aristocrat accept a non-White man in his family if the marriage alliance could preserve his family's privileges and perhaps increase their fortune? Furthermore, in what ways would Miranda's reproductive mission be altered by this new scenario? Such a situation takes place in three of Carlos Fuentes's most renowned novels *Aura* (1962), *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962), and *La region más transparente* (1958) all of which offer a literary yet plausible explanation of different patterns through which the ruling classes took shape after the Mexican Revolution in the first half of the Twentieth Century. As I will argue in this chapter, these novels by Fuentes narrate the process by which a number of Mexican aristocratic *criollo* families used and profited from the ethnicity, class distinction, as well as other perceived values of their *criollo* daughters. The sexual and reproductive right of these women served as a medium to negotiate deals with the recently formed *mestizo* revolutionary ruling elite that arose after the armed conflict. In doing so, the families represented by Fuentes managed to keep their estates, maintained their social status, and eventually became part of the new national project.

Since it is impossible to consider the above situation without positioning it in the framework of some larger questions that relate both to the problem of social reproduction in post-colonial societies and the equally complicated question of gender, my approach to the reading of these novels is informed by certain key concepts from Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* in combination with assumptions made by Fernández Retamar in his famous essay "Caliban: Notes towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America" as the prototypical post-colonial subject in the Americas. As a point of departure, let us revisit Fernández Retamar's claim that Caliban represents the *mestizo* Americas. Retamar's main thesis is based on the now famous allegory of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* characters Prospero, Caliban and Ariel seen here as colonizer/colonized subjects in the context of European imperialism. Thus, Prospero's

invasion and later monopolization of Caliban's island is, according to him, a metaphor for the Spanish conquest and subsequent colonization of the Americas. Retamar goes on to assert that Caliban is a representation of the Caribs of the Antilles, who perceived as cannibals, represent a serious threat to the colonial enterprise and European civilization. Following this idea, that is, labeling the indigenous peoples of this continent as cannibals resulted convenient for European interests simply because under this excuse the native peoples could be repressed with violence or, as Retamar puts it, the cannibals were 'civilized'.[9] Retamar expands *The Tempest's* analogy to explain how US expansionism supplanted Spain as the hegemonic power in this hemisphere after their independence in the early 19th century. A significant point in his argumentation is the ambivalent role played by Ariel, who works for Prospero but in the end benefits from their alliance. As the essay mentions, social thinkers such as Rodó see in Ariel a metaphor of Latin America, which in consequence lead him to believe that those recently independent republics had high hopes for a bright and prosperous future. Nonetheless, Retamar later argues that Rodó's scheme did not work for Latin America; firstly because he mistook Ariel for Caliban, and secondly, because Europe's interests are now represented by the United States. Caliban thus, represents not only the mulatto or *mestizo* populations of the Americas, but also "the wretched of the earth as a whole, whose existence has reached a unique dimension since 1942" (163).

Similarly to Ángel Rama's critique of the Latin American cultural elite in *La Ciudad Letrada*, Retamar also offers a rather negative comment on several writers and thinkers including Carlos Fuentes and Jorge Luis Borges. In Retamar's perspective, Fuentes's texts are not

[9] Some critics such as Peter Hulme and William Arens also discuss the validity of the categorization of all non-European 'savages' as cannibals based on questionable historical accounts, especially since this classification had consequences such as the annihilation of entire human groups. In their analyses of travel books, both Arens and Hulme challenge the proof for the existence of cannibalism and even consider that it was an imaginary condition that Europeans produced as a tool for their imperial endeavors.

representative of the Latin American reality, because they privilege the voice of the oppressor by silencing that of the subaltern *mestizo*. He even speculates that Carlos Fuentes belonged to a Mexican literary mafia financed by the CIA with an agenda that supports US imperialist interests.[10] Retamar observes: "Fuentes dissipates the flesh and blood of our novels, the criticism of which would require, first of all, generalizations and judgments upon the vision of history presented in them, and, as I have said, calmly applies to them schemes derived from other literatures (those of capitalists countries), now reduced to mere linguistic speculations" (53).

If according to Fernández Retamar, the author is an accomplice of the US imperialist agenda, then the *mestizo* and the poor may have not been at all represented in positions of power in Fuentes's novels. However, that leads us to the question of why would Fuentes also depicts the lives of the descendants of the Porfiriato regime in his literature. In order to understand this apparent opposition, we must first acknowledge Fuentes's advocacy for a Pan-American multiculturalism; but most importantly, we must also recognize that Fuentes had strong ties with the wealthy elite. Raymond Williams asserts in *The Writings of Carlos Fuentes* that during his childhood summer vacations "… [his] first visual images of Mexico were of wealth, European elegance, and comfort: this was the aristocratic Mexico first exported to the Americas from the Spain of El Escorial; the images of royalty had been inherited from Phillip II generations before" (4). It is evident that from a very early age, he was confronted with the differences that marked

[10] Retamar's allegations seem to stem from Fuentes's distancing from the Cuban Revolution after 1971 as well as his association with the literary review *Mundo Nuevo* that was opposed to the imprisonment of Cuban intellectuals and other human rights issues in Cuba. According to Retamar: As a final example […] it might have been more useful to mention the C.I.A., which organizes the Bay of Pigs invasion and pays, via transparent intermediaries, for the review *elite*, one of whose principal ideologues was none other than Carlos Fuentes (52). The Cuban critic's direct and harsh comments seem to be associated with the fact that "…the so-called Mexican literary *mafia*, one of whose most conspicuous figures is Carlos Fuentes" (44), were in disagreement to many of the policies of Castro's Cuba.

off the elite groups that were in the process of being re-structured in post-revolutionary Mexico City; or as Williams also observes:

> A new nation was being forged out of the chaos of the revolution, and a new order was emerging. Mexico was laying the groundwork for its transformation into a modern state. After the revolution, Mexico was institutionalizing the recognition of the pre-Columbian roots of Mexican culture, thus supporting, for example, the muralist movement that actively promoted Indian and *mestizo* culture (4).

However, in incorporating these cultures, inevitably, there had to be a point of departure, a reference in pre-existing symbolic and linguistic terms that needed to be re-coded in order to establish new meanings. : "Mexico was institutionalizing a culture that was nationalistic while attempting to be universal" (Williams 13). In this case, it appears that this national model had to be constructed in spite of the previous Spanish-colonial model represented and preserved by the old aristocratic elite, but with a representation of the ancient Mesoamerican kingdoms, the *mestizo* popular culture, as well as the US version of bourgeois capitalism.[11]

So as Williams points out, "Fuentes inherited the problem of identity as a central issue for Latin American intellectuals of the 1940s and a matter of particular interest in a rapidly transforming Mexico" (14). So within this context it becomes clear that the author is not looking exclusively at just one sector of Mexican society, but rather, his narrative seems to depict a wider spectrum in which characters navigate in different circles and establish a wider array of connections. Fuentes is aiming at a sort of multiculturalism --precisely what Retamar criticizes--

[11] Jean Franco observes that the process of decolonization in Latin America did not immediately take place after the independence movements of the Nineteenth Century, but argues that what actually took place was an "informal economic colonization by European powers and finally North American economic ascendancy" (*Fall and Rise of the Lettered City*, 107). In this respect, Mexico's economy during the height of the Porfiriato regime depended heavily on the British, French, and American investments that were negotiated by then minister Limatour. During the Twentieth Century and in current times, Mexico´s economy is still closely tied to foreign investment.

that he defines as Indo-Afro-Ibero-America to encompass the major traditions of what we nowadays refer to as Latin America. Interestingly enough, this concept excludes large groups such as the Italian immigrants to Argentina and Uruguay, the Jewish communities in Mexico City or Buenos Aires, and even the German immigrants from whom Fuentes is a descendant. However, a post-cold-war reading of Fuentes's early novels, particularly *The Death of Artemio Cruz, La region más transparente,* as well as the short novel *Aura* will help us see that in spite of Retamar's allegations, Fuentes may be in fact re-constructing the relationship between Prospero, Miranda, and Caliban.

1.2 Power and upward mobility in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*

First published in 1964, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* recreates a family that appears to rearticulate *The Tempest's* allegory of colonial domination. This novel presents a model in which Caliban joins the White masters and even supersedes them in the exploitation of the so-called post-colonial world. So in this light, it appears that contrary to Retamar's argument, in his literature Fuentes is actually providing a voice --as well as enormous power and wealth-- to the male protagonist, Artemio Cruz, the prototypical Caliban that Retamar identifies: the illegitimate son of a *criollo* landowner and a poor mulatto peasant. If Artemio represents the *mestizo* Caliban, in this text then his *criollo* counterparts, Don Gamaliel and his daughter Catalina are the allegorical representations of Prospero and Miranda.

Another striking similarity between Caliban and Artemio Cruz lies in their birth and early years. According to Prospero, Caliban's mother, Sycorax, was exiled from Algiers for practicing witchcraft and transported to the island by a group of sailors. Isabel Cruz and her brother Lunero arrived from Santiago de Cuba because they both worked for the Menchaca family, *criollo* landowners who establish themselves in Veracruz as a result of the Spanish-American War.

Artemio, a prototypical colonial subject, is the illegitimate offspring of the Menchacas: "Cruz, Cruz without given name, without the right surname, baptized by the mulattos with the syllables of Isabel Cruz or Cruz Isabel, the mother who had been run away with a stick by Atanasio [Menchaca]: the first woman there who had given him a son" (*Death of Artemio* 296). Much like *The Tempest's* Sycorax, Artemio's mother can also be identified with the African slaves that were brought to the Americas. Also, and due to the fact that Sycorax's story is only heard through the discourse of male characters such as Prospero and Caliban, post-colonial scholars consider her to be a representation of the silenced woman of color. Yet in another parallelism, Artemio is brought up by his uncle Lunero much as Caliban is left to the care of Ariel. In fact, Lunero saves young Artemio from death as a newborn and takes care of him for thirteen years. Uncle Lunero warns teenage Artemio about going into the house of the then-ruined Menchacas; in a sort of premonition of his future interaction with the arictocrats, Lunero begs Artemio: "They don't want us there, young Cruz. Don't ever bother them. Come on, let's go back to work." (*Death of Artemio* 293). However, unlike Caliban who in the end agrees to follow Prospero's command and is relegated to live in poverty, Artemio Cruz succeeds in penetrating the elite and manages to attach himself to a social sector in which he was not born.

In *La muerte de Artemio Cruz,* Fuentes narrates how a young Artemio Cruz joins the revolt forces that defeated General Porfirio Diaz's regime in the 1910s. Jailed and charged for treason by one of the revolutionary factions, Artemio meets Gonzalo Bernal, an idealist who joined the revolution but who is in many respects disappointed with its social outcomes. In a rather unsurprising twist of fates, Gonzalo is executed while Artemio manages to escape and travel to the city of Puebla, with the apparent intention of telling the news of Gonzalo's death to his father Don Gamaliel, a *criollo* landowner on the verge of losing his estate. While in Puebla,

Artemio realizes that the Bernal family's fortune and hacienda are at risk of being confiscated by the newly formed Revolutionary government. However, as a veteran of the Revolution he may be able to protect the Bernals's estate and what appears to be the best way for doing so is by marrying Don Gamaliel's young daughter Catalina. Although repulsed by Artemio's vulgarity, Don Gamaliel recognizes a vital supporter in him and consequently agrees to establish and alliance. Catalina is advised to break her engagement and then forced into a marriage with a *mestizo* man whom she repudiates.

But before this analysis continues, it is necessary to first delineate a one-to-one correspondence between the Bernals and the Prospero/Miranda family. In order to do this, we first must know if indeed there ever was an aristocracy in Mexico or at least an elite group that behaved in a similar fashion. Etymologically, the word 'aristocracy' is generally defined as a social class that outstands for a set of perceived differences. In many cases this class exercises political power that is hereditary. Furthermore, and as observed by Eric Mension-Rigau and Bruno Dumons, aristocratic families are characterized for preserving a history and a tradition. These families not only inherit fortunes and estates, but also values that cannot be acquired with money such as a last name, an education, and a series of family connections ("Conserver l'identité nobiliaire dans la France contemporaine" 223). The Bernals, especially Don Gamaliel, are then prime examples of such a group.[12] Before his first interview with the *mestizo* military, Don Gamaliel reflects on the social changes that have recently taken place during the Revolution:

[12] As discussed in his collection of essays *Mythologies*, Barthes observes a series of French behaviors, expectations, and cultural phenomena such as knowledge of wine and cheese or magazine advertisements, and notes that there is nothing inherently French in them. Using the theory of signs, he concludes that behaviors and linguistic referents that seem 'natural' are in fact not only arbitrary, but also correspondent to the interests of a particular social group. They seem 'natural', 'obvious', and 'common' because the relationship between meanings and signifiers is no longer visible.

> Artemio Cruz. So that was the name of the new world rising out of the civil war; that was the name of those who had come to take his [Don Gamaliel's] place. […] The old man imagined himself the final product of a peculiarly Creole civilization, a civilization of enlightened despots. He took pleasure in thinking of himself as a father, sometimes a hard father but always a provider and always a repository of a tradition of good taste, courtesy, and culture. (*Death of Artemio* 44)

Here, the omniscient narrative voice allows the reader to look into Don Gamaliel's patriarch self-image, but most importantly his claim to a European lineage and tradition. It is central to note that this European blood line is also perceived as superior, a sort of central model that must be preserved and protected.

Catalina Bernal, the heiress to this Creole civilization must then follow his father's commands even though it violates the sexual and social conduct that she grew up believing in. In this respect, the works of Anne McClintock offers us a first approach to understand Catalina's situation as a White female in a patriarchal and post-colonial context. In her reading of Fanon's *Black Skins /White Masks*, McClintock discusses the manner in which colonial discourse used European women as both an object of desire and a means of reproductive control. In other words, there was a strict prohibition against sexual relations or marriage between men of color and White women, because the latter were supposed to be exclusive to European males. This ban perpetuated a perceived ethnic and social superiority of Europeans as well as a so-called purity of their offspring. In *Imperial Leather*, McClintock delineates a theory of colonial power and gender and argues that: "gender dynamics were, from the outset, fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise" (7). This means that although European women belong to the group holding power in the colonies, they are nonetheless subordinated to male

dominance. In this light, women became a central instrument in the perpetuation of racial segregation, the formation and affirmation of European authority as well as objects of exchange among colonials. Such trade is portrayed by Fuentes as it was envisioned and planned out by Don Gamaliel when he first receives Artemio as his guest. Fuentes lets us see that Don Gamaliel evidently *knows* that his daughter is prized, and that in order to save the family from ruin, she will follow his command. While Artemio waits at the library, Don Gamaliel tells Catalina:

> Fix yourself up. Take off that black dress. Make yourself attractive. Come to the library at seven o'clock sharp." He said nothing more. She would obey him: this would be the test of all those melancholy afternoons. She would understand. This one trump was left to save the situation. All Don Gamaliel had to do was feel the presence and guess the will of this man in order to understand […] that the sacrifice he was demanding was small and, in a way, not really repugnant. (*Death of Artemio* 44)

On the surface, it seems as though the narrator assumes that Catalina perceived sacrifice was unjustified, but as the novel unfolds, it becomes evident that the relationship between Artemio and Catalina is rather intricate. The colonial narrative under which she was brought up dictates that her husband is ethnically and thus, morally repulsive; but at the same time, prescribes that she must obey male power. To better understand this complex condition, we must again re-examine what originates Caliban and Miranda's sexual ban. To this respect, Ann Laura Stoler asserts that within the colonies, European rulers maintained a strict control over the different types of contact with the colonized peoples including of course sexual prohibitions; but she also argues that those restrictions were implemented simply because there was an actual ethnic mixing during the first colonial encounters, and that represented a risk. In her article "Making Empire Respectable" she examines the different ways in which family formation, *concubinage*,

morality and White prestige are negotiated and constructed in opposition to the dominated indigenous cultures, always asserting that the marked-off subalterns were inferior. At the same time she observes that *concubinage* with native women and ethnic mixing was tolerated during the first stage of colonial domination.

Although this practices were later discredited and even catalogued by medical texts as anti-hygienic, Stoler observes that: "[w]hat is important here is that by controlling the availability of European women and the sorts of sexual access condoned, state and corporate authorities controlled the very social geography of the colonies, fixing the conditions under which European populations and privileges could be reproduced" (349). Under these conditions, a new morality that favors a 'clean' European bloodline was created in order to disguise the economic burden and political framework that would result from recognizing the hereditary rights of *mestizo* children born in the colonies. Such was the case of former Spanish colonies like Mexico in which a *mestizo* bloodline, although quite common, was considered an inferior, unacceptable, and even corrupt condition. This line of reasoning is parallel to what Hommi Bhabha's definition of colonial discourse as purposefully creating a space for a subject people through the production of knowledge and the exercise of power. "Colonial discourse is an apparatus of power […] an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences" ("The Other Question" 23). Consequently, a *criollo* woman like Catalina Bernal strongly believes that her husband is repulsive for being a *mestizo*, but this repulsion appears to be entirely constructed by the colonial narrative under which she was educated.

Even though Fuentes depicts this condition through several female characters, the case of Catalina Bernal and Artemio Cruz is a perfect example of how the Mexican *mestizo* victors of

the Revolution war acquire *criollo* prestige through marriage in a very cynical way. Their union is a business transaction between Don Gamaliel and Artemio Cruz, the kind of commodity exchange across class and ethnicity barriers that Barbara Sebek identifies in *The Tempest's* Miranda because she is perceived as a sexual commodity and a status symbol ("People Profiting" 464). The Bernals will survive the Revolution thanks to Catalina's value as an asset; in fact, this is what her father expresses at dinner in a dialogue with Artemio Cruz:

> The old man went on with his cordial voice. "But we shall go on, go on forever, because we have learned to survive, always…"
>
> He picked up his guest's glass and filled it with full-bodied wine.
>
> "But there is a price to be paid for surviving," said the guest dryly.
>
> "It's always possible to negotiate the most convenient price…" (*Death of Artemio* 36-37)

The novel reveals that Catalina understands well that she is part of a transaction and marries Cruz knowing that she will benefit from this deal, and thus the exogamic model of aristocratic reproduction is at work. As with many Mexican families during and after the Revolución, the Bernals are unremarkable aristocrats going through the process of downward social mobility until they see the opportunity to profit from their distinction. In addition, Catalina's perception of herself changes during the course of the narrative as she becomes aware of her power to shape her present situation and improve her future.

Moreover, the narrative voice exposes an unseen conflict in Catalina's mind, when she realizes and admits in her inner monologue that she feels sexually attracted to her husband, Catalina reflects: "This man that irremediably attracts me, this man who perhaps indeed loves me, this man to whom I don't know what to say, this man brings me from pleasure to shame, from the deepest shame to the greatest pleasure." (*Death of Artemio* 113). On the one hand, and

in accordance to her strict *criollo* upbringing she detests the idea of being married to what she considers an inferior, a barbarian, a man who broke all the rules of decency and who in her mind, abolished all the hierarchies that structure her world. However, this man who should have been executed instead of her brother Gonzalo entices her.

The practices of eugenics that Stoler describes are deeply embedded in Catalina's mind, she does not even want to be touched by whom she considers an uneducated savage. After the death of her father, and borrowing McClintock's terminology, she imagines herself as a bearer of the old Creole national values, or much like her father: "a repository of a tradition of good taste, courtesy, and culture" (*Death of Artemio* 44). This is particularly relevant, because as McClintock postulates, women had a strong participation in the conceptions of the new nationalisms that arose in the newly independent countries: "Women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency" ("No Longer in a Future Heaven" 90). In this light, attention must be paid to the set of features that articulate national identity since they vary according to an individual's gender, ethnicity and wealth.

Since Catalina is convinced that she is betraying her *criollo* values, that is, no longer reproducing a 'clean' Spanish lineage, Catalina decides to live a sort of double life. She does not have agency in decision making, but she can humiliate her husband with her silence in retaliation for having being declassed. Therefore, in the privacy of the bedroom she allows herself to give in to her sexual desires and love Artemio, but in every other public space she openly shows disdain for her husband:

> She would let herself go. She would let herself be loved; but when she woke, she would again remember it all and oppose her silent rancor to the man's strength […] And only in

> moments of true solitude, when neither the rancor of the past nor the shame of pleasure occupied her thoughts, was she able to tell herself with honor that he, his life, his strength offer me this strange adventure that fills me with fear. (*Death of Artemio* 96)

It is remarkable that Catalina's aristocratic values remain stronger than the affection she secretly feels for her husband, and again this suggests that the aristocratic narrative within which she grew up molds and controls even her most intimate decisions. In the delirium of his deathbed, Artemio accuses Catalina and their daughter of what he characterizes as moral mediocrity; that is, not having the courage of standing up to him or entirely cutting ties. They have not done so because, through his money and power, he has showered them with a life of luxury that their sole aristocratic distinction cannot provide for. While looking at them crawling on the floor searching for his last will, he exclaims:

> I gave you wealth without expecting anything back, tenderness, understanding, and because I didn't demand anything from you, you haven't been able to abandon me, you latched onto my wealth, cursing me probably the way you'd never curse my poor pay pocket, but forced to respect me the way you'd never have respected my mediocrity. (*Death of Artemio* 113)

Artemio's remarks are an obvious critique to upper-class female conformity, but at the same time raise the question of Catalina's other alternatives. So, on the one hand, as a White, aristocratic woman she finds herself oppressed by the White male, in this case her father, and must obey him even if his commands contradict her set of values. On the other hand, once married to a former subaltern, she is accused of not loving him and just lingering with him because of his power. As McClintock suggests, Catalina enters a category similar to those of colonial women. Firstly, she is ethnically and socially privileged but has no voice in decision

making for being a woman. Secondly, she is scorned by her husband for staying with him for his wealth and power, when actually it was the main condition in the marriage deal all along. Ironically, the fortune that Artemio accumulated after his marriage resulted in great part from the Bernal's estate, their social capital, and connections in Puebla. This treatment is yet another example of the disadvantages that even White women experienced in post-colonial societies.

As this analysis has discussed so far, Fuentes's early novelistic work offers a fertile corpus for post-colonial study. Although it is true that after the 1820s most of what is now labeled as Latin America became a number of independent republics, this novel depicts how many colonial conditions existed in Mexico well into the Twentieth Century. As we have seen in these examples, and according to McClintock, the post-colonial experience seems to be conditioned by class, power and gender. Even within the wealthy colonials that became the ruling bourgeois elites, gender constitutes a central difference in the individual's condition. Also, through this novel, Fuentes offers a harsh critique of both the Mexican Revolution and the ancient regime by proposing that once in power the *mestizo* victor merely adopts the same scheme of domination and exploitation, but using the discourse of the Revolution.

Indeed, characters like Artemio Cruz are often identified with corrupt union leaders and legislators who adopted a leftist or populist discourse, but were in fact the new oppressors. In other words, Caliban has learned the discourse of his masters, and has eventually replaced them as the dominant class. In the character of Artemio Cruz, Fuentes offers a comprehensive depiction of a group of Mexicans who found ample opportunity for the realization of selfish ambitions and the accumulation of riches in the chaos of the revolutionary armed conflict. Artemio Cruz's dominant position in the economic and political scene is a rather transparent archetype of the members of the PRI elite. Fuentes seems concerned with showing the self-

interest, materialism, and loneliness he finds so prevalent among this newly-formed bourgeoisie, since under the PRI regime, the humanitarian ideals which brought about the revolution were either overlooked or simply deserted for political power and excessive wealth.

Again, to illustrate Artemio's transformation, let us go back to his first contact with the Bernals in Puebla. At this point in the plot, the destitution of the Bernal family is vividly depicted by the scarcity of their private space. The image of an aristocratic family's house is essential, because it is directly correlated to their social status, nobility, and heritage. Since the Middle Ages, castles and estates appear in Spanish literature as symbols of power (Salvador 66). This tradition is taken by Fuentes, and as Raymond Williams observes, a substantial portion of the author's early narrative works takes place in former colonial palaces (145). The portrayal of the Bernals' hacienda illustrates the origin of their former wealth, namely immense landownership and agriculture: "Perhaps that was propitious symbol for a family that had grown and prospered thanks to the fruits of the soil: that had been settled here in the Valley of Puebla... Since the beginning of the 19th century" (*Death of Artemio Cruz* 37). In this passage, the narrative voice is instrumental in directing the reader's gaze into crucial details inside the house:

> The gilt feet of the chairs and small tables rested on the same floor off uncarpeted painted planks, and the lamps were unlit until they reached the dining room, where a large cut glass chandelier shone down on mahogany furniture and on a painting in which glowed the earthenware vessels and flaming fruit of the tropics. With his napkin, Don Gamaliel waved away the mosquitoes whirling around the real fruit dish, less abundantly heaped than the printed one. (*Death of Artemio* 36)

The image of the colonial house is again depicted years later when Artemio has established himself as an important businessman and lives in a restored colonial building located in

Coyoacán.[13] It is precisely in this depiction that we can observe the mimesis between Artemio and Don Gamaliel; or what Homi Bhabha calls mimicry, the colonized subject imitates his colonial master, but in an exaggerated glitzy version. During their first encounter, Artemio is in fact impressed by Don Gamaliel's 'natural' elegance, his clothes, and the sobriety of his library and later tries to imitate him. The Coyoacán house is full of luxurious and artistic items such as colonial paintings and statues. The election of this house and its décor is perhaps a reflection of Artemio's desire to be linked to the colonial nobility from which the Mexican aristocracy derives, at this point the narrator reveals that:

> "He stretched his legs and though of the care with which he had rebuilt and furnished this house, his true home. Catalina could live in the Lomas mansion, a place barren of all personality, not different from any other millionaire's residence. He preferred these old walls with their two centuries of sandstone and tezontle. " (*Death of Artemio* 244)

Even though this house is richly decorated with works of art and historical artifacts, it fails in its objective to work as a symbol of aristocratic status. The house and all these objects contained therein cannot be claimed as Artemio's family heirloom; on the contrary, they constitute a collection of museum artifacts that show off Artemio's wealth, but cannot immediately link him to an aristocratic lineage.

In the 1950s, the economic growth of Western Europe and the emergence of the United States as the indisputable economic power in the Americas triggered a significant impact on Latin American literary production. According to Doris Sommer, a sort of repudiation to the positivist tradition of the great foundational historical fictions arose in the years of the Latin American Boom; but this resistance however, evidenced a repressed attraction to recount history

[13] Formerly a town, it became a residential neighborhood and municipality south of Mexico City.

in their novelistic production (*Foundational Fictions* 3). This conflict and feelings of suppression are similarly manifest in Fuentes's novels. For instance, the Bernals's aristocratic disdain for Artemio in the public sphere is reversed in the intimacy of Catalina and Artemio's sexual life in which she completely ignores any ethnic or class differences. This echoes in part the *criollo* national discourses that Doris Sommer analyses in *Foudational Fictions*, but, unlike its nineteenth-century counterpart, the model depicted by Fuentes sheds a rather different light on the "productive passions of liberal discourse" (41). Although eroticism and attraction are still central elements of Fuentes's novels, the sexual magnetism between heterosexual characters fails to create a new public model of national values; on the contrary, Fuentes highlights the obstacles for such model.

1.3 Wealth and social mobility in *La región más transparente*

Fuentes's depiction of the archetypical *criollo* woman is also represented in his second novel, *La región más transparente* published in 1958, a major work that deals among other themes, with the modernization of Mexico and the question of a post-revolutionary Mexican identity in the 1950s. Heavily informed by the problems of Mexican identity posed by Octavio Paz in *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950), this novel draws a Mexico of concrete highways, sports cars, luxury restaurants and cocktail parties which lies directly over the ancient ruins of the capital. According to Octavio Paz*, La región mas transparente*, brought us the first contemporary literary vision of Mexico City, "a double revelation" that offered for the first time the conflict between the modern westernized Mexico and the ancient often-obscured Pre-Hispanic roots: "The novel turns on this duality: the mask and consciousness, the word and criticism" (*Corriente Alterna* 45-46). Furthermore, in *La region más transparente*, Fuentes also narrates a dissection of the elite class and exposes their lives through the voices of a multitude of

Mexican archetypes whose fortunes were closely tied to the outcomes of the Revolution. Fuentes suggests that there is a clear double standard within the Mexican elite, stemming from a nostalgia for a colonial past, irredeemably destroyed by the Revolution, and an effort to find ways to develop along the new political and economic lines. This text clearly represents the progress and capitalization brought about by the ruling PRI elite emphasizing the power of wealth and class distinction in a context of rapid social mobility.

But contrary to the exogamic model of aristocratic reproduction represented through the marriage between Catalina Bernal and Artemio Cruz, the case of the *criollo* woman represented by Pimpinela de Ovando of *La región más transparente*, will illustrate a different model of reproduction among the aristocracy. Thus, *The Tempest*'s analogy of colonial sexual prohibitions is indeed strictly followed and preserved by Pimpinela de Ovando, a *criollo* woman who observes a firm endogamy model. Both *The Tempest's* Miranda and Pimpinela de Ovando represent a particular type of high status women. On the one hand, they both benefit from the colonial system of ethnic segregation; they are racially superior, they are educated, and are regarded as civilized, beautiful, and desired. Both women are also heiresses to an array of symbolic assets such as class, beauty, and family connections, which transforms them into valuable commodities. But on the other hand, within the colonial scheme, they are nonetheless subordinated to patriarchal power and economic forces regardless of being White, wealthy, or educated simply because they are women. They are expected to be obedient in a world dominated by patriarchal laws and become excluded from any decision-making processes. Thus, Pimpinela represents Mexican *criollo* women not only in her ethnic features, but also because she comes from an aristocratic, land-owning dynasty on both sides of her family. She possesses the attributes of the ideal of femininity of her times; not only does she have intelligence and

artistic sensibility. Pimpinela is depicted as a balanced individual from the beginning of the novel. The narrative voice makes special emphasis on the equilibrium of her physical appearance, her admirable proportions, and a harmonious beauty.

The Mexican land-owning elite represented by Catalina Bernal and Artemio Cruz contrasts sharply with the urban setting depicted in *La región más transparente*. The fragmented society and tumultuous present narrated in *Región* derives perhaps from Fuentes's critique of the 1950s PRI propaganda of Mexican modernity and progress. Apparently, Fuentes work challenges the implementation of a national identity, or as Chelene Helmuth indicates: "The fragmentation of self becomes the loss of self. The refraction of the narrative voice goes beyond reflecting the cacophony of modernity: it points to plurality as the necessary norm" (27). In *La región más transparente*, the multitude of voices and social spaces, parallels the ferocious social mobility that took place in the times of President Miguel Alemán. As Helmuth observes, "This stylistic rendering of a post-revolutionary society suffering from radical upheaval portrays the attempt at forging a novel Mexican identity from the standpoint of different members of the society" (30). Both *Región* and *la muerte de Artemio Cruz* present a society in which traditional social denominators such as ethnicity, education, and appearance become more and more blurred and elusive; and thus a danger to the preservation of class privilege.

The post-revolutionary social space as depicted in Pablo Piccato's *City of Suspects*, characterizes Mexico City as a territory in dispute in which several social groups compete for its control. Since the times of the Porfiriato era: "The urban space reveals itself to be permeable: the *populacho* invaded the central city, expanded politics spatially, engaged directly with government offices and broke implicit boundaries in their claim to participate in an expanding public sphere" (19). The public space, both physical and communicational, had been

monopolized and controlled by the aristocracy during the nineteenth century. The once exclusive colonias Roma, Cuauhtémoc, and Juárez become the battleground in which the impoverished aristocrats such as the Ovandos struggled to gain ground against a capitalist society supported by a group of newly enriched *mestizo*s.

The mixing of new money and class distinction is undoubtedly and aspect that worries the female descendants of the former aristocratic elite, and as a prime specimen of this group, Pimpinela de Ovando informs us of her views on this topic through a candid conversation with Ixca Cienfuegos at a bar in la Zona Rosa. When the latter insinuates a possible sexual encounter with her, she bluntly expresses that she considers herself a repository of distinction: "you'd like the luster of an aristocratic name, my friend, so here I am. I think you said it once yourself… give me cash and I'll give you class, give me class and I'll give you cash" (*Where the Air is Clear* 226), but in the end she refuses to even dine with him. Besides Pimpinela's revelation that she is in fact aware and convinced of her class superiority, perhaps what is more revealing from this conversation is that the aristocratic woman *admits* that her social capital is for sale to the best bidder.

Control of distinction markers appears as a fundamental point in Pimpinela de Ovando's discourse, the "luster" that her kin possesses. While conversing with Silvia Regules, the wife of a wealthy financier, Pimpinela affirms:

> It is so pleasant to know someone like you in Mexico City. Distinction can't be acquired, Silvia, my dear. You know, after losing everything in the Revolution, it's like finding wealth again to meet people like ourselves, with whom one may make believe for a while that nothing has been lost. That the gifts of good taste and elegance […] in a word, to meet kindred souls. (*Where the Air* 234)

Pimpinela, a *criollo* woman is utterly aware of the value of her name, and, as Sebek indicates, she uses it for her own profit as she disguises her intentions to sell some seventeenth century paintings to Silvia Regules. Pimpinela's words also reaffirm Bourdieu's concept of aristocratic recognition, by which members of this class decode meanings attached to behaviors and markers.

In addition to her dialogues with friends, the omniscient narrative voice invites the reader into Pimpinela's inner monologue and childhood memories. The setting for these streams of unconscious discourse is the private space of Pimpinela's Colonia Juárez residence. Alone in an apartment that keeps the remnants of her former luxurious family house:

> Walls hung in green damask, a sideboard of mother-of-pearl marquetry, White marble vases on stands carved into garlands with cold White pears, flowers, peaches, nuts. Pimpinela opened her eyes for an instant on everything inside the huge home surrounded by formal gardens. Tapestried chairs, a cabinet of blue Sevres porcelain, a *rocaille* clock […] reproductions of Watteau scenes; arabesque chair backs, flutes over doors, candelabra of silver with cold cups. (*Where the Air* 228)

As illustrated in the previous quote, the narrative voice depicts a series of images which are associated to the extravagance of the Nineteenth-Century Mexican aristocracy. Not only are these luxury objects inscribed in Pimpinela's childhood memories, but they also describe her desire for wealth in her present.

Pimpinela reminisces of a series of conversations with her mother through which the reader can confirm that the distinction that characterizes her is the result of a long process of constructed and reinforced performative rituals. Even though Mexico had a stable republican government since the 1930s, the de Ovandos continue acting like old aristocrats. This is revealed by the notion that a *criollo* elite is superior to the commoners. For instance, Pimpinela

remembers a conversation with her mother, Angélica de Ovando, a widow that inherited a substantial number of buildings in Mexico City, and forbids her daughter from dating outside her circle of "decent" acquaintances.

Although the de Ovandos lost a significant part of their fortune during the Revolution, class for them is still defined by inheritance. Angélica insist that her daughter's most valuable asset is her distinction: "You are more than merely pretty. I should say that you are also distinguished. That you appear to have inherited ----" (*Where the Air* 232). Consequently, Angélica also manifests the assumption that, along with biological qualities, a series of socially constructed behaviors, such as decency and dignity, are in fact genetic traits. Nonetheless, Fuentes questions the validity of this concept of aristocratic distinction. Thus the concepts of memory, inheritance, and education that are inherent to traditional perceptions of high social status are manipulated in *La region más transparente* to expose their nature as purely discursive constructs. They are presented as artificially imposed methods of self-perception that result useless without a substantial fortune to back up. In this respect, Fuentes also criticizes the other side of the spectrum; namely, the bourgeoisie that arose after the revolutionary armed conflict ended.

The novel also depicts the upwardly mobile trends of the 1940s and 1950s. Norma Larragoiti embodies the *nouveau-riche* who has benefited from her marriage to an industrial and banking tycoon. In a stark contrast, Norma moves in the same privileged social circles as Pimpinela, and occasionally helps her find jobs for family members. In the context of social mobility, Norma longs for acceptance, and to her advantage, she is perfectly aware of the dire financial circumstances under which the de Ovandos live. In a revealing conversation with her aristocratic counterpart, Norma asserts that:

> Look, baby-girl. I am not really from one of your snob old families. My father was a shopkeeper in the north and my mother was a vulgar old woman whom you saw once a long time ago, at the train station, do you remember? And you thought she was my servant […] and how does that make you feel? Because in spite of all your titles and your colonial ancestors, sweetheart, I'm more than you are. I'm on top now and you are on the bottom. And that fizzled-out old aunt of yours is no more than a servant herself, for all her deep blue blood, just as much a servant as my bedroom maid. (*Where the Air* 282)

From this quote, it becomes evident that Norma's ideas are substantiated by her husband's wealth, but the deliberate and calculated meanness that she expresses in comparing the old aristocrats to her live-in maid is a key element in understanding Bourdieu's principle of recognition;[14] she interacts with other elite members and moves in the same social milieu, but is not recognized as the distinguished type. Natasha, another character, confirms the conflict between Norma Larragoiti and Pimpinela de Ovando originates in the desire of the new bourgeoisie to acquire distinction: "Pimpinela is very nice", said Natasha when she saw their eyes meeting. "There is only one person who doesn't like her: Norma Larragoiti. With all her money, she'll never have her style and breeding. That's why she's jealous, the little parvenue" (*Where the Air* 316).

Regardless of her poor background, Norma enters into the arena of power and wishes to enter into the circles of distinguished *criollo* aristocrats. Undoubtedly, she and her millionaire husband belong to the Mexican wealthy elite, but she has a desire to be accepted into the intimate circle of the old aristocratic families such as the de Ovandos. She is ultimately frustrated not only by a blind reliance on her husband's fortune, but also by her pride. Norma believes in the power

[14] Bourdieu affirms that the members of nobility and aristocracies interrelate with one another by mutual acquaintance and recognition.

of money and ultimately rejects the idea that the de Ovandos are superior. Norma desires acceptance, but she also wants to be above the Ovandos, so subjecting herself to Pimpinela's wishes creates a conflict in her interests. In this respect, Norma resembles Caliban for she has decoded the language of the oppressor, and like Caliban, she also rebels against the colonial masters. On the economic side she is well above the de Ovandos; but in the *social* distinction hierarchies, she remains an outsider. Through her insults towards Pimpinela, Norma decidedly disarticulates the de Ovandos' perceived superiority; although at the same time she makes it evident that a large fortune is her only asset in the social arena.

It is clear that Norma, as well as Artemio Cruz, has figured out the myth of the aristocratic blood and lineage for she understands that, without a considerable fortune to substantiate their ethnic, cultural or historical differences, they are beneath her at least in strictly economic conditions. Norma's money grants her the power to purchase any luxury item she desires. This power along with her intentions to penetrate the aristocratic circles represents a threat in the eyes of the aristocrats. Therefore, as in *The Tempest's* rebellion of Caliban, the aristocrats realize that persons like Norma must be stopped from gaining power. Similarly to what happens in *The Tempest's* island, the perceived success of the aristocratic family will result from Pimpinela's marriage to another well-bred male, Rodrigo Pola, whose characterization adequately fits into the character of Miranda's lover Ferdinand.

Let us remember that in *The Tempest*, Miranda is far from playing an idle role, on the contrary, she actively schemes plots and works with Ferdinand seeking to gain her own advantage. The aristocrat female is neither naive nor inactive. In "The Traffic in Women," an analysis of kinship systems and the various roles that women play in marriage alliances, Gay le Rubin affirms that: "Kinship and marriage are always parts of total social systems, and are

always tied into economic and political arrangements" (56). These processes become especially obvious in the colonial world where racial stereotyping and unequal distribution of wealth are institutionalized and deeply rooted in the culture. According to Sebek, women participate in several ways in the colonial setting, even just by being objects of desire and matrimonial commodities:

> The Tempest helps us see how the tangle of "economic" and "erotic" motives is particularly dense in a dynastic sex/gender system that is intertwined with capitalist forms of profit. The conceptualization of an aristocratic woman such as Miranda as an exchanged object rather than as a transactor herself threatens to collapse class difference, since it potentially makes her an erotic property for men other than aristocrats and princely heirs. (466)

As the female stereotype of women of her class mandates, Pimpinela becomes a beautiful decorative commodity, a woman who has been restrained and who has lost her autonomy. To respond to this particular question Sebek confirms that: "Although Miranda is positioned as the prize, the goods to be won, she is herself a desiring, speaking transactor" (469). This explains how both Miranda and Pimpinela participate actively in the consolidation of their marriages, but ironically, their efforts are limited by their ultimate submission to the patriarchal system.

In this context, it is not surprising that the notion of a woman's 'decency' or 'value' consequently dictates that she remain a virgin until marriage. In this case, Pimpinela must adhere to the colonial role designated to *criollo* women and, unlike Catalina Bernal in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, she hopes to find a wealthy husband among the *criollo* elite. The question of Pimpinela's celibacy and virginity is a matter of mockery among her circle; it is viewed as an old-fashioned tradition that the growth of the metropolis may easily dissolve: "And tied to her

virginity as if her aristocracy were defined by the preserved condition of her ass. Really, Bobó, that was all right when Mexico City was a village and everyone knew everyone. But now with four million, frankly no one gives a damn whether a girl has had it or not" (252). The previous conversation between Gus and Bobó reveals that a woman's virginity becomes less valuable in the new urban order, and in marriage courtship. However, for a woman in search of a wealthy husband, virginity remains a marker of traditional aristocratic value.

Growth of Mexico City in the 1950s facilitated the anonymity of its inhabitants, and thus, expressions of sexuality transcend the inner social circle and be manifested in other city spaces. Metropolitan spaces affect the psyche of the city dweller. German social thinker Georg Simmel argues that one of the many conflicts that characterize the modern individual in the metropolitan setting is the tension that results between individual and group interest "in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life" ("The Metropolis and Mental Life", 409). Therefore, a conurbation of four million inhabitants diminishes the intensity of human interaction, and thus creates the relative freedom for these 1950s Mexico City dwellers. But the comments on Pimpinela's lack of sexual liberation ignores two equally important facts; first, that although she lives in an urban setting, her circle of acquaintances is rather limited to the elite members of society; secondly, that her 'virtue' translated into 'virginity' constitutes an added worth in the perceived value of her body as a commodity.

It is necessary to explain the reasons why Pimpinela finds herself in this network of oppressions and perhaps the best way to understand her frustration is through Michel Foucault's concept of power and sexual discipline. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault thoroughly explains that aristocratic and bourgeois families were the first to problematize and control female

sexuality, thus deploying a wide arrange of surveillance and control mechanisms (121). Upon reaching puberty, Pimpinela encounters this complex set of disciplinary measures, not only through her family, but also by the economic restrictions that her family faces after the loss of their haciendas. On the one hand, and according to her mother's traditional values, a young Pimpinela must only aspire to be independently wealthy through marriage; but on the other hand, she also bears the role of preserving the aristocratic blood of her family, therefore not any wealthy man is a suitable candidate for her. To best exemplify this double restriction, the conversations with her mother expose the idea that women of their kind should be excluded from public life; but most importantly, that 'decent' women must sacrifice themselves to maintain the dignity of their families. When asked if she can go out on a date with Roberto Régules, a promising young, albeit non-aristocrat, lawyer, her mother orders: "And as there are no balls given by people we know, none to which your mother would be invited to, and no well-bred young men to escort you, you must just stay at home" (231). Years after into the narrative, Pimpinela informs that a then rich Régules married his secretary, Norma Lagorreitia. Later, Pimpinela speculates that, if her mother had allowed her acquaintance with Robles, she could have had a fancy honeymoon in New York as well as a sumptuous mansion in Las Lomas de Chapultepec neighborhood. However impoverished, Doña Angélica de Ovando still sustains firmly that Pimpinela belongs to a different world and must not show any affliction in front of Norma, whom she considers an inferior woman.

As narrated in the novel, Fuentes suggests that female power figures are important in decision making. Family control does not come exclusively from Pimpinela's mother, but is also exercised by Lorenza de Ovando, another strict guardian of decency and exclusive social interaction. After the revolution, many family decisions depend on the properties they have left.

It is quite remarkable that the recent history of her family is also allegorically depicted by what happens to their Colonia Juárez[15] mansion:

> The house on Hamburgo was broken up, first the garden, which went to some Lebanese as a site for apartment buildings; then the stable, which became a grocery; and last, the front of the house, the drawing rooms and ground and second floors, whoch became a woman's clothing store. They were left with only four upper rooms. A bedroom was converted into a living room. Joaquin's room. And the room in which Doña Lorenza and Benjamín slept. (68)

As can be observed, the exclusive physical space that once showcased the aristocrat's wealth is sequentially reduced in what can therefore be read as a reduction in their position at the top of Mexican society. Fuentes seems to suggest metaphorically that the former exclusive elite must now recede and negotiate with the recently formed bourgeois class as well as with the waves of immigrants who came to Mexico during and after the 1930s. However, it should be noted that, even though Doña Lorenza feels that she has been forced to cede part of her estate, she has nonetheless decided to maintain her distinction at the core, a space that she holds onto firmly and that can only be entered by the strict control of her system of exclusive social interaction.

But in order to successfully cope with the incessant social mobility, other former aristocratic landowners see in their exclusivity a select set of resources that may be exploited. Such is the case of Doña Lorenza, who sees an opportunity to profit from family distinction in their acquaintance with Norma Larragoiti:

[15] During the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century, the wealthy built their houses in three residential areas along Paseo de la Reforma and Avenida Insurgentes: Colonia Cuauhtémoc, Colonia Roma, and Colonia Juárez. Because of the pink cobblestone of its streets, the elegant Colonia Juárez later became known as Zona Rosa.

> You are going to invite Norma Larragoiti to dinner. She's the wife of the banker Federico Robles. She's an upstart, obnoxious, vulgar, a classic anything you care to call her, and Robles is a savage from God knows what jungle. But Norma melts at the mention of an old name, and dinner here, among your mementos, will put her out of her mind. Don't worry, we'll buy everything you need. And the next day, Benjamín will have a position in the bank. (70)

The antagonism between Pimpinela de Ovando and Norma Larragoiti de Robles does not exclusively stem from the former's prohibition to marry outside of the ancient *criollo* families and the latter's monetary ambitions, but it also originates and intensifies with the presence of an aristocratic, yet impoverished male counterpart. As this analysis proposes, a substantial element in the colonial allegory of Caliban and Miranda is precisely the islander's contender, a young aristocrat named Ferdinand who arrives to the island due to a shipwreck caused by Prospero. In Sebek's reading of *The Tempest*, Miranda astutely contemplates the idea of exploiting both men for her profit and comfort; but she ultimately chooses Ferdinand and consequently aids him in his tasks, with the idea that in the end she can leave the island.

In *La Región más transparente*, such figure is represented by Rodrigo Pola, a young writer who, like the de Ovandos, descends from a genealogy within the *criollo* elite, and whose family also suffered the loss of their privileges in the aftermath of the Revolution. During their first encounter, the narrative voice comments on Rodrigo Pola's new fashion style: "He observed that Pimpinela de Ovando kept watching him, his well-cut trousers, the fine-striped Bermuda shirt. This new Rodrigo was very different from the old one" (316). As their conversation begins, she acknowledges the competition between the old *criollo* elite and the new bourgeoisie with which she interacts, but from a calculated distance; she expresses: "Ours is a new society. It has

to be filed down. Fortunately, there are those of us who have salvaged some of the traditions. The Revolution was a horrible shock, but you'll see, not all was lost" (317). In an apparently intentional response, Rodrigo conveys his opinion with regards to the armed conflict and reveals his criollo genealogy in order to catch Pimpinela's attention; he says: "You're right Pimpinela. My mother, Zubarán's daughter's, and he was Díaz's closest friend, always said the same thing. I could understand her; but we had to move from a palace in Colonia Roma to a poor little house on Chopo. This made us hold even tighter to our values" (459). This conversation illustrates yet again the process of aristocratic mutual recognition in two levels. Initially, both characters actively draw on their gaze and proceed to the identification of tangible social status symbols such as fancy clothes and physical features. Finally, each recognize in the other a parallel experience of loss which accentuates their class affiliation.

Following this initial stage, that is, after they have found a match, they engage into a secondary process which consists of the detection of social capital components such as a possible aristocratic heritage or familial connections. Fuentes' narrative constructs a conflict between the characters' sexual desires and their intentions of upward social movement. Rodrigo Pola, Pimpinela de Ovando, and Norma Larragoiti form a complex node of unrequited love and power relationships that is disrupted only when Pola lands a lucrative job as a movie script writer. Immediately, he recognizes that his recently made small fortune can be multiplied through the social connections that a woman like Pimpinela de Ovando can provide for him. In a candid revelation before Natasha introduces Rodrigo Pola to the elite circle where Pimpinela moves, she observes:

> That's the world for you. And the way the rules read, you play the game. You'll get there Rodrigo. There are plenty of ways to make a fortune in Mexico. Nothing is respected

except money in this bourgeois court. You have it and you have everything in Mexico. Without it, you fall on your face into the thieving proletariat mob that is always one of the growing pains of a city. ” (316)

However, in one of the many flashback memories that characterize this novel, the narrative reveals that a nineteen year old Rodrigo was once in love with Norma whom she met at a party in her uncle’s Colonia Juárez residence. Not surprisingly, a money-driven character such as Norma soon rejects the young writer and in due course marries Federico Robles. In a balance of fortunes, Fuentes vindicates the young writer. Years later in the narrative, Pola meets Norma and confesses his love for her; right after she rejects him once again, the narrator reveals he has started a profitable career in movie productions.

In a passage that shows the author’s choice of reversal of fortune as a moralistic device, Pimpinela de Ovando also schemes a revenge plot against Norma that eventually results in the death of the *parvenue*. Using her influence within her circle of wealthy acquaintances, Pimpinela starts a rumor suggesting that Federico Robles’ bank is on the brink of bankruptcy. Many of Pimpinela’s friends liquidate their stock invested in Robles’ financial operations; thus igniting a series of losses for Robles in the stock exchange. Robles informs Norma of their imminent bankruptcy and demands that she return her expensive jewels so that they can have some money relief; but she abruptly declines and proceeds to confess that she married him for his money and that she had always felt a repressed repulsion for him. A fire starts in their Las Lomas de Chapultepec mansion and Norma perishes.

At the closing of the novel, Rodrigo Pola confesses to Ixca Cienfuegos that he loved Norma, but he eventually married Pimpinela because her distinction would be beneficial to his publishing career. But the profit of their marriage is mutual, so in return from his recently

acquired fortune, the de Ovandos have been able to recuperate a great deal of their former lifestyle:

> What? Pimpinela? She gives to me her name, her elegance, her social relations… Just as Norma without knowing it gave too. And I go on giving to no one. That was why I married her. So she could give to me… even her virginity. And she had to believe I give her something too. Aunt Lorenza can rebuild her goddamn house on Hamburgo and amuse herself with throwing the Jews and Spaniards and once again receive her beloved mummies at tea. (358)

But not only did the de Ovando family benefit from Rodrigo Pola's money, as this dissertation argues so far, the former aristocrats also managed to preserve an alleged clean lineage. Borrowing Sebek's concept of ethnic purity, the family's ethnicity remains "uncontaminated," an essential trait in the aristocratic endogamy model of reproduction. For instance, Tía Lorenza has expelled the newcomers that she utterly abhorred while Pimpinela can enjoy the luxuries for which she believes she was prepared. The Pola-de Ovando marriage has also produced offspring, two male children that will very likely be educated within the same aristocratic framework. Pimpinela de Ovando becomes thus an exemplary *criollo* aristocratic woman, not only because she has successfully achieved economic security, but also because ultimately, she becomes the means of aristocratic re-production both biologically and culturally. Both Rodrigo and Pimpinela work as an allegorical image of *The Tempest's* Miranda and Ferdinand model, one based on endogamy and which is perceived as ethnically clean and continuously prestigious.

1.4 Supernatural aristocratic reproduction in *Aura*

So far, this chapter has looked at endogamy and exogamy as two means of cultural and biological reproduction. In these two instances, sexual reproduction is the only possible method

of human breeding.[16] There is however, another rather peculiar mode of reproduction that Fuentes explores in his oeuvre, the supernatural. Fuentes´s novella *Aura* is a valuable point of departure for a reexamination of aristocratic reproduction because it reiterates a number of important questions about how gender, race, and rank related to the perception of class distinction and continuity. Although the social and historical elements in the novels that this study has analyzed so far are realistic, *Aura* presents the themes of human reproduction and preservation of memory through the use of fantastic elements and metaphorical schemes. Fuentes's short novel shares many elements with fantastic fiction; yet this work has seldom been read as a historical novel. Critics have by and large agreed that the experiences narrated by Felipe Montero are supernatural in nature, and although there is a great deal of uncertainty with regards to the characters, the historical facts alluded in the narrative, are rarely, if ever, questioned.

Perhaps one of the key mechanisms in Fuentes's novels is that his fiction does not pretend to merely reproduce history and social reality as unchanging facts; on the contrary, it challenges pre-conceived notions of class by offering other alternative interpretations of history and society, or as Linda Hutcheon puts it, fictional literature is one of several "expressive modes" through which the individual can express the facts of life (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 7). In this novella, Fuentes presents a discourse that challenges traditional notions of time as a chronological and linear succession of events.

While fantastic texts have frequently been dismissed by historians and socially minded scholars as escapist literature, in Latin America they become a particularly effective vehicle for exploring issues related to identity. In this respect, Linda Hutcheon argues that "there are

[16] Stem cell research in the last two decades has been successful in reproducing animals and plants, but has been banned from experimentation with human cells.

important parallels between the process of history-writing and fiction-writing and among the most problematic of these are the common assumptions about narrative and about the nature of mimetic representation" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 58). Therefore, common motifs in fantastic fiction, such as dreams, time suspension, or the existence of parallel worlds, became a common device by Latin American writers to reclaim the past and examine history from a different point of view.

Moreover, the fantastic allows characters to go back in time allowing the past to reverberate against the present. The protagonist of this short novel is Felipe Montero, a young historian who answers a job advertisement and meets Consuelo de Llorente and her young niece Aura. His job requires that he move into Consuelo's old mansion and transcribe her dead husband's memoirs. As Fuentes's *Aura* puts it, the past cannot remain contained in the pages of General Llorente's memoirs; on the contrary, it returns in the form of a phantasmagoric presence as long as characters' issues remain unresolved. Inside Consuelo's house, the past and present coexist because the social conflicts that arose in nineteenth century Mexico continue to influence the 1950s present narrated by Fuentes. In resonance with *La región más transparente*, Mexico City is the setting for this novella, because it is a metaphor for the buried past. The modern city built over the ruins of Tenochtitlán, allows characters in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries to share the same physical space.

The reader's perception of these characters evolves during the course of the narrative and immediately reminds us that past and present are connected. As Rafael Montano considers, the works of Fuentes purposefully explore areas that current historiography does not take into account, such as non-linear time, popular myths, and other undocumented aspects of life that do have an effect in society but escape the grasp of historical writing (*Tropología y el Arte*, 28). In

addition, Rubial García concludes, in the context of narrative strategies, that what distinguishes historic novels and films is the fact that their contents and premises have a direct relation with documented historical facts from a particular era. In historical texts "es válido construir y reconstruir personajes en situaciones posibles y crear interacciones que no sucedieron pero que el argumento y la recreación de época estén lo más apegado posible a la documentación que refleja la realidad que se pretende narrar" [it is valid to build and re-build characters in possible situations, and to create interactions that did not happen; as long as the plot and historical setting reflect reality as closely as posible] (Rubial García 108). The representational mechanisms that result from the interaction between fictional and historical narrative in Fuentes' early novels provides an ample field from which we can re-construct a moment in the past if we are to have a clearer understanding of the present. It is thus possible to read the social and political representations in *Aura*. Fuentes establishes a bridge that links fantastic literature and history. Fuentes achieves this by narrating a fictionalized recount of Mexican history in the elusive style of the fantastic, the main characters in this novella manifest history through their memories and dreams.

A supernatural interpretation of the text suggests that the old Consuelo Llorente has managed to reincarnate herself through witchcraft and has used her beautiful young niece, Aura, as enticement to attract Felipe to her house. In line with this interpretation, Felipe appears to also be a reincarnation of Consuelo's dead husband, General Llorente. At first, Felipe seems hesitant about moving into Consuelo's house to complete the task of transcribing General Llorente's letters, but at the same time he has two rather powerful motivations; the first is his attraction to Consuelo's young niece, Aura, and the second is the handsome salary Consuelo has offered him

upon the completion of the project. In the end the narrator leads us to believe that Aura may in fact be Consuelo's double and that, coincidentally, he is Consuelo's dead husband.

Although lacking detail, the biographical information that the text sheds about General Llorente, easily puts him within the top of the *criollo* elite. His memoirs indicate that he spent his childhood in a hacienda and that he received a formal education in France. He later became a member of Emperor Maximilian of Hapsburg's court during Mexico's Second Empire, and that, after the triumph of the Reformists, he was ultimately exiled in Paris. Nothing in the text informs the reader about the ancestry or social extract of his wife Consuelo, but her physical description easily characterizes her as a *criollo* woman of fair skin, green eyes, and dark brown hair.[17] When Felipe first meets Aura, he is immediately captivated by her gaze. In a parallel manner, General Llorente falls in love with young Consuelo, as stated in his memoirs: "*elle avait quinze ans lorsque je l'ai connu et, si j'ose dire, ce sont ses yeux verts qui ont fait ma perdition*" [she was fifteen years old when I met her, and if I dare say, it was her green eyes that casued my perdition] (*Aura* 40). The description of Consuelo´s green penetrating eyes is crucial because they are the link between the old woman and her young double.

The notion of rebirth and a clear separation of body and mind is a recurrent topic in Fuentes's works especially in *Aura* and *Instinto de Inez* (2001). In this respect, according to C.J. Ducasse and Paul Edwards, the general idea of reincarnation arises from the principle of dualism which assumes that humans are constituted by both body and soul, and that these two elements are separated at the moment of death. In the Western tradition, the distinction between a material realm and a separate mental sphere can be traced back to primitive animism and has been taken

[17] With the exception of Pimpinela de Ovando who has blue eyes, all other criollo female characters that we have presented in this chapter have the same physical characteristics. It is also no coincidence that Artemio Cruz, the illegitimate son of a criollo, also outstands for his penetrating green eyes.

by philosophy since the times of the Plato. Reincarnation is thus defined as "the view that human beings do not, as most of us assume, live only once, but live many, perhaps an infinite number of times, acquiring a new body for each incarnation" (Edwards 5). The belief that the soul does not end with physical death is encapsulated in the doctrine of metempsychosis, which "in its strict form invariably regards reincarnation as the inevitable destiny of the human soul" (Bertholet 59). The concept of the transcendence of the human soul is central in Aura, because most of the novella's characters are manifest through their ghostly presence.

In spite of the uncanny character of this novel, it is imperative to acknowledge that the general assertion that Aura and Felipe Montero are reincarnations of the Llorentes is merely one popular interpretation; for in fact there is no unambiguous clue in the text confirming or denying this claim. To further acknowledge this problem, let us first depart from the fact that the phenomenon of metempsychosis is incompatible with the methods of modern science. At the same time, the doctrine of metempsychosis is limited by the principle that an individual's soul in the process of migration through several bodies retains no recollection of any former lives. A strict observance of these principles would immediately invalidate the novella's premise of a possible reincarnation of the protagonists. However, and for the purposes of this study, I would argue that Fuentes resolves this obstacle by incorporating two literary strategies, first and perhaps most obviously, the fact that the fantastic and ambiguous nature of the text, indisputably allows for different interpretations, one of which contemplates the Llorentes' reproduction through paranormal means such as metempsychosis. Secondly, we should emphasize Fuentes's use of at least two other paranormal processes, namely mnemonic awakening and retro-cognition. The first is manifest through Felipe's reading of General Llorente's manuscripts which have symbolically 'preserved' his memories; while the second appears thanks to the old

photographs in which Felipe Montero recognizes himself as the long-dead general and Aura as Consuelo.

Although modern biology generally agrees that an individual has a unique combination of genes and phenotypical characteristics inherited from their parents, but since identity is culturally constructed, an individual's genetic constitution does not confer any personality traits. In fact, the principle of endogamous biological reproduction that dominated royals and aristocrats since primitive times seems to stem from this desire to maintain a similarity which includes mind as well as body. Family likeness both phenotypical and especially cultural is, in the case of Consuelo Llorente, a powerful incentive to the belief in metempsychosis as a unique reproductive strategy to help maintain a clean aristocratic ancestry. We could therefore assume that through the assumed reincarnation of Aura and her husband, General Llorente, Fuentes is offering us a model of aristocratic reproduction that goes beyond colonial sexual control. An endogamous model so repressive and so extreme, that it can only be performed through paranormal phenomena, and that can only be possible in a work of fiction.

Memory and dreams play an essential role in the narrative and provide clues that situate the characters into the context of social exclusion and distinction. For Felipe Montero, the perception of what is real is closely tied to what Consuelo/Aura preserves in documents as well as in unwritten memories. When Felipe comes across a photograph of young Consuelo and her long-dead husband, the young historian exclaims: "it's he, it's… it's you" (*Aura* 137), this immediately suggests that he is actually going through the process of retro-cognition of his own face in the antique photograph, which may in fact mean that he is the General's most recent reincarnation. While thoroughly examining the photograph, Felipe mentions: "You cover General Llorente's beard with your finger, and imagine him with black hair, and you only

discover yourself: blurred, lost, forgotten, buy you, you, you" (*Aura* 137). This last quote is essential in the plot because while Felipe acknowledges the fact that his memories of previous lives may have been temporarily lost, at the same time he recognizes his own image, nonetheless.

A parallel process takes place with Consuelo and Aura, although in this case, the behavior of both women suggests that they have been in control of the metempsychosis process all along. Felipe discovers after making passionate love to young Aura, that Consuelo has taken her place in his bed, although he recognizes her eyes, this point in the narrative takes us again in the direction of a possible reincarnation. In fact, Consuelo admits in the end that through her powers, she can remain young again: "She'll come back, Felipe. We'll bring her back together. Let me recover my strength and I'll bring her back" (*Aura* 145). The replacement of one woman for the other strongly suggests that they are two versions of the same person; while Aura is young and attractive, Consuelo is described as a person in forthright state of decay. However, in one of the numerous shifts back and forth between the oniric and the quotidian worlds of Felipe Montero, several inversions occur. What initially was regarded as a dream is later assumed to be real and what he had recognized as his own reality in the present is ultimately revealed to be unstable: "When you wake up, you look for another presence in the room, and realize it's not Aura who disturbs you but rather the double presence of something that was engendered during the night […] you're seeking your other half, that the sterile conception last night engendered your own double" (*Aura* 117). It is impossible for Felipe to locate how and when those shifts have taken place, because the supposedly clear limits that had originally defined the two fields collapse inside Consuelo's house.

It is particularly appealing that even in the paranormal context of reincarnation it is the female subject that still performs the task of reproduction, for it is Consuelo who summons

Felipe Montero and awakens his former identity by returning his past memories to him. In consonance with Sebek's argument that colonial women have an active role in praxis of reproduction, let us illustrate that Consuelo exclaims to her husband when she refers to her powers to bring life through paranormal powers: "She cried, 'Yes, yes, yes, I've done it, I've re-created her! I can invoke her, I can give her life with my own life! " (*Aura* 133). Consuelo is a witness and vehicle for returning past memories, and as Hutcheon notes regarding past incidents, "in epistemological terms we can only know them today through texts. Past events are given meaning, not existence, by their representation in history" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 82). It is also Consuelo who returns in the form of Aura whether it is by metempsychosis or by the illusion of a younger double. As we saw earlier in this chapter, the reproductive control of the colonial elite was possible by a strict control of sexual contact and the exclusion of ethnically marked populations and *criollo* women were the mechanism of this separation. In the case of the Llorentes, it is Consuelo's power and knowledge of the paranormal that serves as both repository of memory and instrument of human duplication.

Consuelo's body as well as the atmosphere of her old Centro Histórico house are additionally evocative of aristocratic inactivity and ruin. Along with the previous texts that we have commented in this chapter, the image of the Mexico City colonial palace is also present in this novella, a house so crucial in the narrative that it becomes almost a character in the plot. In fact, old buildings, according to Michel de Certeau, represent a phantasmagoric presence of the past, they are silent witnesses of history which in themselves also constitute a historical narrative, but one that has gradually lost its meanings with the pass of time. The house as a ghostly presence, adds on to the supernatural perception that one has of this text. Moreover, De Certeau goes on to affirm that these ancient buildings become actors that evoke narratives but do

not talk, a presence that resembles a ghost ("Ghosts in the city" 135). As we shall see, Consuelo de Llorente's Centro Histórico house is essentially that type of phantasmagoric character, which to a great extent also metaphorically represents the fate of the Llorentes, that is, an aristocratic family with no biological offspring and a historical memory in the brink of oblivion.

Located on Donceles Street, in the adjacent area north of the Metropolitan Cathedral, the Llorente's house is depicted as an imposing fortress. The narrative voice of Felipe Montero describes it as a solid "on the baroque harmony of the carved stones; on the battered Stone saints with pigeons clustering on their shoulders; on the latticed balconies, the upper gutters, the sandstone gargoyles" (*Aura* 9). The location of this colonial palace is essential in our analysis because its aristocratic memory goes back to a time even prior to the Porfiriato years when the Mexico City elite moved west of the old center district. As Genaro Pérez comments, the house in Aura offers the entrance to a non-renovated space: "un viejo palacio semi-arruinado y medio abandonado, espacio cerrado largamente, la casa constituye nuevamente la entrada a otro mundo" [an old, semi-ruined, and semi-abandoned palace, largely enclosed space, the house again constitutes the entrance to another world] (16). The world inside is not only different in terms of abandonment and suspended time, but it also resonates with the aristocratic principle of exclusion, for only its members are allowed to penetrate and decipher the meanings of social status symbols.

The shadow and damage inside Consuelo's house does more than just create a mysterious atmosphere in the novella. It literally and figuratively depicts the current state of this particular aristocratic family. For instance, the patio is dark and full of wild herbs, every door inside the building is a swinging door without a lock, and the Nineteenth-Century furniture has not been renovated. Once a palace-style colonial building with gardens, the house has been reduced and

trapped due to the metropolitan growth of the city and a major shift in economic activity, as Consuelo explains: "They've walled us in, Señor Montero. They've built up all around us and blocked off the light. They've tried to force me to sell, but I'll die first. This house is full of memories for us. They won't take me out of here till I'm dead! (*Aura* 51). The house is here characterized as a custodian of the family memories, but most importantly, it reminds us that it is the locus in which their reproduction can be performed. Moreover, Felipe admits that he believed that houses within this urban perimeter were uninhabited and simply served as commercial lots: "[…] that conglomeration of old colonial mansions, all of them converted into repair shops, jewelry shops, shoe stores, drugstores" (*Aura* 9). It is thus reflected here that major social and economic changes made the landowning *criollo* families cede part of their territory to a new type of commerce and trade that significantly differs from the feudal model of wealth based on land ownership[18].

The description of the interior decor of the bathrooms, bedrooms, and living room is also evocative of a wealthy past, for instance: "You go through the parlor: furniture upholstered in faded silk; glass-fronted cabinets containing porcelain figurines, musical clocks, medals, glass balls, carpets with Persian designs; pictures of rustic scenes; green velvet curtains" (*Aura* 24). The former luxury contrasts sharply with the current state of the house, which in my reading, constitutes a subtly expressed critique of this social class, for Consuelo has fiercely resisted any change while she sees herself as a guardian of an aristocratic memory that bears little or no meaning outside of the aristocratic territory. It is no coincidence that the intimate spaces of the

[18] It is noteworthy that in a recent trip to Mexico City, I personally witnessed that a great number of these former palaces have been acquired by corporates such as Grupo Carso, Apple Inc. as well as Inditex; these former aristocratic spaces nowadays function as branches for Telmex, Seguros Imbursa, Sanborn´s restaurants, Zara, Máximo Duty clothing stores, etc.

aristocracy that this chapter has analyzedbear striking resemblances, much like their inhabitants, they are reduced, aged, and consistently characterized as declining. [19]

Chapter One Conclusions

As post-colonial theorists have observed, it is impossible to discuss the aristocracy as a defined class without establishing its relationship to the subaltern populations and without seeing it as a gendered phenomenon. Since the reproduction of aristocracy depends on their biological continuity and the reproduction of their cultural practices, an endogamy mode of reproduction is preferred because it preserves the principle of exclusivity under which nobilities and aristocracies are founded. We have observed though, that historical events such as the Mexican Revolution brought about major structural shifts that dramatically altered the economy and the power relationships. The early narrative production of Carlos Fuentes shows that after the Revolution, the *criollo* aristocrats recurred to different strategies to preserve or recuperate the status that was lost during the armed conflict. One of those strategies was the adoption of exogamic practices, in which cultural elements such as the perception of ethnicity and the display of distinction played an essential role. As we have discussed here, the cultural capital of female characters like Catalina Bernal or Pimpinela de Ovando become a rather profitable asset which in the end works to their benefit. I shall discuss in further chapters, how this aristocratic capital continues to be an instrument of negotiation in the context of more recent historical and economic shifts such as the economic crash of the 1980s and the onset of globalization in the mid-1990s and how *criollo* women are represented in cultural texts. In any case, the exogamy model understood through the Caliban and Miranda sexual ban appears to be relevant and valid, but only suspended in the midst of an economic crisis. The *criollo* aristocracy, which represents

[19] The Bernal's house in Puebla and Doña Lorenza de Ovando´s Hamburgo Street mansion.

itself as a strong and solid unity, is in fact porous and vulnerable to power shifts. It is indeed so open, that it has created all that intricate and zealous system of reproductive exclusivity.

It is rather important to point out that, although Fuentes clearly depicts these characters as being the carriers of a *criollo* aristocratic heritage and class memory, he also provides the reader with valuable hints that could potentially dismantle their class pride. Indeed, some crucial past events have been obscured and eventually erased from these family genealogies. For instance, the narrative voice in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* and *La región más transparente*, casually shares with the reader a couple of key secrets about the origin of their fortunes. For instance, upon Don Gamaliel Bernal's death, it is revealed that he was a trader who multiplied his fortune after the reformist government of Benito Juárez confiscated a large amount of lands from the Catholic Church. As for the de Ovandos, the narrator of *La región*, exposes that this illustrious family made a fortune through a series of corruption schemes within the Porfirio Díaz's top officials. As for the reasons why Fuentes casually drops these hints, there are at least two possible explanations. The simplest one would be that the narrator has no sympathy with the de Ovandos or the Bernals and thus chooses to reveal an obscure part of their past; but if we assume that there is a lack of empathy with these characters, we would also have to expect the narrator to be more emphatic about these secrets to start. A second, and perhaps better explanation would imply that the narrator himself is another aristocrat or some insider within the elite, who purposefully drops this information in the form of gossip with the intent to form a complicity bond with the reader. Regardless of his reasons, Fuentes shows that aristocratic memory is selective as he provides the reader with the information to deconstruct the myths of these families so-called magnificent past.

Although it can be argued that they dynamically work toward securing power and wealth, in the end it is a power and wealth that rests in their husbands' hands. As we shall see in later chapters, this trend radically changed in the 1980s and 1990s for the high-class women represented in more recent texts (both *criollo* and *mestizo*) show significantly more nuanced personalities. Although a new powerful elite emerged from the Mexican Revolution, through these texts, we can clearly see that the nouveau-riche only sought to acquire the distinction of their antecessors. Even after both *Región* and *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* anticipate a society in which archetypal social common denominators such as ethnicity, education, and appearance are challenged, in the end there is a return to the same deep ethnic distinctions between *criollos* and *mestizos*, which continued to dominate cultural practices even after the triumph of the Mexican Revolution. It is remarkable that during the 1940s and 1950s a new *mestizo* national discourse was institutionalized in public education and especially in the plastic arts. The PRI government famously sponsored many intellectuals and artists including self-declared communists like Diego Rivera to also represent their version of Mexican history through movements like *muralismo*. It was also the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, which often depicts a *mestizo* national image and values.

Chapter Two

Representations of Class Struggle in Golden Age Mexican Film (1940-1958)

The ongoing academic debates in cultural studies focus primarily on the notions of identity and representation, and their relationships to power. This set of relationships was analyzed and explained by Stuart Hall in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, where he argues that the images produced by the mass media seek to define who people are; but most importantly, that these images in turn produce knowledge, because much of what we know about the world depends on how we see it through representation. Hall is particularly interested in the meanings that are articulated in this process: "Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged by the members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things" (15). Hall goes on to explain that the power of the visual media lies in their ability to circulate images extensively, in a process where they attach meanings to those images, rather than leaving them to interpretation. He believes that in the case of film, these meanings become attached to images where there is a preponderance of similar images presented in similar contexts and styles. The fixed meanings are manifested as stereotypes of the identities represented in the images (257). Therefore, according to Hall, power is mediated through the circulation of images, and the fixing of meanings associated with them. Indeed, not only is "power" a complex and much contested term, but in current Latin American studies, it is integral in the criticism of discourse and the notions of identity and representations.

The social rearticulating of post-revolutionary Mexican society was not only a response to the populist administrations which favored a new national image, but also the result of relationships between ethnic identities and power. In *Yearning: Race, gender, and Cultural*

Politics, bell hooks writes of the importance of recognizing how racial identities are commodified to sustain systems of domination. Besides critiquing cultural representations to uncover the ways in which identities are commodified, she states that an examination of discursive practices can lead to emancipation. Discursive practices are discourses and ways of producing knowledge that serves to foster cultural beliefs and sustain existing social arrangements (22). Literature, film production, or a national culture are some of the representational machineries that serve to consolidate discursive practices which enable conceptions of national identity and social affiliation.

In the 1940s, Mexican Film played a crucial and fundamental role in the consolidation of the nation-state and the creation of stereotypes of the identities of social classes. It functioned as a vehicle to promote the social, economic, and political interests of the recently-formed political elite through representations of the poor, the wealthy, the decent, the immoral, and so on. Many of these representations are reflective of a culture of social competition and mobility. In turn, the beliefs and ideas about these groups are reinforced by their cultural representations. In Mexico, the notion of realism in film has often been tied to the examination of social problems stemming from centuries of colonial rule, racism, and economic inequality. The development of Mexican film industry paralleled the growth of nationalism during the period stretching from the mid-1930s and the early 1960s.[20]

Due to the fact that social distinction is performative, a significant component of the difference that a group chooses to set them apart is predominantly visual. When one thinks about

[20] Jean Franco affirms that in both literature and film production, Latin American regimes were been deeply implicated in the process of national formation and cultural identity ("Nation as Imagined Community 204). Franco asserts that now-canonical works of the 1950's and 1960's: "offer a space in which different historical developments and different cultures overlap. What they enact is the unfinished and impossible project of the modernizing state ("Nation Imagined Community" 205).

the aristocracy, one of the first images that comes to mind is their look: their clothes, hair styles, and other manifestation of fashion. In fact, according to Guadalupe Loaeza's numerous discussions of the Mexican elite, *la facha*, namely, the look, is the primary factor that determines the inclusion or exclusion of an individual into a particular social circle (*Manual Gente Bien* 271). As a predominantly visual medium, cinema has been instrumental in the conceptualization, projection, popularization, and ultimate stereotyping of social classes since its inception. During its Golden Age, Mexican filmmakers adapted the Hollywood star system to the local cinema market. In the framework of a post-colonial society, the equation between color of skin and ethnic category greatly determined (and continues to do so) the ways in which Mexican cinema actors were assigned movie roles. Consequently, fair-skinned actresses like Silvia Pinal or Miroslava Stern were frequently cast as upper middle-class, urban women; whereas others like Columba Domínguez or Emilio Fernández were exclusively given the roles of servants, peasants, or poor city-dwellers. However, as I will argue in this chapter, by casting actors and actresses who could portray both low-class and aristocratic characters, the films made in this era show once again that social distinction is performative, unstable, and fluid.

This chapter focuses on the issues of class, gender, and race in Golden Era Mexican Films. The discussion is guided by an analysis of the representations of elite characters in these productions and their relationship to the PRI populist national discourse. As proposed here, 1940s and 1950s movie stars, most of *criollo* phenotypes and genealogy, successfully portrayed Indigenous, *mestizo*, and *criollo* characters. Moreover, the *mestizo* characters promote a national *mestizo* image, whereas they also establish family links with the old landowning aristocrats. In this national discourse, love and family between *mestizos* and *criollos* not only eliminate class barriers, but the creation of a new family also gives legitimacy to the Mexican Revolution. This

chapter begins with an analysis of historical-realist films by auteur Emilio Fernández *Flor Silvestre* (1943) and *Enamorada* (1946) which narrate love stories between *criollos* and *mestizos*. Next, this chapter offers an analysis of love across class and ethnicity in Ismael Rodríguez's *La Cucaracha* (1958). The last section studies the performativity of class in *Escuela de vagabundos* (1954), a comedy of errors by mainstream director Rogelio González.

2.1 Mexican Film as historical representation of the Revolution

The study of historical representation in both film and literature confronts the reader with the problem of authenticity. There is an ongoing scholarly discussion regarding the study of cultural texts as valid sources of historical knowledge. In the 1980s, the appearance of the new historicism began a cross-discipline dialogue between historians and literary critics. It became possible to think of cultural production as artifacts that make visible the ideological processes of a historical period. In this respect, Aram Veseer pointed out that: "No discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature, and our perception and understanding of the past is informed by both literary and non-literary texts that circulate inseparably in our culture (xi). In her seminal work *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, Linda Hutcheon agrees with Veseer, but she also argues that "there are important parallels between the processes of history-writing and fiction-writing and among the most problematic of these are the common assumptions about narrative and about the nature of mimetic representation" (58). Past events existed in the empirical world, but Hutcheon astutely affirms that: "in epistemological terms we can only know them today through texts. Past events are given *meaning*, not *existence*, by their representation in history" (82).

In the heyday of Mexican film production, filmmakers had already been struggling with the almost impossible task of accurately representing society, both past and contemporary, on the

screen. From the outset, with Fernando de Fuentes's *ranchero* films in the mid-1930s, the Mexican Revolution provided the preferred setting for exploring some of Mexican society's deepest questions on identity on the silver screen. However, the intersection of film and history is frequently somewhat problematic because, as Vivian Sobchack observes, combining contemporary cinema with historical narratives blurs the very meaning of history: "In great part, the effects of our new technologies of representation put us at a loss to fix that 'thing' we used to think of as History or to create clearly delineated and categorical temporal and spatial frames around what we used to think of as the 'historical event'" (5). Consequently, when history serves as pretext for cinema, the authenticity of history appears to dismantle under the pressures to bring the truth of the past into a contemporary fictional text. Historical truth and representation depend upon the decisions made by directors, producers, and script writers. This is true even in the case of documentary film, because the final cut always reflects the "reality" that directors choose to portray.

Well beyond the critical problems of inter-marrying history and film, for over a century, directors have often used historical events to express their own contemporary artistic vision, personal anxieties, and political affiliations. In the case of Mexican film, the mid-twentieth genre of historical film further complicates the difficulties of depicting events such as the Mexican Revolution through cinema. In fact, the very term "Cine de la Revolución" encapsulates this problem, as the phrase seems to denote films created during the Revolution, a frequent misconception. But even if the History within these cinematic texts cannot strictly be studied as primary historical source, these films do provide us with valuable information about the expectations and attitudes of the Mexican mainstream public who made these productions a commercial success.

2.2 Golden Age Cinema

The period between 1940 and 1958 in Mexican film production is popularly known as *cine de oro*, or *cine de la época de oro*,[21] both terms referring to a Golden Age. Recent studies suggest that although film scholarship has become more nuanced with regard to the discussion of specific works, there is still no general agreement about how the term *cine de la época de oro* should be used with reference to film or what specific themes or techniques set it apart as a distinct category. In *Celluloid Nationalism and Other Melodramas* a study of nationalism in Mexican film, Susan Dever refers to the difficulty of categorizing *cine de oro* as a clearly defined category. For her, Golden Age film is a polyvalent corpus of artistic films that in contrast to Hollywood: "projected representations of a national citizenry that was far from a unitary amalgam" (12). Indeed, to a large degree, the term is applicable to everything from urban comedies to surrealist cinema. For instance, films as diverse as *Los olvidados* (Luis Buñuel, 1950), *La diosa arrodillada* (Gavaldón, 1947), and *Allá en el rancho grande* (Fuentes Carrau, 1936), have all been discussed as representative examples of *cine de oro*, and while they all offer a particular vision of Mexican society, it is difficult to conceive them as a single unified genre because they vary in approach, techniques, and handling of the subject-matter. However, the discussion of this category strays away from the purpose of this dissertation, so in the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to *cine de oro* as the body of film produced in Mexico during the relatively peaceful period between the administrations of General Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), and President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958).

Although *Santa*, based on the scandalous novel by Federico Gamboa, became a classic and popular hit in 1932 (Berg 1992), critics agree that *Allá en el rancho grande* (1936) is the first

[21] These terms, often used by film critics can be translated as Gold Cinema or Golden Age Cinema.

feature film that opened the stage of the golden era. *Comedia ranchera*, a type of comedy in the setting of rural Mexico, appealed to the public in Latin America not merely because they felt identified with specific aspects of rural life in the Western Mexican state of Jalisco; but rather, because this film featured distinct Mexican elements in that folklore, which in many ways resonated with ideas, traditions, customs, values, and characters all over Latin America (Sever 12). Unlike films made in Hollywood or Europe, the actors and the life represented in Mexican films showed a world that was familiar and attainable, a world however, filled with racism, violence, and social inequality.

During World War II, Europe's film industries came to a standstill. Meanwhile, Hollywood productions focused on themes that were unsuccessful in the Mexican market. From 1936 to 1958, producers such as Agustín Fink and Gustavo Alatriste recruited directors and actors with experience in Hollywood and Europe and successfully mirrored their studio production, their star system, their distribution, and marketing strategies. By 1943, the influence of this industry competed head-to-head with productions from Hollywood. Mexican cinema saw enormous success beyond its borders and had an effect throughout Latin America. The influence of Mexican film was such that, up to the present, the international stereotype of what is essentially Mexican immediately invokes many of the cultural productions articulated in those films such as the sounds of mariachi songs, as well as images of rural men riding donkeys and drinking tequila. By 1940, Mexican cinema was established as the main film producer of films in Spanish featured in Latin America and its directors and stars, Dolores del Río, María Félix, Pedro Armendariz, and Pedro Infante to name a few, were consolidated as famous household names.

Moreover, Mexican films from the so-called Golden Age played a major role in the formation of what Benedict Anderson conceptualizes as nation in *Imagined communities*, "an imagined political community –and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6) that developed throughout the country. Apparently, this industry strengthened the feeling of belonging to the Mexican nation as it managed to standardize the way the broad Mexican public sector saw and constructed itself. It is precisely these new representations of Mexican society that depict a collapse of the *criollo* culture, which privileged the landowning descendants of the colonial nobility. It was not the Independence, but rather the Mexican Revolution, the historical period that Golden Age Film chose as the moment of national foundation. Therefore, many of these films favor mestizo culture as the preferred national image. [22] Class distinction, which is usually articulated through behaviors and symbols, acquires a decisively distinct representation in visual media; especially because social status is manifested through audiovisual means and images.

2.3 Dolores del Río as *mestiza* in *Flor silvestre*

Class and race instability are especially patent in the filmic images of Dolores del Río and María Félix, the most influential actresses of their generation, but also in popular actors like Pedro Infante and Blanca de Castejón.[23] In his biography of Dolores del Río, Paco Ignacio Taibo thoroughly reports that the actress was born in August of 1904 in what he calls a highly

[22] The issue of race became fundamental in Mexico's search for a national identity once the armed conflicts of the Revolution had ceased. However, this search was not the direct result of the new national project, on the contrary, since the nineteenth century, Mexican intellectuals such as Justo Sierra and José Vasconcelos, had concluded that Mexico was a nation united through a shared history and culture that transcended any ethnic differences. In an attempt to erase or at least minimize European influences, these social thinkers tried to construct an authentic mestizo culture which glorified the racial mix of the majority of the population.

[23] In her introduction to *Manual de la Gente Bien*, Guadalupe Loaeza reconstructs a scene from 1936 New Year's party at socialite Carmen Luján's mansion, by then considered one of the most elegant houses in Mexico, and tells that the young aristocrats emulated the style and fashion of one of their movie icons, Dolores Asúnsolo de Gibbons, known all over the world as Dolores del Río.

respected family in Durango, Mexico. A bona fide member of the old colonial aristocracy, on her paternal side, Del Río was the daughter of Leonardo Asúnsolo, the son of wealthy ranch-owners with family ties to businessmen in northern Mexico. On her maternal side, she was a direct descendant of the López Negrete y López (sic) family, whose lineage was traced back to colonial nobility. With the offset of the Revolution in1910, she and her mother fled to Mexico City where they moved into a house in the elegant Juárez neighborhood. Dolores attended a private school run by French nuns where she learned French and became a notable dancer. In fact, years later at a benefit performance, she was introduced to Jaime Martínez del Río, the husband from whom she took her artistic last name. Through her husband, she met Hollywood director Edwin Carewe who convinced the couple to move to California where she started a successful acting career in silent films.

After an accomplished career in Hollywood, Dolores del Río returned to Mexico in 1943. However, the public image that she had forged in the United States had to be re-branded for Spanish-speaking audiences, basically because at the time, she was labeled as a Hollywood star. For most of her career, Dolores del Río assumed the roles of ethnically marked women. Although she was of *criollo* descent, her phenotypical features –most noticeably brown eyes and dark hair- were perceived by Hollywood executives at the time as decidedly ethnic. These physical features, nonetheless, are not immediately distinctive; in fact, dark hair and brown eyes are frequent in people of European ancestry. Therefore, in Mexican film industry, Dolores del Río's ethnic age and roles fluctuate between the decidedly indigenous and the conservative *criollos*. For instance, in *María Candelaria* (Fernández, 1946), Del Río interprets a young poor Indigenous woman from Xochimilco, a traditional town south of Mexico City during the Porfiriato years. María Candelaria meets a painter who hires her to model for him because of her

seemingly perfect Indian features[24]. In sharp contrast, in her protagonist rendition of *Doña Perfecta* (Galindo, 1950), an adaptation of Benito Perez Galdós's homonymous novel, Dolores del Rio portrays a drastically dissimilar character, a strict, conservative Nineteenth-Century Mexican landowner who is proud of her Spanish ancestry and strong Catholic values.

There is a general agreement among critics about the undeniable success in the reconstruction of Dolores Del Rio's public image in the 1940s. But in her first Mexican films, the contradictions between her image and her characters are open to debate. Dolores del Río's face, body, and postures function as a medium from which we can begin to read the desires of the Mexican public of the era. Dolores del Río metamorphoses into a *mestiza* peasant, in Emilio Fernandez's film *Flor Silvestre,* produced by Agustín Fink and released through Films Mundiales S.A. in 1943.[25] In this film, the beauty, virtue, and sacrifice of the main character become a bridge by which the working classes and the old landowning elite meet and (re)construct the new idealized *mestizo* national image of which the former *criollo* aristocrats are no longer at the center. [26] In *Flor Silvestre*, Del Río stars as Esperanza, a young *mestiza* girl who is prepared to be the town's new teacher. In a retrospective narrative, the story begins when Esperanza tells her son how she fell in love with José Luis Castro (Pedro Armendariz), the son of a *criollo* landowning family. The male protagonist is constructed as a liberal for instance, his conversations with revolutionary comrades reveal ideas such as: "La nueva generación no tiene los prejuicios de nuestros padres." [The new generation does not share our parents' prejudices]

[24] Although she refuses to pose naked, another woman helps the painter complete the nude picture. Later, a passersby catches a glimpse of the painting and Maria Candelaria is accused of indecency. She dies tragically in the hands of the townspeople.
[25] *Flor Silvestre* is an adaptation of Fernando Robles's novel *Sucedió ayer* (1940).
[26] Like most Latin American countries, Mexico's population had been racially mixed since the Spanish Conquest of the sixteenth century. Race as a signifier of breeding or blood was subsequently used to differentiate among *criollos*, Indigenous peoples, and *mestizos* or "mixed" blood. Racial categories were continually modified to reflect changing notions about what constituted racial difference.

(*Flor silvestre*) His political views antagonize him against the conservative background of his parents, but are in fact in agreement with the populism of President Cárdenas's administration. Actually, the film alludes to an intellectual base in the Revolution plight. Thus, in spite of his higher social status, José Luis is an idealistic supporter of social justice and equal rights, he believes in the Revolution's ideals, and he is convinced that this movement will bring social justice.

Cinematographically, the images in *Flor Silvestre* reveal an idealized role of *mestiza* women in post-revolutionary Mexican social life. Filmed by renowned photographer Gabriel Figueroa, this black and white film begins with a slow panning shot that shows a fertile land reminiscent of the Bajío region in the Mexican central plateau. A female narrator, the voice of Dolores del Río, retells the history of her land while a Mesoamerican inspired flute melody plays in the soundtrack. The camera stops at a medium shot of Dolores del Río characterized as a lady in her fifties, all dressed in black, and holding the arm of a young man in military uniform. Looking into the fields, she reveals that she is the man's mother and that they are standing in a former hacienda: "Todas estas tierras pertenecieron a los Castro. En ellas vivieron miles y miles de familias de peones […] eran muchas tierras para una sola familia. Los amos podían recorrerlas de día y de noche sin llegar a sus límites. Eran muy pocos los que tenían tantas tierras, otros en cambio no tenían nada." [All these lands once belonged to the Castro family. Thousands of peasants lived there. Too much land for just one family. The masters would travel day and night without reaching its borders. Very few owned too much land, while others had nothing] (*Flor silvestre*). After showing the landscape, the camera stops at the figures of the narrator and her son. Next, it cuts to a long shot showing the backs of the characters and slowly dissolves into a flashback, as the narrator begins her story.

This scene immediately introduces two central themes of national discourse. First at the visual level, the photographic composition of this scene shows a peaceful, bucolic, and idealized picture of the Mexican country, an image of a fertile and productive land that undoubtedly puts Mexico in the fringes of modernity and progress. Secondly, at the discursive level, the voice of Esperanza, the protagonist and narrator of the story, addresses the issue of class struggle and social inequality that peaked at the turn of the Twentieth Century. This scene also confirms that, as a primarily agricultural economy, Mexican wealth depended on extensive land ownership in the hands of a few families who benefited from the cheap labor that a vast majority of peasants could offer. The narrator's emphasis on the past tense also alludes to a major historical change, not only political and economic, but also social since this land no longer belongs to just a slew of aristocratic families.

After the opening sequence, the voice in off of the narrator describes the circumstances of her wedding many years before, as the image dissolves into a long shot showing a rural chapel and the backs of a man and woman walking into the church. The film presents Dolores del Río and Pedro Armendáriz as young Esperanza and José Luis. Class and ethnicity are highlighted by the actors' costumes, hair, and make-up. Dolores wears a long skirt and shawl characteristic of female peasant's clothes; her hair in two braids; while her make-up is a natural look. Armendáriz wears sombrero, boots in the common *charro* outfit.

The narrative confirms that during the diegetic time of the film, the society portrayed therein follows an economic model of the hacienda, in which peasants work for the hacienda owners in exchange of permission to live in their land and keep a small portion of the harvest. José Luis is the only son of the landowners and heir to all their property, but regardless of their

difference in class, he wishes to marry Esperanza. In an over-the-shoulder shot showing Esperanza's face in close-up, she says: "Tengo miedo, José Luis. Todo esto me parece tan extraño. Siento como una corazonada de muchos males. Somos de clases tan opuestas que tu familia nunca me aceptará. ¿Estás seguro de que no te importa dejarlo todo, perderlo todo para casarte conmigo?" [I'm afraid, Jose Luis. All this seems so strange to me. In my heart, I feel a bad omen. We belong to very different classes and your family will never accept me. Are you sure you don't mind renouncing to everything? Losing everything to marry me?] (*Flor silvestre*). Esperanza's fear confirms that pre-revolutionary society was aware of class difference; moreover, that this social order discourages intermarriage and punishes disobedience with economic sanctions. In spite of this marriage prohibition, both decide to marry in a secret ceremony.

Perhaps the most difficult obstacle perceived by the protagonist couple is the announcement of their wedding to their families. On the one hand, Esperanza, the peasant, is worried that her grandfather will take her elopement as a lack of decency because from his perspective, virginity and a clean reputation is a woman's essential virtue. To this preoccupation, José Luis explains that the legality of their marriage, and consequently his wife's honor, is unquestionable since they were married under what he considers God's law. Through gossip among hacienda workers, José Luis's mother, Doña Clara, becomes aware of her son's secret marriage and manifests disbelief: "[…] eso no puede ser, mi hijo no pudo haber cometido semejante disparate. Él sabe cuál es su lugar y el respeto que le debe a esta casa. Ademas mi hijo es hombre y libre." [That is impossible, mi son couldn't have committed such folly. He knows his social position and the respect he owes to this house. Besides, my son is a free man] (*Flor silvestre*). Besides breaking the marriage expectations of a member of his class, José Luis

belongs to a radical group called *movimiento revolucionario del Bajio* whose activities against the Porfirio Díaz government are brutally repressed by the federal army.[27] Don Pancho is informed of his son's involvement in those events and reacts in anger, because he considers these activities as unworthy of his family and his name, a conversation with a friend that he contemplates sending José Luis to the United States or Europe as a disciplinary measure. In agreement with Ann Sebek's view of the colonial condition, Don Pancho's attitude confirms that the colonial space is considered a space of ethnic and moral contamination, which can be avoided by the perceived order and progress of the Western-European centers.[28]

In addition to this, Esperanza fears a negative reaction from the landowners, as she is undoubtedly aware of the social distance between her and her in-laws. This distance is metaphorically and visually manifest during a scene, which takes place during *el herradero,*[29] the couple's first social event as a married couple. In this scene, a rodeo ring is divided according to social status. The sequence starts with several shots depicting the various fair activities, while we listen to Lucha Reyes singing Pedro Galindo's "El Herradero" (1940). The film shows the workers scorching under the sun, a mariachi band under a tent, while the principals sit in a grandstand under the shade. A long shot looking at the grandstand shows Doña Clara sitting at the center, flanked by her daughter. They discuss the José Luis and Esperanza's marriage while the band plays a ranchero song. José Luis and Esperanza enter the grandstand, he announces her as his wife, and she sits next to Doña Clara. The sequence quickly cuts to show a visibly upset Don Francisco standing in the arena. This three-quarter shot from a low angle emphasizes Don Francisco's higher social position by making him appear taller. After Don Francisco hurries

[27] In 1909 workers unions and liberal newspapers were violently suppressed by the Mexican Federal Army.
[28] For an explanation of Sebek's view of ethnic contamination, see page 36.
[29] A rodeo-like fair where livestock is branded.

towards the grandstand, as he enters the shot, Esperanza stands up. Next, a frontal close-up of Esperanza shows her startled face as Don Francisco tells her to go to the other side of the arena, with those of her kin. As mentioned earlier, he considers Esperanza's presence within the elite a form of contamination, and perhaps a threat to his *criollo* legacy. Esperanza exits the frame as an argument between father and son erupts.

After suffering an accident, the film illustrates a sequence that also illustrates social position and distance between Esperanza and the *criollo* landowners. A series of binary oppositions are also depicted visually. As Esperanza lies ill, her mother and sister-in-law visit her with the purpose of convincing her to leave José Luis. The scene begins with a long shot where a weak Esperanza lies in bed illuminated from above, and wearing a white gown on the left side of the frame. Esperanza's horizontal position clearly contrasts the other side of the frame whereas on the left side of the screen, where Doña Clara in a black dress and fine jewels stands vertically, showing pride and height (see figure 2.1). While Esperanza's hair is dark and braided, Doña Clara's is gray and done up. Doña Clara moves towards the bed while the camera approaches, as she emphatically tells Esperanza to leave José Luis. A sequence of close-ups follows the dialogue. To accentuate the upper social hierarchy of Doña Clara, her face is shot from a low angle, while Esperanza is photographed in a three-quarter, big close-up with warm light from above accentuating Dolores del Río's beauty and expressions. This sequence of shots suggests that the viewer is at the same height and shares the perspective of Esperanza, the beautiful *mestiza* protagonist.

The visual opposition complements the intention of the dialogue because each character exposes contrasting arguments. To stress the melodramatic tone of the film, Esperanza ends up convinced that José Luis's fortune beside his family is more important than her desire to start a

family with him. Ironically, this gesture of detachment and self-sacrifice convinces Doña Clara that Esperanza is indeed a decent woman worthy of her son's love. The scene ends with both women in a warm embrace. By welcoming a *mestiza* into a *criollo* hacienda-owning family, the film suggests that the mestizo subject is capable of entering the space of the elite if they show high values such as love, honesty, and decency. However, it must be noted that this entrance happens only after the mestizo subject surrenders to the master.

The social contrast of the newlyweds and the hacienda owners is manifest after José Luis leaves his father's house. Living in a small cottage, Esperanza and José Luis receive the visit from Reynaldo and Nicanor, two workers at the Hacienda who serve as a communication bridge between the two social classes. The scene shows a small, yet illuminated kitchen and table where José Luis sits dining, while Esperanza serves him. She opens the door to the workers who praise her for being the wife of their former master: In spite of this, Esperanza once again indicates her social adherence: "Yo soy de abajo como ustedes y José Luis es el hijo del amo. Dios quiera que ésta no sea la causa de su desgracia." [I come from below, just like you, and Jose Luis is the master's son. I hope to God this may not cause his disgrace] (*Flor silvestre*). On the surface, Esperanza's message indicates assuredness and pride in being mestiza, but it also tells that her new position as the *criollo* heir's wife is the result of *unplanned* events. This distances her from the greed-driven social climbers (the bourgeois) and the strict traditionalists (the aristocrats). Figuratively, the love between Esperanza and José Luis suggests that *mestizos* may transition from peasantry into high status positions in an organic, genuine, manner; and like the Revolution, their love is historically inevitable.

In agreement with his social ideals, José Luis welcomes Reynaldo and Nicanor at his table, but they immediately decline, arguing that he is the master and "God's law" forbids them from taking such a privilege. The film challenges the old idea of social distances when José Luis quickly corrects them by saying that: "Dios nos hizo a todos iguales y precisamente por eso ha surgido la Revolución, porque queremos que en México pobres y ricos sean realmente hermanos" [God created every man equal and that's why the Revolution started. Because in Mexico, we want the poor and the rich to become real brothers] (*Flor silvestre*). To put emphasis on the contrast between tradition and new revolutionary ideals, the sequence cuts to the Hacienda, where the Castros dine in luxury. The scene shows a dining room with silver candelabra, large paintings, and fine china, in stark contrast to the Esperanza's home (see figure 2.2). The director counterbalances the relaxed openness of Esperanza's kitchen with the solemn ambiance of the Hacienda, where the lights are dim and the characters sit uptight.

Through the storyline and characters, *Flor silvestre* insists on the notion that the Mexican Revolution was based on authentic social principles as opposed to a disorderly armed conflict; in fact, the disgrace of the Castro family and the fall of their Hacienda does not come about by the Revolution uprising, but from illegitimate and uncontrolled factions of plunderers who pillaged under the banner of the Revolution. Such opportunists and delinquents are portrayed in the film as the Torres brothers. The film informs of the illegitimacy of those bands in an interview with Pánfilo, Esperanza's cousin. Here he addresses the issue of the crimes committed during the upheaval:

> El señor presidente Madero quiere que se reestablezca la paz en el país y como la Revolución ya triunfó ahora viene lo difícil. Hay que acabar con el bandidaje […] los

> jefes quieren contar con el concurso de los correligionarios honrados como tú para controlar todo esto que hemos desatado. En el Bajío tú, que eres hijo de ricos, nos has puesto la muestra a todos los que soñábamos con tiempos más justos […] Tú que sientes la Revolución y conoces como nadie estas tierras del Bajío, debes ayudarnos a librarnos de los bandidos como los hermanos Torres y muchos otros que a la sombra de nuestra causa roban y asesinan. Esos son los peores enemigos de la Revolución.
>
> [President Madero wants to re-establish peace in the country, and now that the Revolution has triumphed, the difficult part begins. We must end with bandits … the chiefs want the support of honest fellows like you to control all this that we've started. In the Bajio, as the son of a rich family, you have shown that to all of us who dreamt with justice. You feel the Revolution and you know these lands of Bajio like no one else. You must help us get rid of bandits like the Torres brothers, and many others like them, who steal and kill in the shadows of our cause. They are the worst enemies of the Revolution]. (*Flor silvestre*)

On the one hand, director Emilio Fernandez's decision to include these characters has at least two important effects. First, the film explains and validates the *legitimate* Revolution by making clear that the violence against civilians during the conflict was carried out by opportunistic bandits. Second, but most importantly, it redeems the aristocrats by portraying them as *victims* in the conflict. Perhaps one of the tensest moments of the film shows a bitter fight between father and son. These effects are best exemplified by the relationship between Don Francisco and his son. He considers his son's marriage to a low-class a high dishonor, but also, his family is ashamed by his son´s involvement with the revolutionary intellectuals. In a scene that takes place

in a heavily adorned Hacienda living room, which displays old paintings, candelabra, swords, and heraldic objects in the background. The presence of these objects is both symbolic and aesthetic; firstly because the swords and family coats of arms are typically associated with chivalry and aristocrats, and secondly because this space, which signifies the ancestral continuity, is ironically the locus where father and son ultimately part ways. In accordance with the director's comparison-and-contrast visual language, this room is shown later in the film immediately after the Torres brothers attack and sack the hacienda (see figure 2.3). A group of dirty and sweaty bandits drink and eat while all paintings are ruined, and the coat of arms lies defaced on the floor. It is implied that Don Carlos is killed during this attack.

The discontinuity that results from father and son's violent fight will eventually trigger José Luis's desire to participate in the Revolution battle field, although Esperanza persuades him not to seek revenge after birthing their child. However, in a narrative twist, Esperanza is abducted by the Torres brothers. The film presents another play of oppositional binaries as Esperanza and her son are in the bandit's captivity. The scene shows a brothel where bandits dance and drink with *soldaderas*[30] and prostitutes. Among the havoc, the film shows a tired Esperanza sitting on the floor holding her son while tears run down her cheeks. This photographic composition is reminiscent of Catholic iconography. These close-ups show Esperanza wearing a *rebozo* as a veil around her head, illuminated with warm light from above and natural make-up. The elements of this shot along with Dolores del Río's expressions, make a pictorial composition comparable to Renaissance and Baroque paintings of the Virgin Mary.

[30] This term refers to women soldiers who fought alongside men during the Mexican Revolution.

Thus, symbolically, the *mestiza* woman embodies the hope of beauty and salvation among the chaos of the Revolution.

José Luis confronts the bandits and surrenders his life in exchange of Esperanza and their son's. The deaths of Don Francisco and José Luis symbolize the end of a pure *criollo* bloodline, but their legacy survives through Esperanza and her son. The film ends with a return to the diegetic present. Esperanza closes her narration with the an explanation of the Revolution war: "La sangre derramada en tantos años de lucha por miles de hombres que, como tu padre creyeron en el bien y en la justicia, no fue estéril. Sobre ella se levanta el México de hoy, en el que palpita una vida nueva." [The blood spilled in so many years of war, and by so many men, was not infertile. Upon their blood stands today's Mexico, where the heart of a new life beats] (*Flor silvestre*). Esperanza survives as figurative guardian and nourisher of the new generation. As a central element in the national image promoted in the 1940s, the mestizo woman becomes a foundational mother of a new nation which legitimizes the Revolution. This new nation symbolically emerges from the love between the two contrasting classes, and its union only seems possible through the social barriers broken by the Revolution.

2.4 María Félix as a *criolla* in *Enamorada*

The Mexican film star system exploited the ambivalent physical appearance of actors to profit from their popularity; such was the case of María Félix, the only other Mexican diva on a par with Dolores del Rio. In order to understand the ambivalent ethnic roles that María Félix interpreted, it is necessary to trace her ancestry. As stated in her biography *Todas mis guerras*, on her maternal side, she is the granddaughter of well-to-do Spanish immigrants, her mother Joséfina Güereña was born in Álamos, Sonora and grew up in a strict Catholic environment. She

goes on to reveal that her father, on the other hand, was a descendant of the Indian tribes of the Yaqui Valley, although she is quick to remark that the Yaqui can pass as Europeans, since they are more corpulent and taller than the average people from Central Mexico (Krauze 34). In collaboration with directors and filmmakers, Félix took advantage of this ambivalence not only in the screen, but also in her public image in Mexico and abroad.

For instance, in *Todas mis guerras* she argues that allegedly turned down offers from Hollywood directors because the characters were Indian women, as opposed to the mestizo characters that immortalized her in Latin American films: "Busqué deliberadamente interpreter personajes que fueran lo más opuesto a mí en carácter y en físico. Películas como *La diosa arrodillada* o *Doña Diabla* no me exigían un esfuerzo mayor del normal. En cambio, para caracterizar a una india tarasca en *Maclovia* tuve que hacer milagros." [I deliberately sought characters as opposed to my personality and physical appearance as possible. Movies like *La diosa arrodillada* o *Doña Diabla* did not require a big effort. But to interpret a Tarascan Indian in *Maclovia*, I had to perform miracles] (89). In addition, Félix was quite conscious of the difference between the revolutionary women that she portrayed and the real life persona that she sought to project, and in *Todas mis guerras* she admits that many of her lifestyle choices originated from this distinction, when talking about her clothes she observes: "¿Cómo quieren que me vista? ¿De huarache? De huarache sólo en mis películas de revolucionaria, pero ante mi público me pongo mis mejores alhajas y mis mejores galas porque así están acostumbrados a verme. ¿Se ha visto alguna vez algún indio con huarache que ande descalzo?" [How do you want me to dress up like? In huarache sandals? In huaraches only in my movies as revolutionary woman, but before my public, I put on my best jewels and my best dresses, because that's how they usually see me. Has anyone ever seen an Indian with huaraches, but walking barefoot?]

(29). Félix became famous because while in Europe, she was careful to wear the latest Parisian fashions since, from her personal perspective, she was representing all Mexican women abroad. But what this fashion choice perhaps denotes is a Latin American strong desire to imitate European cultural products, a practice deeply rooted in elite groups.

A critical reading of Maria Felix's part in the film *Enamorada* reveals that Emilio Fernandez, the director, repeats many of the same discursive and visual strategies and techniques employed earlier in *Flor Silvestre*. While both films privilege intermarriage between *criollo* landowners and revolutionary *mestizos,* the way in which the elite is represented is quite different. In a 1973 interview by Elena Poniatowska, María Félix revealed that *Enamorada* was one of her favorite movies[31]. This film represented a new success in her career and one in which she felt honored to work with Fernández. In her biography *Todas mis guerras* she states*:* "Todos los [directores] del cine mexicano han sido preciosos conmigo. Siempre he estado contenta con mis directores: Roberto Gavaldón –el mejor director- ; Emilio Fernández –el más pintoresco-. Creo que el cine mexicano es una gran propaganda para nuestro país" [All Mexican Film directors have been precius to me. I´ve always been happy with my directors: Roberto Gavaldón –the best director- Emilio Fernández –the most picturesque- I believe Mexican cinema is great publicity for our country] (173). Indeed, in this movie the Mexican Revolution is again presented as a conflict, but one in which social justice and progress are the ultimate results. What is more, Félix admits that Fernández presented a particularly agenda in his films.

[31] In this interview, Felix also remarks that she admires Dolores del Río, a woman who is "guapa, gentil, tiene diplomacia y don de gentes" (*Todo México* 173). But perhaps most importantly, she believes that her success was in great part giving the Mexican audiences the image of success: "le he dado la imagen del éxito. Yo soy la imagen de la salud, de alguien que se mueve en su propia piel y está de acuerdo consigo misma" (*Todo Mexico* 158).

The film opens with the taking over of the town of Cholula by the Revolutionary army of General José Juan Reyes interpreted by Pedro Armendáriz. Dressed with sombreros and white *calzones de manta*, the soldiers contrast sharply with the well-dressed landowners and priests who have gathered in Don Carlos Penafiel's mansion for protection. Realizing that the federalist army will no longer protect them, the rich men surrender and are taken to the General's quarters. The scene can be read as an allegory of the national discourse. The actions that take place in this scene synthesize the image of the revolution that the 1940's discourse sought to promote; that is, a genuine political movement based on principles of social justice and equality. Consequently, the characters in this scene represent some of the stereotypes of Mexican classes at the moment. On one side sits José Juan the Revolutionary leader as he questions end extorts the town's wealthy men; facing him stand Don Carlos Peñafiel, the aristocratic landowner, Fidel Bernal the wealthy merchant, Mr. Albright an American engineer, Mr. Sanchez the teacher, and going back and forth, father Sierra, the Catholic priest.[32] José Juan talks about political ideals of justice, shows a genuine preoccupation with social problems, orders the reopening of the primary school, pays the back salaries owed to the town's teacher, and orders the greedy merchant be executed and his fortune confiscated. Finally, Father Rafael and José Juan engage in a discussion about their principles and ideals, which in many ways synthesizes the idealized revolutionary discourse after the war: the Catholic Church and the revolution are in fact different expressions of the same basic mission: bringing justice to the poor and needy. Despite the association between

[32] The premise of this film is reminiscent of Carlos Fuentes's *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, as I argue in chapter one of this dissertation, Fuentes rearticulates the relationship between Prospero, Miranda, and Caliban from The Tempest's allegory of postcolonial domination. General Reyes, the male protagonist, takes power and wealth from the landowners and falls in love with Beatriz. If Reyes represents Caliban, in this film then his aristocrat counterparts, Don Carlos and Beatriz are the allegorical representations of Prospero and Miranda.

landowners and merchants, the film's narrative intertwines the lives of the revolutionary and the aristocrats by establishing a love relationship between individuals of the two groups.

In this film, the multiplicity of filmic genres downplays the importance of historicity and calls attention to other ways of narrating the class struggle between the protagonists. In order to make this romance plausible, Emilio Fernández, the director, mixed scenes of humor melodrama, and realism. For instance, the introductory scenes offer realistic long and panoramic shots of battle; meanwhile, the courtship sequences between Beatriz and José Juan are mostly comedic. For instance, Beatriz throws fireworks at him, she strikes him in the head when he knocks on her door, and both of them fight and laugh. Although silly on the surface, many humorous scenes are key in understanding the conflict that arise from Beatriz's many desires, which are repressed by social and gender expectations. On one hand the seemingly decent and proud aristocrat is portrayed as wild and aggressive (Beatriz) while the savage revolutionary is courteous, eloquent, and patient (José Juan).

Parallel to the sexual tension between the protagonists, their social confrontation reaches its peak at a point in which the film turns to melodrama. Initially, José Juan is infatuated by Beatriz's beauty and strength of character, while she rejects his advances and constantly reminds him of his humble birth. Ultimately, the tension breaks in verbal and physical violence in a scene at the atrium in front of Father Sierra. Beatriz wears the traditional clothes of rural Mexican people. Her hair is braided, she wears a *rebozo* and a simple but tight *paisana* dress (see figure 2.4). It is rather noteworthy in the church atrium scene that both characters symbolically represent two clashing social classes. Beatriz represents the *criollo* aristocratic woman, whereas José Juan stands as the emerging *mestizo* powerful class. The scene starts off with the priest and

Beatriz discussing traditional gender roles and how these circumstances put her at a disadvantage. For instance, she claims that if she were a man, she would physically and violently confront any male aggressors. Her suppressed attraction to José Luis makes his presence disturbing. Beatriz rejects José Luis's advances and calls upon his social inferiority. Her frustration intensifies as José Luis orders substantial changes in the town's administration, obtaining the respect of the townspeople. The new Federal government which José Luis represents, threatens the aristocrat's tenure of the land. This political change deeply influences the behavior and reactions of the old landowners, in this case, represented by Beatriz's family.

The character's struggle between sexual desire and social expectations are exemplified in dialogue and visuals throughout the film. In a series of attempts to court Beatriz, José Juan follows her to church. This sequence begins with a long shot showing a typical Mexican church in the back while both characters begin a dialogue which emphasizes Beatriz's perceived class superiority. Her lines reveal an internalized notion of superiority. As an elite woman, physical contact with a lesser man seems forbidden, and even immoral. The camera transitions into a low angle shot that highlights the social hierarchal positions of the elite female (above) and the commoner (below). After Beatriz climbs up several steps towards the atrium entrance, she is in a higher position above the man. The camera takes a lower angle to emphasize her perceived height (see figure 2.5). From that position, she insults José Juan: "Usted es quien es y nosotros, por qué no decirlo, somos gente decente y usted un aventurero cualquiera, un pelado. Déjeme en paz y váyase usted con sus mujerzuelas." [You are who you are, and we, why not say it… We're decent people, and you're an adventurous nobody, a commoner. Leave me alone and go to your whores] (*Enamorada*). Immediately, he reduces the distance by climbing up the stairs, and adopts a defiant position. At this moment, José Juan makes perhaps the most revolutionary

gesture. The male representation of the new *mestizo* national image contends that status should not be determined by birth and questions the preconceived notions of the elite woman: "Si somos diferentes, no es por culpa mía ni por méritos de usted. Como tampoco son mujerzuelas esas soldaderas a quienes desprecia usted porque no las conoce." [If we are different, it's neither my fault nor your merit. Those soldier women are not whores, you despise them, yet you don't know them] (*Enamorada*). The physical altercation that ensues can also be understood in terms of class struggle. On one side, the aristocracy resists the power advance of *mestizo* commoners, but unable to keep them under, calls on their inferior birth. On the other side, the Revolutionary *mestizo,* struggles to satisfy his desires to acquire distinction via the marriage to an aristocrat heiress.

As he did in *Flor silvestre*, Emilio Fernández resolves the class conflict by following a similar plot dénouement. The final scene shows Beatriz Peñafiel joining the Revolutionary army besides José Juan, thus ending the conflict in a loving union. When presented with the opportunity to marry an American investor, Beatriz choses the *mestizo* fighter. In spite of her elite social affiliation, Beatriz, and the aristocracy she represents, succumbs to what appears as the inevitability of love and the tide of History. Once again, Fernández implies that the Revolution forms a renovated Mexican family composed of the former *criollo* masters and the *mestizos*. Similarly, by joining the Revolution, Beatriz distances herself from both the money-driven bourgeoisie and the old *criollo* tradition. Beatriz's choice indicates submission to the idealized *mestizo* man, but it also tells that her new position as a *soldadera* is the unavoidable effect of love. Symbolically, the loving union between Beatriz and José Juan suggests that the Revolution is the catalyzer of a new family and a national model.

2.5 Reversal of fortune and class in Ismael Rodriguez's *La Cucaracha*

By the late 1950s, the social programs of President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines continued with the PRI agenda. Among the social changes in this administration, the Mexican Congress passed a law granting full voting rights to women in 1953. In addition, the strengthening of the US economy triggered a number of policies to protect Mexican industries, among them film production. However, by the end of the 1950s the penetration of Hollywood productions in the mainstream, generated a slow decline in the Mexican film industry. In 1958, Ismael Rodríguez directed *La Cucaracha*, a movie which sought to honor the women soldiers who participated in the Revolution. For this Technicolor production, Rodríguez managed to gather a multi-stellar cast that included Dolores del Río, María Félix, and Emilio Fernández in the leading roles. Gabriel Figueroa directed the photography and Raúl Lavista arranged the musical score. Besides its artistic merits, *La Cucaracha* is a film that touches upon the issue of race, distinction, and the relationships between ethnic identities and power. Again, a cultural reading of the characters in *La Cucaracha* reveals some of the ways in which ethnic and aristocratic identities are commodified.

In different studies that analyze *La Cucaracha*, critics have often read this film from an evident historical perspective, emphasizing especially the theme of *soldaderas* as a representative social phenomenon during the Revolution. But even though this film is obviously inspired by historical events, its structure and narrative parallel the true-and-tried formula of *cine ranchero*, which nourishes from long-established Hollywood genres such as melodrama, comedy, and western. In fact, a strict historical analysis of this film will confirm that all characters and settings, although representative of the times, are entirely fictional. Even though there is constant mention of key historical moments and figures, most noticeably General Pancho

Villa and his triumph in the Battle of Zacatecas in 1915, the male protagonist, his revolutionary militia, and the town of San Blas are entirely made up. This film however, can be read as Emilio Fernández's effort to give voice and identity to the women who according to the ending credits announces: "y junto con sus hombres y sus hijos hicieron la Revolucion Mexicana". In fact, this film was inspired by popular songs and stories that originated within the actual revolutionary armies, which made their way into the popular imaginary. The Mexican *mestizos* and Indians who fought in the Revolution are at the same time legitimized and romanticized in this process of re-appropriation and a re-writing of oral sources in the 1940s and 1950s.

Ismael Rodríguez's *La Cucaracha* (1958), stands out not only because it portrays the essential role played by women during on the battle grounds of the revolution war, but also and very notably because María Félix y Dolores del Río, the two most renowned female film stars of their time were cast as antagonists. In *La Cucaracha,* Ismael Rodríguez offers a historic-realist film in which the social class, behavior, and decisions of the female characters will shed some light into how the national discourse intended to create new meanings by re-writing the history of the Revolution. On the one hand, this film portrays the mestizo woman, *la pelada*, as the prime heroine of the battle; but simultaneously, it reaffirms the *criollo* class as people with higher value, the possessors of distinction that can and must be converted and assimilated into the new nation.

Filmed in the Mexican state of Querétaro, *La Cucaracha* tells the tale of the final days of Antonio Zeta, a fictional coronel under Pancho Villa's Northern Division command. After a significant defeat that diminishes his group, he finds a safe haven in San Blas, a town controlled by Carrancista militia men. Despite the alliance between Villa and Carranza, Zeta seizes the town, has the top commanders executed, and establishes himself as the man in charge. Among

the women fighting with the Carranza men, one *soldadera* stands out for her beauty and courage in the field, everyone knows her by her alias, la Cucaracha. After an unconventional courtship, Zeta and la Cucaracha begin a sentimental relationship. However, their romance is interrupted when Isabel, a *criolla* and the widow of the town's teacher, survives the sacking of San Blas and becomes a *soldadera* in order to survive the chaos of the Revolution.

As Hommi Bhabha proposes in *The Location of Culture*, the colonial encounter is characterized by it ambivalence and hybridity because it constitutes a liminal space in which cultural differences are rearticulated and which, according to Bhabha, produce the construction of national and cultural identities (122). As depicted in the film, a double process of mimicry begins when *mestiza* and *criolla* women compete for power. On the one hand, la Viuda imitates *soldaderas* in order to enter the ranks of Antonio's army. Simultaneously, la Cucaracha begins to imitate the feminine refinement of la Viuda as she envisions a future next to Zeta. Though both women are exuberantly beautiful and admirable in character, la Cucaracha manifests jealousy of Isabel's distinction, a quality that captivates many other revolutionary men and women. In the end Zeta abandons la Cucaracha and quickly courts Isabel, la Viuda, thus creating a love triangle in which each female character mirrors the other.

The contrast between the characters is an evident binary opposition. María Félix interprets la Cucaracha, a strong, dominant, uneducated *mestiza* woman who joins the Revolution to fight alongside men. Dolores del Río incarnates her antagonist Isabel, an educated and refined *criolla* who is conscious of her higher standing and proud of her social distinction (see figure 2.8). This contrast is presented to the viewer both in the discursive and visual levels. On the one hand, Isabel speaks in a paused controlled yet firm voice; like most women of her

class, her insults are not through vulgarity, but using implicit meanings. The dialogue between both women at church contrasts the impropriety versus decency:

> Viuda: Está usted en el templo
>
> Cucaracha: Estoy en tu abuela. Ponte a reparar si quieres.
>
> Viuda: Yo no sé reparar, no soy rodadora. Creo que así les dicen a las que sirven de todo.
>
> Cucaracha: También les dicen mulas a las que no sirven pa' nada. Porque aquí se pelea o se ayuda a pelear sin remilgos de culeca (sic).
>
> Viuda: Qué bien defiende su oficio.
>
> [Viuda: You are in church.
>
> Cucaracha: My ass! Go look for a man.
>
> Viuda: I don't know how. I'm not a crawler. That's how they call easy women.
>
> Cucaracha: And good-for-nothing women are called mules. Here you fight or help others fight. Don't be finicky.
>
> Viuda: You defend your trade vehemently] (*La Cucaracha*).

Isabel implies that, unlike la Cucaracha, she is sexually exclusive and monogamous, and consequently more valuable. At the visual level, the scene confronts the antagonists with the inside of a church as the background. Isabel wears black from head to toe and maintains a rigid position, her head covered with a long black shawl. On the other hand, la Cucaracha wears a black skirt showing her ankles, a red blouse, colorful earrings, and hair down to her shoulders. This point of the narrative begins a reversal of roles that both women will embrace. Each woman possesses what the other lacks. The *mestiza* soldadera has an agency developed in battle, whereas the *criolla* has distinction and good manners. .

The opposition of these characters is also emphasized by their performance of typical gender roles. They also have different attitudes and rapport in the presence of dominant males. For instance, La Cucaracha considers herself another *soldado*, rather than a *soldadera*, making emphasis on the Spanish masculine marker. During the first half of the film, she is explicitly proud of her economic independence, wears man's clothes, and reproduces social behaviors typically performed by men, such as drinking at cantinas, fighting, and even denigrating other women. In sharp contrast, Isabel, though proud and impenetrable on the surface, is in fact dependent on a man. For instance, after her husband's death during the San Blas battle, Isabel cannot return to her former life and enters a state of depression which is aggravated when she becomes the target of jokes and is bullied by la Cucaracha and her minions. Trinidad, a soldier interpreted by Ignacio López Tarso, defends Isabel against this maltreatment and warns the *soldaderas* that: "No se metan con la Señora. No ven que no tiene hombre que dé la cara por ella" [Do not bother that lady. She has no man to take care of her.]; to which la Cucaracha quickly responds: "Pos que se busque uno, buenas mañas no le faltan." [Then she should find herself a man, she surely has some good tricks] (*La Cucaracha*). The intention in Trinidad's message is twofold. As a man, he intends to stand up for whom he considers a defenseless lady; but also, he manifest a sexual interest in her by implying he can defend her. However, la Viuda immediately manifests reluctance to such prospects. This may be a simple lack of interest, but such rejection can also be interpreted as the result of *criolla* women internalized sexual prohibitions. At this point in the film's narrative; la Cucaracha attenuates her masculine attire due to the fact that a powerful male has manifested a sexual interest in her. Consequently from that moment, both women compete for the dominant male's attention.

During the first encounter between Antonio Zeta and la Viuda, the colonel's gaze is decidedly attracted by her physical beauty. As he approaches her, his manners change. He offers words of sympathy and solace, but he also communicates his rank as the most powerful male. Isabel is aware of her social distinction, but she is careful not to distance herself from potential benefits a powerful friend can provide her. Aristocratic distinction is based on a system of beliefs.[33] However, distinction is effective inasmuch as it is exclusive. This process of segregation is realized by specific discursive, ritualistic and ceremonial strategies that distinguishes an elite form the rest of the population. Before meeting colonel Zeta, Isabel's rapport with the revolutionary troops is distant, implying that she sees herself above commoners. However, the first encounter with Antonio Zeta is crucial in the plot, because Isabel realizes that Zeta is attracted to her distinction, and it is beneficial for her to count on him for protection. Once again, the superior woman uses her beauty and class, both culturally constructed perceptions, to profit in moments of upheaval.

If Isabel represents the typical female role of weakness and dependence on a powerful male; then women like la Cucaracha are problematic because they perform behaviors typically ascribed to men in a male-dominated society. La Cucaracha has many prerogatives atypical of early twentieth century Mexican women; for instance, she decides with whom to engage in sexual activity, and she administers her money. Similarly to her male counterparts, she navigates effortlessly in public spaces designated for males. In cantinas, she drinks heavily, sings, and yells profanities. But these behaviors are suspended when her relationship with Antonio Zeta becomes steady. Although the mestiza is beautiful, she lacks the sophistication and manners of her criolla

[33] Bourdieu proposes that elite groups like nobilities and aristocracies are defined by antagonism with other social sectors. This process is initiated by those who are not born inside the elite but wish to enter. A certain education, family and business connections, are necessary to be recognized as aristocrat, but must also be manifest and recognized by non-members. (*Reflexive Sociology* 119).

antagonist. The following dialogue between Antonio and La Cucaracha reveals a hidden admiration for la Viuda's distinction:

> Zeta: Qué se anda fijando. Yo a usted la quiero, pero ella es una señora.
>
> Cucaracha: ¿Y yo qué soy?
>
> Zeta: Ya lo sabe, usté (sic) es mi mujer. ¿Usté pa' qué (sic) quiere cumplidos?
>
> Cucaracha: Pos eso sí.
>
> [Zeta: Never mind. I love you, but she is a lady.
>
> Cucaracha: Then, what am I?
>
> Zeta: You already know that, you're my woman. Why would you want my cumpliments?
>
> Cucaracha. I guess that's true]. (*La Cucaracha*)

At this moment in the film, La Cucaracha has changed her appearance, no longer wearing pants and hats, but rather skirts and blouses, long hair, and feminine sandals. She even joins the washers in the river and acknowledges that now she observes a monogamous relationship with colonel Zeta. Being Zeta's woman implies she must abide by the man's rules. All these behaviors, that for the Twenty-First century audience might seem contradictory, inform us of the values and expectations for women in the 1950s. This means that intelligent, strong, independent women are subordinated to male authority figures. Yet, within this subordination, high-status women such as la Viuda, deserve admiration, while those of lower-class background must accept an inferior position without question.

Indeed, the privilege that is conceded to the *criollo* woman, represented in la Viuda, becomes influential to *mestiza* women. During the first half of the film, *mestiza soldaderas* are portayed as confident, strong-headed, and proud. However, in the second half, la Cucaracha begins to show insecurities and even shame and frustration. This may be interpreted as a result of

her inability to adapt to the social norms and expectations of a *decent* woman such as la Viuda. During battle, La Cucaracha is proud of labels such as "un soldado" [sic] or "una mala mujer," but her involvement with Zeta and her contrast to la Viuda begin to change those attitudes. La Cucaracha becomes aware of the negative consequences of an ill-reputation; and most importantly, her inability to *perform* the traditional role of a woman. This situation becomes evident in a turning point of the narrative when Antonio Zeta decides he cannot come to terms with La Cucaracha's past. In the next dialogue, he manifests a masked repudiation of La Cucaracha: "Yo la quiero mire. La quiero, pero no sé porque siento que ya no debo quererla. Ya pa' que la entretengo." [Look, I love you. I love you, but I don't know why I feel I shouldn't love you. I must let you go] (*La Cucaracha*). During this allusion to La Cucaracha's reputation, the camera cuts to show a male soldier watching a second soldier laying with a woman. The second man falls asleep, but the woman carefully removes from his embrace and rolls out of frame. This shot implies that the woman is a *rodadora*, just like la Cucaracha and serves as a mirror of her past behavior. The sexual freedom that helped la Cucaracha and other soldaderas survive the havoc of the Revolution has become a liability when competing with distinguished *criollas*.

Despite Isabel's reluctance to join Zeta's army as a *soldadera*, she eventually expresses affection to him. After la Cucaracha leaves Zeta, Isabel seizes this opportunity to flirt subtly, she expresses: "No quiero más soledad. No me escuche Coronel. Tenía que decirlo porque me he contagiado de este modo de vivir. Como usted quería, le ruego que no me escuche. Ojalá yo pudiera ser una soldadera, pero aquí resultó extraña hasta para usted Coronel." [I don't want more solitude. Don't listen to me, Colonel. I had to say it because I've been contaminated by this life style. I beg you to ignore me. I wish I could be a *soldadera*, but here I am foreign, even to you, colonel] (*La Cucaracha*). The film allows for multiple interpretations of this transformation.

First, following Anne McClintock's theory of colonial women agency, Isabel's conversion could be interpreted as an internal realization that her distinction and ethnicity are profitable, as long as she sells them to the highest bidder. This would explain her previous rejection to Trinidad's proposals. Second, the change could be seen as retaliation to la Cucaracha's insults. But perhaps, and as argued in previously in this chapter, the *criolla's* change may be the result of an organic transformation triggered by the historical event. Under the Porfiriato, Isabel's social position would never allow her to express affection to an Indigenous man such as Antonio Zeta, much less join him as a soldier. However, the development of the characters suggests that the Mexican Revolution functions as a legitimizer of new relationships. As Doris Summer proposes, romantic love becomes a central element in the symbolic and fictional foundation of the national image, in this case, a new mestizo nation where love breaks class and ethnic barriers.[34]

A subversion of roles begins when la Viuda accepts Antonio Zeta as her lover and protector, and la Cucaracha leaves the army due to an unexpected pregnancy. In fact being pregnant with Antonio Zeta's child gives her the conditions that she was expecting to be an a woman, and puts her at an advantage with regards to la Viuda. As a confession in a cantina sequence, la Cucaracha admits a perceived inferiority in terms of class, but understands motherhood as the redeeming condition: "No soy más que basura, pero ves esta basura que soy, pos ya hay algo en mí que no es basura. Voy a tener un hijo de Antonio Zeta y nadie puede quitármelo." [I'm nothing but dirt. But inside me, there is something that isn't dirt. I will have Antonio Zeta's child and nobody can take it away from me] (*La Cucaracha*). During her pregnancy, a striking change in la Cucaracha's demeanor. By the end of the film, la Cucaracha returns to San Blas and brings her son to receive baptism. Inside the church she looks onto the

[34] Although love between *mestizos* and *criollos* is indeed possible, race is still a distinguishing factor in in the real nation.

image of Jesus and prays: “Qué quieres que te diga, no sé nada de ti. ¡Qué iba aprender una metida en la bola! Puro pecado. Pero yo no sabía, tú sabes que yo no sabía. Ya sabes todo lo que hice. Si me perdonas Diosito, yo lo voy a enseñar para que te quiera”. [What can I say, I don’t know anything about you. What can anybody learn while in the Revolution army, but sin! But I didn’t know, you know I didn’t. But now, you know everything I’ve done. If you forgive me, my Lord, I will teach him to love you] (*La Cucaracha*). From this confession, it emerges la Cucaracha’s desire to be a decent woman and to adhere to social norms. Moreover, her permutation is radical: her voice becomes soft and paused, she begins wearing skirts and *rebozos*. I addition, her overall demeanor and body posture denote subordination; that is, her attitude is that of the “decent” woman. She remains strong, but maternity has transformed her into an obedient subject. The uncivilized, barbaric, and aggressive manners that characterized la Cucaracha are suspended by maternity. At the end of the film, it is clear that her main life mission becomes the education of her child.

The last sequence of the film synthetizes the transformation of la Cucaracha and la Viuda. The *mestiza* and *criolla* women have a final silent encounter, in which they see how the one has imitates the other. Borrowing Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, it is at this moment of ambivalence that the audience sees how both *mestiza* and *criolla* appropriate the Other, representing the behaviors that differentiated them previously. On one side, the former *soldadera* now resembles the widow, she wears dark clothes, her head covered with a shawl and her head down. On the other side, la Viuda now bears a resemblance of a soldadera; she walks energetically, holds a rifle, and wears a sombrero and bandoliers across her torso (see figure 2.10).

The mirrored images of la Viuda and la Cucaracha can be interpreted as a metaphor of post-revolutionary Mexican identity. Once again, the film shows the predominantly *mestizo* national image that emerged as it conceives the Revolution as its foundational moment. The conflict between the criollo and mestizo class is suspended as both representations collapse into a new image. Symbolically, the uncivilized *mestiza* and the distinguished *criolla* appear at the same level. Moreover, it is feelings of maternity, and loving partnership that eventually, almost inevitably, makes these women overcome the boundaries of the colonial past. The discursive and visual elements in this film help explain the ways in which the mestizo nation reconceives its origins and substance. The cultural image that Ismael Rodríguez articulates in this film gives validity to the Revolution and justifies the integration of the former *criollo* elite into a new mestizo genealogy. However, this amalgamation can also be seen as the mestizo claiming and legitimizing a *criollo* ancestry. Ismael Rodríguez's *La Cucaracha* emphasizes the central role of women fictional characters in the reconstruction of the country after the Revolution war. The synthesis of *criolla-mestiza* into a new woman exemplifies how social class and ethnicity are re-written in the context of a triumphant Revolution. This film reaffirms that an aristocratic *criollo* class did not disappear as a result of the struggle, but rather that by profiting from their perceived higher value, the possessors of aristocratic distinction that can also be renewed and integrated into the Revolution.

2.6 Class performance and ambiguity: Pedro Infante in *Escuela de vagabundos*

The Golden Age of Mexican film developed many genres. So far this chapter has dealt with revolutionary stories and write the intersections of *criollos* and *mestizos* in the Revolution setting. However, several productions also portray the lives of the upper crust in the 1950s,

among them *Escuela de vagabundos,* a comedy directed by Rogelio González in 1954. In spite of his enormous popularity in city melodramas and *ranchero films,* the male actor of *Escuela de vagabundos,* Pedro Infante, also profited from ethnic ambiguity as he played roles of urban workers, rural ranchers, Indians, but also wealthy educated suburban men. Nonetheless, his interpretation of Alberto Medina in *Escuela de vagabundo*s illustrates the importance of appearance and performance within aristocratic distinction.

Structurally, this film follows the traditional elements of a comedy of errors. It begins with the premise of reversal of fortune; but towards the end, the film reveals through peripety and anagnorisis of the protagonist's mistaken identity. Pedro Infante interprets Alberto Medina, a dirty and badly dressed man who shows up at a mansion to use the telephone, because his car breaks down on a country road. Coincidentally, the family who lives in this suburban mansion belongs to the wealthy Emilia de Valverde (Blanca Castrejón), an eccentric philanthropist who enjoys employing vagabonds with the intention of giving them a chance in life (see figure 2.11). To the dissatisfaction of the rest of the family and servants, many vagabonds before Medina have stolen valuables and eventually disappeared. Mrs. Valverde hires Alberto, ignoring the fact that he only wants to make a telephone call. In the midst of this confusion, Medina realizes the opportunity to play along and accepts a job as the family's chauffeur. Once cleaned up an evident sexual attraction between Alberto and Susana Valverde develops. Soon after, a series of comical misunderstandings and misinterpretations end up revealing Alberto's true identity, he is a renowned composer, and thus an appropriate match for Susana.

Through Alberto's interaction with the Valverde family, it is possible to study the representations of a Mexican aristocratic family. Through comedy, this film, challenges

traditional assumptions attributed to this sector of the elite by portraying their interactions with the vagabond. Traditionally, the aristocracy is perceived as a monolithic and clear-cut sector of society. This film enables us to study the representations of the Mexican elite in a distinct light, one in which the behaviors and signs that confer distinction can also cause conflict and confusion. Alberto Medina's ambiguous image causes confusion among the elite characters who make assumptions about him based on his poorly appearance. However, once Alberto adopts the looks of the wealthy, he becomes capable of interacting with the elite in both public and private. The theme of love and sexual attraction across social classes is also central in understanding this comedy. The elite female seems attracted to the vagabond, but his lower condition becomes an obstacle in the projection of her desire.

The error that triggers the comedic plot in this film is the assumption that Alberto is a vagabond, thus Emilia hires him as chauffer. However, during a party at the mansion where Alberto dresses up in a tuxedo, a group of wealthy invitees, assume that he is another distinguished guest. In order to maintain the comedic effect in the film, Alberto Medina's true identity is not revealed until very late in the story. In suggesting that a vagabond can be mistaken by a member of the elite, the director seems to affirm that the rules that govern the system of distinction can be suspended. At several stages, Alberto is judged by his appearance, first upon arriving to the mansion in rags, later while wearing a uniform, and finally when wearing a tuxedo at formal events. The transition from dirty clothes to chauffer garments make him attractive to the Valverde women. This attraction is manifested in a scene following Susana Valverde's night out with her boyfriend. Upon seeing Alberto at the mansions entrance, Susana pretends to have lost her keys as an excuse to spend time with him. This sequence shows a musical number (Infante sings "Tengo ganas de gritar te quiero"), and culminates with a passionate kiss.

However, this personal encounter is forgotten when Susana realizes she has broken the boundaries between social classes.

In a parallel maneuver, the narrative structure of the film aligns a third transition of appearance, from service uniform to formal dinner clothes. In principle, Alberto will help the staff in serving at a formal dinner that the Valverdes are hosting, but upon arriving all other guests assume that he has also been invited to the party. The 1950s Mexican society depicted in this film simultaneously suits and challenges the model of symbolic distinction; that is, the series of elements that merely the nobles and aristocrats recognize in their peers. The comical effect during the dinner scenes is achieved by the family's effort in keeping Alberto's social status a secret from the wealthy Mr. Vértiz, a potential business partner, whose daughter Patricia finds Alberto attractive. During the conversation at the table, Mr. Vértiz laughs at the idea that a vagabond could mingle in their group and affirms that such a person's class and manners would be obvious: "se le reconocería a leguas" [A vagabond would stand from miles away,] he insists.

However, the good manners and rapport that Alberto shows during the soiree do not correspond to those of a vagabond; after all up until this moment, the film does not reveal his true identity yet. It seems unlikely that an uneducated individual could navigate this space so confidently, understanding and successfully decoding upper-class codes of conduct. The supposed vagabond successfully chats with businessmen and fools everyone around him. This contradiction is resolved at the end when the story reveals Alberto is a famous composer, not a vagabond. So from these scenes, we could argue that the Mexican aristocracy constructs itself through a differentiation not only in terms of wealth, but also through the possession of a

symbolic capital which consists of an exclusive education, a similar physical appearance, as well as the knowledge to decode and interpret a series of the orchestrated rituals.

Chapter Two Conclusions

As we have observed in the this chapter, social status can only be determined and dissected by mapping out its connections and encounters with the lower-classes, but also by understanding it as a gendered phenomenon. On the surface, these films evidently promote a national *mestizo* culture, but as discussed, they also establish biological links with the old landowning aristocrats that ruled the large haciendas at the turn of the Twentieth Century. Attraction, love, and family are continuing themes in these films; not only for dramatic purposes, but also as vehicles to break class barriers.

Although a mestizo elite emerged from the Revolution, through the films we reviewed in this chapter, we can see a definite trend in which the "good" *mestizo* ends up acquiring or developing some of the skills that distinguish *criollo* aristocrats. Emilio Fernandez's films present a society in which archetypal social common denominators such as ethnicity, education, and appearance are unstable. For instance, mestizo characters such as Esperanza in *Flor silvestre* and José Juan in *Enamorada* are accepted into *criollo* land-owning families due to their love and decency. Ismael Rodríguez ends *La Cucaracha* with the antagonists, la Cucaracha and la Viuda, merging and mirroring the other. These images produced by film sought to define a new national representation of Mexico. Moreover, in doing so, the armed conflict of the Revolution acquires legitimacy as an historical event that brought about a new family. This message is metaphorically created in film images that are presented in similar contexts and styles, thus

articulating what Stuart Hall calls identities and stereotypes. As seen in these films, the power of the mestizo is represented in terms of love and high moral value. This power attracts the distinction of the *criollo* group to form a new nation with both genealogies.

The cinematographic representation of the Revolution strongly suggests that during the armed conflict, ethnic and social boundaries are suspended, thus allowing the mestizo revolutionaries to associate with *criollo* aristocrats by intermarriage. Even if boundaries are temporarily deferred, the value of aristocratic distinction is not. As we have discussed here, the cultural capital of female characters like Isabel la Viuda in *La Cucaracha* or Beatriz Peñafiel in *Enamorada* are constructed as culturally profitable assets, a trait that in the end benefits these women. Perception of ethnicity and the display of distinction play an essential role in their interaction with powerful males.

These films demonstrate that in the 1940s and 1950s, aristocratic capital continued to be an instrument of negotiation in the context of economic shifts such as the financial boom of the 1940's and the onset of modernization of the Mexico City in the early 1950s. In any case, the representations of both *mestiza* and *criolla* women in cultural texts can be understood through the exogamy model in which ethnic sexual bans dissolve in the midst of an economic or historical crisis. What is more, the *criollo* aristocracy, which traditionally represents itself as a cohesive group, is depicted as porous and vulnerable to major power shifts

Also, Golden Age films demonstrate that aristocracy is gendered and that the female body is the mechanism of its biological and cultural reproduction. However, women still find themselves subjected to the patriarchal discourse and heterosexual dominance. For instance, all the feminine characters –with the exception of the masculinized la Cucaracha- that we analyzed in this chapter have agency and participate actively in securing a powerful male, but none of

them at no time indicate or even contemplate the desire to pursue wealth or happiness independently. Indeed these *criollo* female characters exploit their wits and scheming skills with the sole objective to marry well and become reproductive machines. Classic 1940s Mexican cinema presents us with a representation of Twentieth Century Mexican society in which women are reduced to their basic biological functions of sex and motherhood.

As we shall see in the next chapters, the *mestizo* national image is challenged in the literature produced in the 1980s and 1990s. High-class women represented in more recent texts portray an elite in which ethnicity is still a major differentiator in elite interactions forty years after the Gold Age Cinema promoted a *mestizo-criollo* conciliation. Many cultural texts after the 1980s depict a resurgence of aristocratic nodes and criticize the populist discourse of the 1940s and 1950s.

Chapter Three

Social Mobility and Memories of an Aristocratic Upbringing

The rapid social mobility that affected Mexican society in the years after the Revolution was novelized in the late 1950s and early 1960s as a means to criticize the corruption of the PRI regime and the failures of democracy in Mexico. However, the social flux that took place in that era were the subject matter of several literary works published during the 1980s and 1990s. The four novels studied here were published in the last quarter of the Twentieth Century; however, the events refer to the characters' memories of the 1950s showcasing anxieties to preserve the privilege of *criollo* distinction. To illustrate such views of social mobility, the selection for this chapter includes Elena Poniatowska's *Paseo de la Reforma* (1998) and *La "Flor de Lis"* (1988); Guadalupe Loaeza's *Las yeguas finas* (2003); and José Emilio Pacheco's *Las batallas en el desierto* (1981).

The novels that make up the corpus of analysis in this chapter not only narrate the lives of a slew of aristocratic families, but in fact some of them where written by actual members of the Mexican elite themselves. Memory and aristocratic distinction are closely related for as Eric Mension-Rigau argues:

> *À la différence des autres classes sociales où le passé est souvent mal connu, voire inconnu et parfois – quand la famille est en situation d'ascension sociale – tenu volontairement caché et considéré comme relevant du tabou, la mémoire, opposée à l'oubli jugé comme un reniement, est ici, surtout dans l'aristocratie, à tout moment et à tout propos convoquée et exploitée comme un réservoir de symboles gratifiants.*
>
> [Unlike other social classes where the family past is often unfamiliar, if not unknown and sometimes, if the family has elevated its social status, willingly hidden and considered

> like something of a taboo, memory, as opposed to oblivion which is considered like renunciation, is here, especially in aristocracy, at every moment and on any occasion, called in and exploited like a reservoir of gratifying symbols]. (*Aristocrats et Grand Bourgeois* 14)

Whether they are inspired by autobiographical references are not, the texts discussed in this chapter portray in detail the process by which aristocratic distinction is constructed and developed since early childhood, a process so ritualistic, orchestrated, repeated, rehearsed, and performed that it becomes the fundamental body of memories in these novels.

Although it may be too early to talk about representative novels of the aristocratic distinction in this period, it is evident that considering the protagonists of these novels reflect similar preoccupations in spite of their structural generic stylistic differences. The common denominator of the novels studied in this chapter is that they conform to the structure of a Bildungsroman in the context of acquiring the marks of distinction. Also, all four novels narrate the political and economic atmosphere of the 1950s. In doing so, they portray the desires of the former landowning aristocracy to preserve their distinction against the progressive integration of the *mestizo* bourgeoisie into their spheres of exclusivity.

It is fundamental to understand that these novels allude to a failed implementation of social changes promised by the PRI administrations. On the contrary, and echoing Franz Fanon's theses, Mexico's post-revolutionary society resembles a process of decolonization. The power shifts that occurred after the Mexican Revolution, minimally changed the old structure of rulers and subalterns; the actual political change consisted in the class holding power. Indeed after the Mexican Revolution, a local powerful *mestizo* ruling bourgeoisie emerged, but the economic and political structures that arose followed the same oppressive character of the ancient regime. The

upwardly mobile bourgeoisie appears to have affected the cohesion of the Mexican aristocracy, because this recently-formed group seems perfectly able to mimic their social rituals.

Because aristocratic distinction is a cultural construct, its effectiveness relies on the correct performance of aristocratic acts and displays of status symbols. Therefore, a great deal of aristocratic ritual reproductions takes place in a constantly changing public sphere. Jürgen Habermas argues that major historical events restructure the social dynamics of the private and the public spheres. For instance, social acts that are nowadays only performed in private, were public in Antiquity and the Middle-Ages. In free-market societies today, any citizen can purchase items and services; however, these commodities become status symbols only when others in the public sphere recognize their value. Similarly, performances through body language, speech, and even ways of wearing clothes serve as class markers in public. In the case of the aristocrat, the repetition and public display of rituals through specific manners of speech, body postures, and fashions, among many, has for objective, that the person who enacts such behaviors be recognized in public as an exclusive member of the aristocratic network. These enactments are enforced, learned, and reinforced since the early stages of childhood so that when enacted in the public sphere they are perceived as a natural and inherited trait of the aristocrat. Consequently, the *Bildungsroman* and the fictionalized autobiography are apt genres for novelizing aristocratic childhood indoctrination.

Critics have tended to view autobiographies and autobiographical novels as closely related genres, sometimes erasing boundaries altogether in their treatment of modern texts. Literary theorists such as Leigh Gilmore and E.H. Jones are inclined to reclassifying the biography genre as a broader category named life writing which includes autobiographies, biographies, case studies, memoirs, and autobiographical novels, among other subgenres. Seen as

a product of personal sensibilities, this type of fiction reveals a preoccupation with themes, events, incidents, or characters normally described as intimate, familiar, reflexive, or secretive experiences, which are often excluded from the public sphere and the so-called realistic literature. In addition, this novelistic style challenges traditional notions of genre, realism, and identity as Leigh Gilmore argues in *Autobiographics*:

> Even in their surface presentation of unity and leaving your development, autobiographies pull together such a variety of kinds of writing (history, memoir, confession, even parody) that the "unifying" *I* at their "center" is already fractured by its place in varying discourses (political, philosophical, psychological, aesthetic), and what frequently fractures such totalizing theories of identity is gender. (45)

Borrowing Gilmore's concept of life writing as a genre, it becomes possible to look at novels, short stories, as well as the historical and anecdotal elements of the individual's life story, can be viewed as a legitimate source of knowledge. By reading these life writing texts as a vehicle to understand history, it becomes possible to broaden the view of the lived experiences of a specific social group and come to know it more intimately.

The life stories in the *Bildungsroman* provide a window to examine the ways in which the Mexican aristocratic identity is articulated during childhood. This genre also offers further possibilities for examining how memoir and biography re-construct historical events such as the 1950s and the effects of the Mexican Revolution. For instance, the novels of Poniatowska and Loaeza construct narrative voices who are conscious of strict social binary oppositions and cultural assumptions, yet they try to transcend those oppositions by questioning the real value of distinction. In Pacheco, the problem of memory as the result of actual experience or the product of dreams raises important questions about the construction of knowledge.

The cultural analysis of aristocratic childen memoirs challenges the assumption that the Mexican aristocracy has an unproblematic history. Through novelized childhoods, these authors also lead to a reconsideration of texts that have either been left out of the canon, because they were written by people with perceived power and social influence, or whose lives have been categorized as unproblematic, non-representative of popular culture. In response, the study of these *Bildungsromane* becomes a vehicle in which some aristocrats in Mexico have expressed themselves, not only as sources of knowledge on the aristocratic experience, but also in terms of what the rhetoric of these narratives reveals or hides from its readers.

3.1 Displaced aristocrats in Elena Poniatowska's *La "Flor de Lis"*

Contemporary writer Elena Poniatowska, started publishing in the 1950s, well-established in Mexico and abroad, her work has been translated into numerous languages and she is nowadays regarded as a legendary figure in the Mexican intellectual and cultural life. Starting as a journalist, she has refined the art of interviewing and investigative journalism to produce several testimonial works, both novels and essays. Poniatowska's production is particularly concerned with real events, often uncommon, and real people, sometimes marginal and nameless taking up the issues of gender, class, and ethnicity in contemporary Mexico.

Following a tradition established in Mexico by popular social chroniclers such as newspaper columnist el Duque de Otranto, Poniatowska began her career writing about the activities of the upper classes. Her early works include descriptions of the comings and goings of the Mexican elite, such as important weddings, dinners, charity events and other social activities of the local rich and famous. Poniatowska recalls that her awareness of the lower classes was born in the late 50s, with her first visits to the so-called Palacio Negro de Lecumberri, Mexico

City's infamous penitentiary. There she interviewed railroad strikers who led a social movement that inspired the student movement of 1968 several years later. In her own words:

> [A]t the time I was a young woman who had seen lovely homes with beautiful people in beautiful surroundings. I was familiar with the VIPs, the Mexican nobility, the Haciendas, the French expatriate community, but through my work as a journalist, I also discovered the slums and poverty; I saw much satisfaction but also much misery [sic]. I then realized that the dark side of the picture was more representative and more demanding than that which was depicted inside the satin covers *Vogue* or *House and Gardening*, which had been my natural habitat, and that was where my inclinations led me. (Schuessler 121)

Although her most celebrated works do not especially reflect on this privileged side of her life, she does touch upon the failed projects of the Revolution and Agrarian Reforms. In her novel *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* (1968), Poniatowska pays homage to *soldaderas*, women-soldiers of the Revolution, and to many other unheard dwellers of the Mexico City urban underworld. It is clear that the poverty and abjection narrated in this novel was produced, at least in part, by the Mexican Revolution which according to Jesusa, the protagonist, never gave anything to anybody except the revolutionary political bosses who took the place of those aristocratic Mexican families that escaped to France during the fall of Porfirio Diaz's long presidency.

According to many of her biographers, Elena Poniatowska is herself directly related to these families. On her father's side, she is descended from the last King of Poland and from Prince Joseph the Marshal of France. Her family includes among its illustrious ancestors an Archbishop, a musician, and several writers. Poniatowska was born in Paris in 1932 and immigrated to Mexico when she was only ten years old, along with her mother and sister all

three fleeing the dangers of Western Europe which was at that time in the threshold of World War II. Her mother was from a Mexican family that had left Mexico after the execution of Emperor Maximilian. Poniatowska began her education in France where her grandfather gave her lessons in French and mathematics. Upon her arrival in Mexico City, she continued her elementary schooling at the British sponsored insert school and concluded her formal education at the convent of the Sacred Heart in Philadelphia. Back in Mexico, she became a celebrated journalist and her literary career took off.

According to Poniatowska, for the creation of her *Bildungsroman La "Flor de Lis"*, she took refuge in her own childhood memories while gathering long forgotten documents that inspired her to write about the happiness and innocence of her youth. Allegedly, she called this novel *La "Flor de Lis"* after the shop that sells tamales in the Colonia Condesa as well as because the *fleur-de-Lis* is a symbol of her native France. Poniatowska's generic choice is in alignment with life writing theory, for as E.H. Jones suggests:

> Autofiction, as opposed to autobiography, then, is highly attuned with an age in which the subject is no longer accepted to be a unified, simple whole. Moreover, the admission of fiction is a clear recognition of the extent to which memory is fallible and a move away from the mythical figure of an omniscient writer looking back and taking stock of the slide, many decades after it began." (177)

This *Bildungsroman* contains some undoubtedly autobiographical episodes; for instance, the narrative is about an aristocratic girl, her mother, and younger sister who arrive to Mexico from France in the midst of World War II. In another evident parallelism with the author's life, the protagonists of this novel discover their own Mexican identity; for in fact her mother's ancestry

descends from a long line of *criollo* landowners who lost their haciendas in the midst of the Mexican Revolution.

One could argue that one of the innovations of this novel, and for which it deserves critical attention, is the fact that it does not represent the Mexican elite as a privileged group in full decadence; but on the contrary, it shows the young aristocratic protagonists' struggle to construct their identities and to preserve their values in a postcolonial society heavily characterized by sharp racism and unequal distribution of wealth. In Beth Jörgensen's opinion, *La "Flor de Lis"* critiques of the wealthy from within the upper class; and in doing so, Poniatowska suggests that privilege is fictional: "a product of human language and human structures of power and a lie based on the illusion of inherited superiority" (102).

This novel can be broadly divided into two distinct sections, before and after Mariana meets father Teufel, a priest that preaches against the inequalities of Mexican society. In the first section, Poniatowska narrates how the aristocratic class conscience is constructed and reproduced, and perhaps the conversations between the narrator and her mother are the best examples of such rituals put into practice. For instance, the narrator's adolescent memories explain how their aunt Francisca teaches the young Mariana and her sister Sophia how to serve tea "*comme il fault*". While emphasizing the difference between the French and English styles, their aunt implies that this knowledge will stand them apart from the rest. She also insists on the importance of physical appearance and warns the protagonist: "Mariana, tú no tienes la suficiente estatura para permitirte un gramo más. El pan y la mantequilla engordan por si no lo sabes" [Mariana, you're not tall enough to afford putting one more ounce on. Bread and butter fatten you up, in case you did not know] (*Flor de Lis* 82). In the presence of their aunt, these girls develop an awareness of how to wear their clothes and jewels, how to hold their posture, as well

as the most appropriate manners so that this combination of social rituals will be interpreted as a 'natural' good taste: "elegancia, porque somos elegantes por dentro" [elegance, because we are elegant from within] (83). Although the contradictions of these practices may seem evident, natural instinct cannot be learned, what is important to point out here is the fact that particular meanings are attached to specific behaviors; and the key to decipher or understand those meanings is a kind of knowledge that in turn becomes distinction, as Bourdieu explains.

Poniatowska's novel also illustrates the concept of distinction through the inheritance of luxury items and pieces of art. A central element of aristocratic distinction lies in the fact that their personal belongings have been passed from generation to generation and have thus acquired a history. Perhaps the best example of such belief occurs when Mariana visits with Thèrese Nissan, a Jewish friend who live across from her on Jalapa Street. At dinner, she describes that their costumes are definitely different to those of other friends. While many of her acquaintances merely try to imitate the good manners and style from the old aristocrats, the Nissans do not. Mariana's mother explains that this is due to the fact that the Nissans are bourgeois whose patrimony had been recently acquired: "…los muebles, las porcelanas, no estaban firmadas, nada había pertenecido a Napoleón, a Catalina la Grande, a María Lezcinska; las sábanas no tenían cifras ni iniciales. Burdas imitaciones, compradas en sus centros comerciales […neither the furniture nor the porcelain were original, nothing had belonged to Napoleon, Catherine the Great, Maria Lezcinska; the bed sheets were not monogramed. Coarse imitations bought at their shopping malls] (*Flor de Lis* 123). Ironically, when the protagonist invites Thèrese to dinner, the latter shows no amazement at the art on the walls or the décor in their mansion, quite the contrary, she believes their style is outmoded. The protagonist again explains the contradictory

forces that are at play in her mind; for she is at once proud of her aristocratic upbringing, but also finds the bourgeoisie represented in Thèrese to be honest, appealing, and practical.

School, a space of social mingling, becomes paramount in Mariana's understanding of post-revolutionary Mexican society. Indeed, the conflict that arises between the national revolutionary discourse and the old aristocracy immediately provokes questions in the young mind of the narrator. On the one hand, she has learned about the people who made and won the Revolution from the enthusiastic lectures by her teacher Miss Velázquez. But on the other hand, this view of the conflict is markedly opposed by all adults in her family who describe the winners as mere criminals, "puros bandidos," in her grandmother's words. Mariana learns from Mister Chips, an intimate friend of her mother's that her family lost all their haciendas as a result of the so-called Revolution. Mariana's elders refer to the PRI administration in derogatory terms: "Los políticos son los mismos ladrones que hicieron la Revolución. ¿Qué tuvo de bueno la revuelta esa de muertos de hambre? [Those politicians are the same thieves who made the Revolution. What was good about the revolt of those dirt poor ones?] (*Flor de Lis* 47-8). The quote above does not make any mention of race, however, this viewpoint suggests that those "thieves" winners of the Revolution are considered morally inferior, and also that their condition of "dirt poor" presumably links them to the mestizo/native population. Mariana's early years in Mexico are characterized by these conflicted views. However, as she becomes an adolescent, she challenges the prior generation's preconceptions on race and class.

3.2 *Paseo de la Reforma* by Elena Poniatowska

The themes of memory and distinction appear in other works by Elena Poniatowska. In her novel *Paseo de la Reforma*, she narrates the life of Ashby Egbert, the male protagonist, whose social position and personal interests put him at an intersection between to the old

aristocracy and the mid-Twentieth Century intellectual elite. Through the construction of this character, Poniatowska masterfully portrays the ambivalent and perhaps hypocritical stance that a handful of intellectuals and artists sustained with the post-revolutionary PRI ruling class. This novel's protagonist, Ashby, is the only son of a wealthy US couple that lives in Mexico City's exclusive Colonia Juárez in the 1940s. However, his privileged life takes an unexpected radical turn when he suffers an electric shock trying to save the life of one of the house maids. But because his parents are on vacation overseas, the staff finds no other option but to take him to a public hospital where he must share a crowded and noisy room with working class patients. Inside Hospital Obrero, Ashby discovers what Octavio Paz called "the Other Mexico", the one of the lower classes in which death, sex, and excretions are commonplace and palpable. But in a plot twist, Poniatowska identifies his privileged protagonist with the marginality and abjection that he finds in the public hospital: "Los humores de los demás y hasta sus evacuaciones eran las suyas, sus vidas le resultaron fascinantes y cuando le preguntaron por la suya la contó viéndose a sí mismo desde lejos, feliz de inventarse por primera vez y de lograr con tres trazos un personaje que a todos resultaba creíble" [the smells and even the secretions of the others were also his, their lives became fascinating, and when they asked about his own, he told it looking at himself from afar, happy for creating himself for the first time and for achieving a plausible character with only three lines] (*Paseo de la Reforma* 18). In a similar narrative strategy used in describing the childhood events of *La "Flor de Lis"* Mariana, Poniatowska also creates a class conflict in the early life of elite protagonist. By contrasting a life of privilege with extreme poverty, the author begins to play with the character's identity.

The experience of abject marginality produces a series of changes in the protagonist. The author resolves the contrast between the protagonist and working-class patients by creating a

mirror in which the protagonist constructs a low-class identity. For instance, he decides to create a myth about his origin and pretends to be a horse boy. By discursively re-constructing his class identity, the boy challenges his elite upbringing and begins to understand the myth of class distinction: "Verse a sí mismo como otro, examinarse, analizar su estirpe, su raza, elaborar juicios de valor acerca de su existencia, lo hacía entrar a un mundo nuevo, a una tierra perdida en el océano que ahora descubría" [looking at himself as an other, examining himself, analyzing his lineage, his race, judging his own existence, made him enter a new world, a land lost in the ocean he now began to discover] (*Paseo de la Reforma* 20). This myth allows Ashby to reflect on his own privileged class which he compares constantly to the raising of pure blood horses. Through the inner monologue of her character, Poniatowska suggests that class identity is to a great extent the result of socially constructed concepts like genealogies, family ties, and ethnic origin. She also raises questions on personal convictions and actions by implying that members of the elite simply conform to preconceived notions of their own class. For Poniatowska, prejudgments are an obstacle in the creation of a just society. She implies that in Ashby's return to his aristocratic home; he is an adolescent in search of his own self but with a mindful awareness that social and ethnic distinctions are a system of belief as opposed to biological differences.

Although this novel is not autobiographical, it does delineate, however, two similar processes between protagonist and author; firstly, both develop an honest and deep connection with the house staff and people outside of their social circles; but second and most importantly, both author and protagonist must navigate between the intellectual left and the powerful elite. In *Paseo de la Reforma*, Poniatowska masterfully depicts the complicated world of Mexican intellectuals and how they are intricately linked to the political and economic forces that they criticize. As Jean Franco affirms in "Dominant Ideology and Literature," the Latin American

lettered elite swings from the radical left ideology to bourgeois discourse: “The situation of intellectuals in this scenario is ambiguous. On one hand, because they were generally marginalized from power they criticized the repression of the people; on the other hand, in their reading, they were exposed to the ideology of the metropolis, expressed in the most subtle and refined forms” (448). Poniatowska’s text although fictional, narrates literary gatherings or *tertulias* at Ashby’s house that may have actually taken place. The fictional Ashby and his wife are hosts to respected writers such as Alfonso Reyes, Octavio Paz, Rosario Castellanos, and Max Aub, among others.

Indeed, the Egberts’ mansion is the perfect example of the complex node in which artists and aristocrats meet. Poniatowska ascribes aristocratic attributes to this space by describing it as a Parisian-style *hôtel particulier* in Colonia Roma, which is decorated with chandeliers and sterling silver flatware. This space becomes a fertile field for criticism of the Revolution, the PRI bourgeoisie, and the artistic elite as well. The narrative voice attests that during the Saturday parties at the Egberts’ one of the most recurring topics of conversation was the current political state: “México, país híbrido, no era democrático ni revolucionario ni conservador ni nada ni mucho menos sabía dónde iba” [Mexico, a hybrid country, was neither democratic, nor revolutionary, nor conservative or anything, and least of all it did not know where it was going] (*Paseo de la Reforma,* 68). This perceived lack of a Mexican political identity is in all lights a critique of the Mexican state’s inability to construct sound institutions that last beyond the six-year presidential terms. Additionally, the literary *soirées* depicted in this novel become a forum of criticism to the well-established mid-Twentieth Century tendency to exoticize Latin America. To this purpose, Poniatowska created a character named Amaya Chacel, a prototype of the leftist intellectuals of the time and becomes Ashby Egbert’s love interest. Amaya makes fun of Frida

Khalo's friends by asserting: "¿A poco no es una farsa vestirse de huehuenche o de tehuana para la cena cuando del diario las señoras andan con modelitos de París o de perdida de falda y blusa como todo el mundo? Todavía Frida Kahlo, la tullida, usa enaguas para esconder su columna rota y su pata flaca, pero las demás a qué le tiran?" [Isn't it a farce to dress up as Huehuenche or Tehuana for dinner when everyday ladies go around with the latest Paris fashions or at least a skirt and a blouse like everyone else? In her case, Frida Khalo, the crippled one, wears an underskirt to hide her broken spine and her skinny legs, but the rest, what are they pretending?] (*Paseo de la Reforma* 67). In any case, what Poniatowska reiterates with this character is the fact that the traditional aristocracy is not necessarily divorced from the production of intellectual dialogue. Ashby, a member of the *gente bien*, desires to be accepted inside the intellectual circles of the epoch.

By situating the protagonists at the epicenter of active intellectual dialogue, Poniatowska also establishes another clear parallelism with her own life experience as a journalist who eventually became acquainted with the most important Mexican writers and social thinkers of the time. By the mid1950s, Poniatowska had published her first collection of short stories *Lilus Kikus* (1954) and had established herself within a circle of young writers such as Carlos Fuentes and Juan García Ponce. But meanwhile, she still made a living writing her social columns for newspapers *Excélsior* and later *Novedades*. Therefore, while one side of her publishing career dealt with literary creation and criticism, the other involved reporting on the weddings, dinners, charity events, and other social activities of the Mexican elite to which she belonged. Similarly, Ashby, the protagonist of *Paseo de la Reforma*, is a member of the Mexican elite who in turn becomes a literary critic and member of the intellectual milieu. Once again, although not biographical, writer and character share aspects in common.

Aristocratic childhood, as narrated in Poniatowska's Bildungsromane, present a world in which the Mexican elite works continually to maintain their status. They also challenge the common notion that all aristocrats are alienated from society by presenting characters that are undeniably Mexican regardless of their migrant parents' cultures. As we shall see in novels by Guadalupe Loaeza and José Emilio Pacheco the *Bildungsroman* becomes a vehicle through which we can read about the aristocratic experience.

3.3 The "newly poor" in Guadalupe Loaeza's *Las yeguas finas*

Class construction and elite prestige are themes explored by Mexican writer Guadalupe Loaeza in many of her works. In agreement with the research of historians such as Pablo Picatto and Michael Johns, Loaeza depicts a residential migration in the 1940s and 1950s that parallels downward social mobility in aristocratic families that lost their fortunes and connections as a consequence of the Revolution. Mexican writer Guadalupe Loaeza contrasts these families to the *nuveau-riche* by simply referring to them as 'nuevos pobres' or the *nouveaux-pauvres*. Her novel *Las yeguas finas* (2001)[35] narrates the troubled relationship of an eight-year-old girl and her mother in the background of their aristocratic family's economic and social decline. But perhaps the most relevant aspect that this novel narrated as a *Bildungsroman* is the fact that the voice of Sofía, its narrator, recounts the aristocrats' anxiety in the midst of social change. The novel reveals Loaeza's interpretation of the strategies through which the former aristocrats seek to re-enact and re-produce social distinction in stark contrast with the power and wealth of the newly-formed bourgeoisie.

[35] In Spanish "fine mares" a mispronunciation of the French *jeunnes filles* or young girls.

The economic boom of post-World War II in Latin America became a most advantageous stage for social mobility. Half a century before, during the Porfiriato regime, the public sphere and spaces in the city were largely determined by race and class and, thus, access to the perimeter of the wealthy was tightly controlled by the state. In *City of Suspects*, Pablo Piccato surveys police documents of the era and maps out the city from the perspective of the different dimensions of organized crime. His study is instrumental in understanding the urban space as a sort of battle field in which the elite fights fiercely to keep the rest of society away from their exclusive loop. In the aftermath of the Revolution, however, Picatto concludes that: "The urban space reveals itself to be permeable: the *populacho* invaded the central city, expanded politics spatially, engaged directly with government offices and broke implicit boundaries in their claim to participate in an expanding public sphere" (19). The expansion of *el populacho* into these spaces, once exclusive to the aristocracy, become a preoccupation for a *criollo* elite that is unwillingly dealing with Mexico's transition into a new economic model. Writers such as Carlos Fuentes also narrated this space shifts in his novels *Aura* (1962) and *La region más transparente* (1958).[36]

The elite residential areas, known as *colonias* in the Mexican dialect, before the 1940s were built around Paseo del Emperador, a long avenue that was designed by Emperor Maximilian in order to connect the Imperial Castle on Chapultepec Hill and the old Historic center in Mexico City. Later renamed El Paseo de la Reforma, this boulevard became an emblematic space because it housed many of the most elegant buildings and mansions at the height of the Porfiriato: "The truly rich waited to build on Bucareli Street, and then along Reforma in the elegant colonias of Cuauhtémoc, Juárez, and Roma" (Johns 29). However, by the

[36] This dissertation discusses this preoccupation in chapter one.

1940s, new and more exclusive suburbs were traced farther West in the old military practice fields of Las Lomas as well as in the former hacienda in Polanco, both bordering the ancient forests that became Chapultepec Park. A combination of these residential developments and the financial hardship left behind a number of aristocratic families whose trials and tribulations were later narrated in contemporary literature.

Loaeza's novel's title derives from the mispronunciation of the private school that the protagonist, her mother, as well as her sisters attend: The Saint Cosme French School for young girls: "…*jeunes filles*, como llamaban a sus alumnas las monjas francesas. Pero como muchos de ellos no hablaban francés terminaron por bautizarlas con el nombre de yeguas finas" [*jeune filles*, as the French nuns used to call their students. But because many people did not speak French, they ended up calling the girls *yeguas finas*] (*Las yeguas finas* 11).[37] Although this school is fictional, it is representative of a number of private and exclusive Catholic schools that at the time were struggling to survive. As it is revealed in the text, the founding order of this school in France was undergoing a deep financial crisis and could no longer afford to finance the same number of scholarships to its students. As she narrates the indifference she receives from both family and educators, this economic situation triggers the anxiety and strife of Sofía, the protagonist, because her grades are poor and an extra year of tuition would be a harder burden for her family.

The author exemplifies the apprehensions of downward mobility by narrating Sofía's struggle and confusion as she sees the world of the adults around her. At her age, she seems

[37] This mispronunciation denotes mockery to their social status while it also implies that the school is raising these girls as though they were cattle, not people. This mispronunciation may also reflect a sociolinguistic trend since at that time, French was no longer the preferred language at the international level. The United States had become a hegemonic power in the Americas and thus, English was by then the preferred language for business, science, and technology. The characters in this novel make constant mentions of American brand names, stores, and car models.

incapable of wholly understanding unwritten social cues and boundaries; therefore the hypocrisy and lies that the adults adopt in order to keep up with appearances become truly problematic for her. The girl does not understand why adults reprehend her for telling the truth about what she sees and hears; furthermore, she begins to create a profoundly negative image of herself. Sofía idolizes her teacher Miss Mary not only because she appears as a smart, young, and educated lady, but also because it is from her that she gets the attention that she lacks at home. However, this relationship goes awry when the girl spends an afternoon at her teacher's Colonia Cuauhtémoc home and observes the decadent state in which her family actually lives. Innocently, Sofía observes Miss Mary's drunk father, an empty refrigerator, but pays a peculiar interest in the guest bathroom, which reminds her of the poverty in her own family: "…el de mi casa también es horrible. Casi nunca hay papel, ni toalla, ni jabón, ni nada. No me lo va a creer pero en el piso hay una coladera que está rota" [the bathroom in my house is as horrible as this one. There seldom is toilet paper, or a towel, or soap, or anything. You will not believe this, but there is even a broken drain] (*Las yeguas finas* 45). Loaeza describes an indignant child protagonist who notices how her teacher blatantly lies about her father's alcoholism, and loses all sympathy for her teacher when she calls her a gossip and insists that her father was sick with the flu and not drunk. However, the important aspect of this episode is that Loaeza reveals through the voice of Sofía that these families, are distinguished, but in appearance only.

Keeping appearances, or rather, the optimal performance of these social acts/behaviors becomes an essential element inside the private school because both old and new money compete for distinction in this space. In agreement with Eric Mension-Rigau's the aristocrat's concern to perceive the qualities of the group as blood privilege, and the unwillingness to mention money are central in the distinction between the aristocrat and the newly-rich bourgeois:

> L'inscription de l'individu dans un lignage, le souci d'ériger les qualités du groupe en privilège du sang, les réticences à l'égard de l'argent, ou la pratique d'une certaine désinvolture – dans le savoir-vivre ou le langage notamment – apparaissent plus nettement comme caractéristiques d'une appartenance aristocratique.
>
> [The inscription of the individual in a lineage, the concern to elevate the qualities of the group as blood privilege, and the reluctance to talk about money, or the practice of a certain casualness (in the manners or in the language in particular) mostly seem to be characteristics of aristocratic belonging]. (*Ancient et Nouvelles* 14)

In her representation of formerly-wealthy families, Loaeza uses the social contradictions perceived by the narrative voice of Sofía to illustrate the conflicts between money and class distinction. Although Sofía is the descendant of an old aristocratic family, she realizes that rich girls, regardless of their upbringing, receive better treatment from nuns and teachers alike: "sobre todo las que tienen papás que trabajan en el gobierno" [Especially those who have a father working for the government] (*Las yeguas finas* 105). Sofía bitterly complains that some girls related to then-president Ávila Camacho were allowed to break rules because of their enormous donations to the school's charitable funds. Not surprisingly, the novel also illustrates the distance that begins to separate the aristocrats with money from those whose fortunes had waned due to earlier armed conflicts. This exclusion is evident between Sofía and Sara, her best friend when the former realizes that she was not invited to the latter's birthday party; as opposed to other girls who are the offspring of upstarts. In agreement with Mension-Rigau's observations on the tacit importance of money, Loaeza explains Sofía's relationship with a best friend who excludes the protagonist from social events due to her family's recent poverty: "Nunca te olvides que eres mi mejor amiga, Las otras no me importan [Never forget that you are my best friend, I don't care

about the others] (*Las yeguas finas* 141). The author suggests that families with ties to the PRI administrations begin to diminish the gap that had kept them apart from interacting directly with the elite. Meanwhile it also becomes evident that whether or not the aristocratic sector admits it, wealth is a tacit element in the maintenance of class distinction.

At the emotional and visual center of this *Bildungsroman* one observes the imminent figure of the protagonist's mother. She is presented as an overwhelming character who captures her daughter's anxious attention and, simultaneously, dictates the parameters by which Sofia should, although unsuccessfully, reproduce the norms and rituals that give social distinction to her family. However, what characterizes this family's mother figure is a type of omnipresent absence; that is, her image and authority remain constant in her children's lives, while at the same time she is distant, dismissive, and in many instances, intimidating. Thus through the narrative act and the epistolary dialogue with her sister Inés, Sofía attempts to fill the gap that separates what she desires through her gaze, but that remains inaccessible to her grasp. Unfortunately for Sofía, the distance between what she is and what she is told she should be, puts her at a disadvantage in school. She then enters a vicious cycle by believing that being more in the image of her mother will end her frustration. Sofía's story of frustrated development gravitates around this complicated relationship. In the opinion of her mother, the protagonist fails to reproduce the values and behaviors that would make her a good prospect for marriage, quite the opposite of what her mother wishes.

Sofía's story of frustrated development revolves around an unstable relationship with her mother. Several contemporary studies of individual development attempt to explain the processes by which an infant acquires the sense of self and other that is essential to his or her life as a social being. The mother-child interaction, a critical factor in the child's development, has been

the object of academic debate and competing interpretations. Feminist critic Mariam Irene Tazi-Preve's book, *Motherhood in Patriarchy*, provides the theoretical underpinnings of how Sofía visualizes her mother, and how Sofía is simultaneously fascinated and perplexed. Following Foucault's idea of the modern state regulating the private sphere, Tazi-Preve focuses attention on the social dimension of motherhood in an effort to show that Western patriarchy has deprived women of reproductive decisions while placing on mothers the burden of child education in an effort to reproduce male power (21). This burden is depicted in Loaeza's novel by placing the mother at the central place in the narrative. Loaeza's novel narrates the incidence of an omnipresent mother who instills an identity of female dependency. On the one hand, the author describes a child who sees, hears, and admires her mother, but on the other, the novel depicts a distant and criticizing mother. The young protagonist is not fully recognized by the mother, who soon disappears from view.

Furthermore, Tazi-Preve hypothesizes that tales of omnipresent mothers in fact imply that they possess a great deal of power, when in reality women seldom have (185). She goes on to describe the first bond between mother and child understanding 'mother' in functional and not strictly biological terms and the conflict between independence and dependency during early childhood as opposition of forces, because the child experiences connection and separation simultaneously. Her mother's overbearing personality and the difficult economic conditions of Sofía's upbringing combine to deny her a supporting interaction with a mother figure. Effectively excluded from the circle of her mother's concern, Sofía compensates for abandonment by creating and re-creating a mental image of the absent mother. Sofia's narration attempts to give symbolic presence to the absent mother, to fix and to process with words a frustrating reality. Sofía emphasizes the visual in her descriptions, then the angle of her vision

proves to be fundamental to our interpretation of the images that she narrates. Starting with the opening scene at the school reunion and continuing throughout the novel, Sofía locates herself at a significant distance from her mother, both physically and emotionally. Looking at her mother on the telephone for hours, or waiting for her at school, Sofía watches on the scene, ignored, and even, sporadically forgotten and unnoticed by the adults on whom she relies for recognition. As Tazi-Preve further suggests, constant tension between assertion and recognition is essential to the dual goal of autonomy and relatedness in child development (190). Because Sofía's individual accomplishments are not recognized by her mother, she feels excluded from a supportive social context. To emphasize her mother's preference for her siblings, the author narrates the assertion and recognition of Sofía's sisters who see their mother as the primary source of recognition and encouragement.

Undoubtedly, the centrality of her mother in this novel structures Sofía's low self-esteem and, consequently, creates a constant craving for attention. But other characters also play significant and counterbalancing role in the protagonist's search for identity and roots. As the plot progresses other attachments begin to pull her gaze away from the mother's appeal and authority by engaging her in new interactions. The failure of an essential mutual bond between mother and child conditions these alternative relationships and compromises growth, but our analysis cannot ignore the influence of several other characters who help Sofía begin to understand the importance of social distinction and reproduction of rituals. As mentioned before, among the women who play and nurturing role in her life, Sofía feels a particular affection for her sister Inés. In addition, Western patriarchal culture identification with the father has traditionally provided the growing child with the means of entry into the outside world of work, public life, and public recognition (Tazi-Preve 39). For Sofía the classic scenario is complicated

by the position of her father as an estranged character. Her father remains the figuratively missing at home because he is somehow disconnected from family life. By putting a strong emphasis on Sofía's mother, Loaeza reveals very few details about her father. While the mother figure appears omnipresent, the father's seems almost phantasmagoric. Loaeza's text only reveals that Sofía's father's business dealings are modest, because his education did not prepare him for commerce. Also, Sofía tells that her father hardly argues openly with his wife in spite of the evident tensions between them.

With the exception of her sister Inés, all other family members ignore Sofía, especially her mother. This causes her to start believing that she is unworthy, and in turn, she begins to develop what classical psychoanalysis calls "an inferiority complex," that is an impoverishment of the ego due to a constant enforcement of a negative self-image. Although she is not physically deformed, or mentally slow, frequently her mother insults her: "Anda tú, idiota. Idiota, bruta, imbécil" […] Seguro tiene razón, porque todo el mundo dice que ella es muy inteligente, y si me dice todo esto es porque es mi mamá y es por mi bien" [you idiot, brute, imbecil… She's probably right because everybody says she is very intelligent, and if she calls me these things it's because she's my mother and it's for my own good] (*Las yeguas finas* 74). In an interview after the release of her novel, Loaeza explains that: "Tal vez esta niña lo que rechaza es lo que está en ella. Esta niña tiene un conflicto de admiración y resentimiento. Es decir, esa mujer que admira tanto no la ve, no existe para esa mujer, y esa mujer existe demasiado para la niña, para Sofía." [Perhaps this girl rejects what is inside of her. This girl has a conflict between admiration and resentment. In other words, the woman whom she admires doesn't see her. The girl does not exist for her mother; and that woman's existence means too much for Sofía] (Ortiz 89). The child sees her mother, but the child is not seen by her mother, who soon disappears from view. Her

mother's personality and the real conditions of Sofía's upbringing combine to deny her the nurturing mutuality of dependable interaction with her mother. In order to cope with her mother's negative comments, Sofía believes that she can become invisible: "… en esos momentos soy totalmente invisible. Todos siguen platicando afuera en la puerta […] Me voy sin despedirme pero nadie se da cuenta" [In moments like those, I am completely invisible. Everyone keeps talking outside the door… I leave silently but nobody notices] (*las yeguas finas* 54). Her frustration is so well-established that Sofía has developed the imaginary technique of using magic powder when she finds herself in situations of stress, in what appears to be her strategy to deal with anxiety.

Interviewed in 2003, Loaeza revealed that Sofía, the protagonist of *Las yeguas finas,* is a fictionalized version of her own childhood and the troubled relationship the author had with her mother. But perhaps most importantly, the author declares that Sofía's narrative parallels her own act of novelizing part of her life in order to gain the attention that she lacked when she grew up: "Todo lo que hace es para que la vea. Escribir para que la vea. La radio para que me escuchen, porque si siempre te dijeron que no existías porque hacían sentir que no existías, para eso escribo mis libros" [Everything she does is to catch her mother's attention. She writes for her mother's attention. I do radio shows to be heard. Because if they always said you did not exist, they made you feel you did not exist. That's why I write] (Ortiz 91). In fact, when asked about the truthfulness of the facts depicted in the novel, Loaeza responds that other members of her family will find that the description of the character based on her mother exaggerated, but then again she contends that what she wrote is simply her own impressions and her side of the story: "en lo que se refiere al las relaciones con mis padres, es mi versión. Eso es lo importante" [in regards to the relationship with my parents, it is my version. That's what counts] (Ortiz 96).

Excluded from the circle of her mother's concern, Sofía compensates for abandonment by creating a discourse of her indifferent mother. Sophia's narrative attempts to fix and to possess with words an unattainable reality. Starting with the opening episode and continuing throughout the novel, Sofía sees herself at a distance from her mother, outside and beneath her. Sofía watches on the scene, overlooked, and even, occasionally stepped on by the very adults upon whom she depends for needed recognition.

However, the issues with her mother are not the result of mere indifference, it so happens that Sofía's mother treats her with unquestionable meanness; for instance when a friend of the family praises Sofía, her mother entirely dismisses the compliment: "Qué mona está esta niña Inés", le dijo el señor con sus ojos verdes [...] mientras con sus manotas acaricia mi cabecita. "Ay esto no es nada, si vieras a las otras. Ésas sí que son bonitas." [How cute is this girl, Inés, the green-eyed gentleman said while he caressed my head with his big hands … oh, this is nothing compared to the others. They really are pretty] (*Las yeguas finas* 123). This is also patent in the distribution of her mother's estate upon her death; while her three older sisters will inherit antique paintings, china from Limoges, and a detailed series of other luxury items, Sofía will only get a gold medal. Although she is only eleven, in her mother's view Sofía is not a potential good match for a profitable marriage, and thus, a heavy burden to the family.

As a postcolonial society, ethnicity in Mexico and in the rest of Latin America is an essential element of class distinction. Although Loaeza's characters do not directly make racist remarks, Sofía's family exemplifies in several instances the ways in which phenotypical traits such as skin and hair color confer a person a higher or lesser degree of respectability. Moreover, qualities such as a fair skin or light colored hair must be preserved as a standard feature of a 'respected family' in the milieu of Mexican society. The color of the skin is perhaps the most

noticeable component of this differentiation, but surely the one that worries Sofía's mother the most. Sofía narrates how her mother is horrified to see her dressed in Afro-Caribbean attire after she returns from a birthday party:

> Sofía fue disfrazada de negrita. Inés me pinto la cara de negro con un corcho quemado […] Después que me pintó toda la cara, me puso alrededor de la cabeza una mascada roja de bolitas blancas. Así pintada y vestida con una blusa de holán, una falda larga y un cojín que me amarró en la parte de atrás, me veía igualita a la negra que sale en la caja de *hot cakes.* (*Las yeguas finas* 60-70)
>
> [Sofía dressed up as a black girl. Inés painted me black with a burned-up cork. After that, she put on a red scarf with white dots around my head. All made-up and dressed with a ruffled blouse, a black skirt and a pillow in by back, I looked just like the black woman in the pancake box].

Although there is an implied innocence in Sofía's costume choice, the fact remains that her image of Afro-Caribbean women is constructed from stereotype and mockery[38]. But perhaps the most indicative sign of this naturalized racism comes from Socorro's family, the birthday party hosts. Although they are described as lower-class *mestizos*: "prietos y pelados" (dark-skinned and uneducated), they believe Sofía has the funniest costume and award her a whipping top, the best costume prize. It is thus implied that there is a clear notion of ethnic hierarchies among the mestizo population who imitate the same scheme of oppression on which the colonial system was based.

[38] In this episode, Sofia is the only girl from her class who attends Socorro's birthday party at a poor *vecindad* in Colonia Santa María la Ribera. Ironically, her best friend Sara hosts a costume birthday party at her father's ranch, but Sofía is not invited.

The question of skin color brings up the discussion of tanning, a practice that according to Loaeza, has opposing views in the Mexican aristocracy. During centuries of colonial rule, fair skin was considered a higher value, thus the more traditional trend prohibited women to sunbathe. In France however, since the 1920s, a winter tan became a status symbol for usually the rich could afford to go on vacation to warm tourist spots. Loaeza discusses this fashion trend at length in *El ABC de las y los mexicanos* where she asserts that: "En México, entre las clases altas, exponerse al sol era un peligro mayor. Significaba quemarse y tener la piel morena […] ser prieto y estar identificado como perteneciente a la raza de bronce era socialmente inaceptable." [In Mexico, among the upper clases, exposing onself to the sun was a risk. It meant they could catch a tan, and dark skin was a mark of low status; belonging to the bronze race was socially unacceptable] (178). The 1950s, as described by Sofía are witness to the conflict between the traditional, racist view and the more accepting modern trend. For instance, Sofía is conscious that her rich school mates return from vacations at beach resorts and their tan is evident proof of their economic power. In order to keep up with these girls, Sofía decides to sunbathe at the roof of her house unaware that this will upset her mother: "Nunca se ha quemado con el sol. Odia a los prietos. Por eso, cuando me bronceo en la azotea se pone furiosa y comienza a gritar: "Pareces criada". Yo nunca he ido a la playa con ella" [She has never sunbathed. She hates dark-skinned people. That's why she gets furious when I catch tan. She cries: 'you look like a maid'. I have never been to the beach with her] (*Las yeguas finas* 121). In spite of the fact that tanning is not permanent, the opposing views towards this and other such practices reveal important changes within traditional elite families, some of which result in significant contradictions.

Despite the superficial notion that Inés, Sofía's mother, is intelligent and refined, the descriptions of her character and actions depict quite the opposite. These contradictions can be

addressed and explained from different perspectives, the first and most obvious view would be to read this text as social satire, that is, Loaeza's effort to indirectly make a social critique through ridicule and exaggeration. As a result, while members of this social stratus boast about their decency, inherent good qualities, and education, indeed they show disrespect, avarice, and ignorance. For instance, Sofía's mother is described as a "yegua fina," an intelligent young mother of five whose major concern is to provide what she considers a good education to her children[39]. Sofía's inner monologue however, lets us see that her mother is actually indifferent to her and her sisters on boarding school in France; she spends most of her day on the telephone and visiting with other socialites. Sofía reveals that her mother is often preoccupied with raising her children in her image as a decent member of society, but that her mother is in fact racist, unpunctual, and rude. Loaeza is thus presenting the impoverished Mexican aristocracy by pointing out the basic inconsistencies that govern a lifestyle that no longer matches their family's income.

Undoubtedly, the centrality of the mother in this novel structures the portrayal of Sofía's poor school performance and dependency. But other characters also play significant and counterbalancing roles in the protagonist's search for attention and identity. As the story progresses other attachments begin to pull her gaze away from the mother's presence by engaging her in new encounters. In spite of the coldness and lack of empathy that characterizes Sofía's relationship with her mother, the young protagonist finds guidance and attention in her older sister Inés who frequently writes from a boarding school in France. The figure of Inés does

[39] Interviewed by Elena Poniatowska, Loaeza observes that both, mother and daughter have a difficult relationship because they are very much alike: "la niña se parece mucho a su mamá, es igual de metiche, igual de platicadora, igual de criticona, igual de fijada, igual de necia, de vanidosa" (Ortiz 88). However, as it was mentioned, they are diametric opposites in other areas of their personalities. For instance, Inés the mother, excelled in school and was admired by nuns, teachers, and schoolmates alike; Sofía, on the contrary, has poor grades and must re-take fifth year of primary school.

more than just play a nurturing role in her life, but she feels a particular affection and emotional support to her younger sister in her correspondence. The content of her letters, though trivial, reveals an even harsher criticism of Mexican society as she questions many of the precepts and norms with which she grew up. For example, after a few months in boarding school, Inés recognizes that the approach to her education in France is directed at developing critical thinking skills, as opposed to what she had always experienced in Mexico. She particularly mentions that students in France are not afraid of expressing their views, and also points out that French nuns, although strict, are not feared by the students: "No que en México ni quien pregunte, ni quien discuta en las clases, y menos en la de catecismo, y además te regañan." [During class in Mexico, no one asks questions, no one discusses anything; much less in Catechism class, they'll reprehend you if you do so] (*Las yeguas finas* 86). Inés seems gladly surprised that, in France, girls are allowed to ask questions, engage in discussion, and express disagreement. Such different styles of formal education are not just a matter of relative freedom; colonial practices still partly present in Mexican society dictate that elite girls be groomed for a profitable marriage. In the gendered categories of the post-colonial context, an obedient woman has a higher value.[40]

A more careful revision of Inés's school experiences strongly suggests once again that the well-known category of '*gente bien*' with which she grew up is rather unstable. Indeed, the most peculiar observation that Inés makes has to do with her reading of class status markers. According to her experience in France, it is impossible to tell which students are wealthy and who aren't: "Lo bueno de aquí es que no sabes quién es rica y quién no. Nadie llega de coche con chofer, ni vienen las nanas cargando las mochilas […] Todas las niñas usan zapatos con

[40] For more, see Chapter One of this dissertation.

suela gruesa de hule y agujetas. No he visto a ninguna con zapatos de charol o *loafers* tipo gringo" [Fortunately, nobody here knows who is wealthy and who isn't. No one arrives in a car with a chauffeur, you don't see maids carrying books. All of us wear plastic-sole, lace shoes. I've never seen anyone wearing patent leather shoes or American style loafers] (*Las yeguas finas* 85). At first glance, these remarks may only seem trivial comparisons between French and Mexican schools, but what they confirm yet again is that markers of class are culturally constructed and that the correct reading and interpretation of these symbols becomes a crucial asset for and of the aristocrat. The deconstruction of class markers in the text thus depends on the experience of the young Mexican aristocrat in a foreign context; that is, she becomes aware that social distinction is an unstable discourse whose meanings are culturally determined.

From its title, the novel already suggests that the female members of the Mexican upper class belong to and compete in the market of profitable reproduction. Loaeza depicts a mother convinced that her daughters will enter marriage market where they will battle with the young daughters of the wealthy and powerful, she is thus convinced that their experience and schooling in France will give them an edge in this competition. For instance, once the girls have settled in this school and upon returning to Mexico, Inés, the mother, remarks that they will be better prepared: "Ay niñas, no sean tontas, no vayan a llorar, qué hubiera dado yo por estar en su lugar. Estas monjas las van a formar y les van a dar sentido de responsabilidad, Van a aprender a hablar francés muy bonito y se van a casar muy bien, ya verán. Van a tener armas para la vida" [Girls, don't be foolish, don't cry. What I would have done to be in your place! These nuns will educate you and instill a sense of responsibility in you. You will learn to speak a beautiful French, and you'll marry well, you'll see. You'll have ammunition for life] (*Las yeguas finas* 34). In the case of *Las yeguas finas*, learning to decipher and correctly reproduce a set of exclusive behaviors is a

crucial asset for successfully fulfilling the goal of marrying well. It seems no accident that their mother chooses the term "ammunition" as opposed to other metaphoric expressions such as tools for life; from this we can assume that the postcolonial context in which they live is widely perceived as a space of ruthless competition and latent violence. Just as Inés gradually acquires this awareness, her character becomes the guide, and moral compass for the young protagonist.

In conclusion, Loaeza's novel provides clues on how aristocratic distinction is instilled in childhood. It also helps in understanding the processes by which families construct their class affiliation.The reproduction of what would become the label *gente bien* in the 1980s depends primarily on the constant reproduction of rituals, practices, and beliefs from an early age. As Loaeza depicts through Sofía's voice, by controlling education, families are able to preserves the principles of exclusivity under which aristocracies are established. Also, this novel also demonstrates how historical events such as the Mexican Revolution or initiated social structural modifications. Despite Sofía's family distinction, the narrator shows their struggle in the face of the 1950s economy.

3.4 Social mobility in José Emilio Pacheco's *Las batallas en el desierto*

The anxiety of social mobility and childhood during the 1950s Mexican society is a theme narrated by renowned poet and novelist José Emilio Pacheco. Whereas the protagonists in Poniatowska and Loaeza tell their memories about the 1950s with a melancholy for the lost French cultural predominance, Mexican José Emilio Pacheco narrates the social mobility of the 1950s from another perspective. His acclaimed Bildungsroman *Las batallas en el desierto* (Battles in the Desert) masterfully presents the depth of American cultural presence in the Mexico City then newly-formed middle classes, and shows how, in spite of its reluctance, the impoverished descendants of the old aristocracy can greatly benefit from the newly rich.

In spite of the fact that there are many parallelisms between Pacheco and Carlos, the protagonist and narrator of *Las batallas en el desierto*. According to Loaeza's introduction of *Manual de la Gente Bien*, by the 1950s the morality and expectations of the aristocracy had dramatically changed; especially in Mexico City: "Tal vez sea a partir de los cincuenta cuando la Gente Bien (la rica y venida a menos) comienza a hacer concesiones que sus antepasados jamás hubieran comprendido ni admitido" (41). [Perhaps from the fifties on, Gente Bien (both wealthy and impoverished) starts to make concesions that their ancestors would have never understood or permitted]. The most liberal members of the upper crust of Mexican society had adopted a number of American values, which also helps us understand many of the discrepancies that Carlos observes around him. Twentieth Century American consumerism relied heavily on the appropriation and mass production of the cultural artifacts.

Penetration of US pop culture and values took special impetus in the post Second World War years and coincides with the so-called "Mexican Miracle" years during which the PRI established itself as the most powerful political force and the *de facto* ruling party. According to Guadalupe Loaeza, the presidencies of Ávila Camacho and Miguel Alemán had helped to create a Mexican bourgeoisie built on enormous wealth and political power (*Manual de la Gente Bien* 35). Not surprisingly, in the early 1950s it became common to find politicians and government ministers among the traditional aristocrats at social events such as weddings and charities. But perhaps the most noticeable change within the upper class was a new taste for the so-called American way of life, as well as a desire to consume imported goods. Loaeza indicates however, that the inclusion of the recently formed bourgeoisie with a preference towards American values created a subdivision within the old families; those that welcomed and benefited from the new order, and those who stuck to the tradition of class segregation and strict conservatism.

In a 1990 interview for newspaper *la jornada*, Elena Poniatowska, a long-time friend of Pacheco's, attests that although his maternal family, the Bernys, were wealthy businessmen, his father actually came from poor origins but worked his way up the military ranks during the Revolution (Borinski 24). Poniatowska suggests that characters and situations in Pacheco's narrative are not autobiographical: "esta es su verdadera biografía y no la de sus personajes de ficción que muchos han tomado como declaraciones autobiográficas, lo que a él le satisface porque, dice, le confiere autenticidad a sus imaginaciones" [this is his true biography, as opposed to what many have interpreted as autobiographical confessions in his fictional characters. He enjoys this misconception because, he says, confers authenticity to his fictions] (24). In *Las batallas en el desierto*, on the contrary, the childhood memories are fleeting; despite his detailed descriptions, the narrator often questions his own memory, and thus, destabilizes the levels of fictionality within the text.

This *Bildungsroman*, narrates the childhood memories of an adult Carlos who, similarly to many other characters analyzed in this chapter, grew up in Mexico City's Colonia Roma. His recount is triggered by nostalgia from two sources; first by the uncanny feeling of visiting his childhood neighborhood four decades after, but most importantly by the memories of falling in love with a classmate's mother, a rather unusual event that unchained a series of changes in his life. Nine-year-old Carlitos attends an all-boys private school in Mexico City. There he establishes a special bond with Jim, the son of a young, attractive Mexican woman named Mariana and an absent American father who lives in the San Francisco area. A scandal ensues after Carlitos reveals his love to Mariana, who turns out to be the mistress of a top-tier government minister. By the end of the novel, Carlos learns that Jim has moved away and his mother has allegedly committed suicide. However, when he returns to their apartment to confirm

the tale he just heard, he does not recognize the place. Moreover, the tenants of this apartment building deny ever knowing anyone with that description.

Many critics have categorized Pacheco's narrative in the limits of historical literature. For Carmen Carrillo Juárez, the historicity of *Las batallas en el desierto* lies in the relationship between the narrator's psyche and the city, and not strictly in the portrayal of actual historical facts and persons. As the city goes through drastic transformations, so does the perception of the narrator's reality: "El recuerdo es una construcción que se va puliendo, pero que si se pierde el referente espacial toma carácter de ilusión. El asunto es que en términos de una ciudad no sólo tiene que ver con lo particular sino con la historia de un pueblo" [Memory is a construction that keeps developing, but if its spatial referents are lost, then it begins to resemble an ilussion. In terms of a city space, memory isn't just related to an individual, but also to a whole people] (136). But even though these memories are unstable, Alicia Borinsky argues that the intimate tone that Pacheco constructs, almost like a confession, builds trust between the narrative voice and the reader (223). The possibility that the events narrated in this text can exist in reality is subverted by the narrator's insistence that his memory is unreliable.

The historical event which draws attention to the novel in the first instance, and in fact serves to illustrate the process of re-constructing history from memories, is the process of industrial development that occurred in Mexico during the presidency of Miguel Alemán. Before the 1940s, only under the long dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz can we see a comprehensive and coherent project that actively aimed at putting the country on the level of development of the industrialized economies of North America and Western Europe. Indeed, Mexico City saw the introduction of urban services, as well as the promotion of industry and communications in the last decades of the Nineteenth Century. Areas of the interior, especially mining and industrial

towns benefited from the introduction of railroads and electricity among some other services which are indicative of the modernizing task in a country, which paradoxically, only saw a widening gap between the rich and poor. However, the armed struggle and the long period of political instability that followed the Revolution, gave no opportunity to maintain the momentum to the industrial development that the country witnessed during the Porfiriato. It was only during and after the Second World War that new economic development promoted any significant modernization of the country.

The recent modernization of the country and the consequences of the ominous presence of the United States culture are central themes in *Las batallas en el desierto*. We can easily recognize the process of "Americanization" in the language and desires of Carlitos, the protagonist and narrator. His fascination with US modernity renders him inferior to his American counterparts, and suggests that this process parallels the relationship between the United States and Latin America in the same era. Perhaps the best example to illustrate this relationship comes from his friendship with his classmate, Harry Atherton, the son of an American businessman expatriated in Mexico. During dinner at the Athertons, the following conversation ensues:

> Sus padres no me dirigieron la palabra y hablaron todo el tiempo en inglés. Honey, how do you like the little Spic? He's a midget, isn't he? Oh jack, please. Maybe the poor kid is catching on. Don't worry dear, he wouldn't understand a thing. Al día siguiente Harry me dijo: voy a darte un consejo: aprende a usar los cubiertos. Anoche comiste filete con el tenedor del pescado. Y no hagas ruido al tomar la sopa, no hables con la boca llena, mastica despacio trozos pequeños. (25)
>
> [His parents never talked to me and spoke English the whole time. Honey, how do you like the little Spic? He's a midget, isn't he? Oh jack, please. Maybe the poor kid is

> catching on. Don't worry dear, he wouldn't understand a thing. The next day Harry told me: I'm going to give you a piece of advice, Learn how to use silverware correctly. Last night you ate steak with a fish fork. And please don't slurp when you eat soup, don't speak with a full mouth, chew small bites slowly].

This quote reveals that the Athertons not only position themselves at a higher social level, but they also allude to their physical height as a confirmation of their perceived ethnic superiority. Their reluctance to speak Spanish also reveals a profound disrespect to their host country while at the same time allows them to refer to Carlitos in a clearly demeaning way. After this dinner, Carlitos is never invited again and his friendship with Atherton ends with a lesson on banquet etiquette. But even though this episode exemplifies Carlito's subordination to US culture, his closest friendship with Jim, another classmate, will also represent his feelings of inferiority, but in this case to a Mexican-American who has open access to the developed world.

As Hugo J. Verani has noted in "Disonancia y desmitificación", the image of Mariana, his friend Jim's mother, becomes a symbolic representation of an idealized Mexico of the 1950s. Not only is she beautiful, but she is also bilingual, smart, and contemporary. Her apartment makes a lasting impression in Carlitos because it features everything he desires: a television set, electro domestic kitchen items, and fashionable furniture from Sears Roebuck, which first opened in Mexico City in 1947. Verani observes that the narrator chooses to name brands, stores, streets, and even bus routes with great detail; while refering to historical events obliquely (267). By only revealing small hints and vague descriptions, Pacheco makes Jim and his mother intriguing characters. Carlitos voice reveals that Jim's father lives in California, and that Mariana is perhaps divorced. Other students rumor that Mariana is in fact involved with a married politician who pays for her apartment and for Jim's tuition. This non-traditional family structure

contrasts that of Carlitos whose mother seems obsessed with decency and strict Catholic beliefs. In fact, Mariana is, in this respect, the very opposite of Carlos' traditional mother.

Carlitos's family also illustrates the process of incorporation into the new era. His father owns a modest soap factory, but in an effort to improve his family's income, he decides that it is wiser to break with tradition and become part of the new economic trend. Thus, he decides to take English lessons and ends up selling his business to an American detergent manufacturer, but manages to remain the general director. After years of economic struggle, his family acquires a comfortable level of life with enough economic strength to compete in the circles of the well-to-do. A year after his father's business restructure, Carlitos reveals that their recovery is so successful that they can even afford to send their children to study abroad. His older brother is a student at the University of Chicago, his sisters at a college in Texas, and they will all stay at the Plaza in a family reunion in New York City. For this family, then, the successful model derives from adopting an American franchise business operation; but perhaps most importantly, by accepting that the United States, along with its culture, is the new hegemonic power. This trend contrasts that of the families portrayed in Ponioatowska's *La "Flor de Lis"*, and Loaeza's *Las yeguas finas*; but parallels the economic success of Rodrigo Pola and Pimpinela de Ovando in Carlos Fuentes's *La region más transparente*[41]. While the families in Loaeza and Poniatowska's families fiercely retain a strong bond with Western Europe with France as its cultural epicenter, Pacheco's novel presents the competing model that, in the long run, became the predominant force for the second half of the century.

In contrast to the openness to modernity and American values that typifies Carlitos's father, the narrator presents Carlitos's conservative mother. A self-proclaimed member of the

[41] For more, see chapter one.

gente bien of the interior, Carlitos' mother shows an adamant disdain towards the new order. For instance, she reveals that her family belonged to the old aristocracy of her native state of Jalisco in Western Mexico, where she enjoyed not only social distinction, but also a higher level of comfort before her marriage to an outsider. The following quote summarizes their transit form the Porfiriato years into the 1950s:

> Mi madre insistía en que la nuestra es decir, la suya era una de las mejores familias de Guadalajara [...] Pero vino la venganza de la indiada y el peladaje contra la decencia y la buena cuna. La Revolución -esto es, el viejo cacique- se embolsó nuestros ranchos y nuestra casa de la calle de San Francisco, bajo pretexto de que en la familia hubo muchos cristeros. Para colmo mi padre -despreciado, a pesar de su título de ingeniero, por ser hijo de un sastre- dilapidó la herencia del suegro en negocios absurdos [...] luego a base de préstamos de mis tíos maternos compró la fábrica de jabón que anduvo bien durante la guerra y se hundió cuando las compañías norteamericanas invadieron el mercado nacional.
>
> [My mother always insisted that our family, that is to say, her family was one of the best in Guadalajara. Then came the Indian hordes seeking their revenge against decency and distinction. The Revolution, the old chieftains that is, confiscated our ranches and our house on San Francisco Street with the pretext that there were too many *Cristeros* in the family. On top of that, my father who despite his degree in engineering was held in contempt for being the son of a tailor, squandered the inheritance from his father-in-law on one absurd business venture after another. Then using money borrowed from my maternal uncles he bought the soap factory that did well during the war and then went under when the North American companies invaded the domestic market]. (49-50)

Marrying outside of the land-owning aristocracy, namely, the exogamic model of reproduction is not successful in this case, because Carlito's father yields no political or economic power. However, as we mentioned in the paragraphs above, Carlito's father finally encounters financial success by embracing capitalism. Little is revealed about Carlito's father physical appearance or ethnicity, but there is reason to believe that he may be of *mestizo* descent when he warns his son not to discriminate against people of Indigenous ethnic origin: "Mi padre dijo que en México todos éramos indios, aún sin saberlo ni quererlo. Si los indios no fueran al mismo tiempo los pobres nadie usaría esa palabra a modo de insulto" [My father said that everyone in Mexico was Indian, even without knowing or wanting it. If Indians were not poor, nobody would use that word as an insult] (24). Although this does not necessarily confirm that they come from a mestizo background, it does hint at this possibility and helps understand some of Carlito's mother's anxieties.

By placing his protagonist in the center of these conflicting forces, Pacheco again draws attention to the social mobility that occurred in this era. While Carlitos frequently enjoys his walks in and around his neighborhood, Colonia Roma, he also recounts his mother's negative opinion of the good families who have left the area, and the subsequent arrival of new inhabitants. As we have discussed earlier, the geographical and cultural space delimited by Colonia Roma, Colonia Cuauhtémoc, and Colonia Juárez becomes the competing ground where social mobility is perhaps more noticeable:

> En esa época mi madre no veía sino el estrecho horizonte que le mostraron en su casa. Detestaba a quienes no eran de Jalisco. Juzgaba extranjeros al resto de los mexicanos y aborrecía en especial a los capitalinos. Odiaba la colonia Roma porque empezaron a

desertarla las buenas familias y en aquellos años la habitaban árabes y judíos y gente del sur: campechanos, chiapanecos, tabasqueños, yucatecos.

[Back then my mother could only see through the narrow view she was raised with. She hated those who were not from Jalisco. She deemed the rest of all Mexicans foreigners and especially abhorred the people from the capital. She hated Colonia Roma because the nice families had moved out and in those years it was populated by arabs, jews, and people from the Southern states: from Campeche, Chiapas, Tabasco, and the Yucatan]. (22)

In Pacheco's novel, the expansion of Mexico City in the 1950s creates negative opinions in Carlitos's mother. Although this contrast may be a strict personal preference, it can also be explained in Georg Simmel's arguments of "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in which he claims that cities in expansion reduce social tension and allow the dweller to transit with more freedom (409). However, this freedom in the public sphere is precisely what dismays Carlitos's mother in *Las batallas en el desierto*, who actually compares Mexico City to Sodom and Gomorrah: "Lugar infame, […] en espera de la lluvia de fuego…" (50). The modernity of Mexico City bothers Carlitos's mother, but maybe not because she is inherently opposed to living in a big metropolitan area, but perhaps because this urban space is at this moment being absorbed by the other that she unambiguously considers inferior to her. Also, as we have argued in this chapter, a mother of aristocratic identity is invested with the responsibility of reproducing social distinction, both biologically and culturally. Thus, an aristocratic woman being downgraded into the middle class, *los venidos a menos* (recently impoverished), is consequently put under tremendous pressure on at least two fronts. On the temporal aspect, she has been imposed with the perceived duty of continuing a lineage and preserving a tradition, in

metaphorical terms, she is the vessel in which her family past will continue into the future. In addition to this responsibility, she is also under the weight of being a woman in a notable patriarchal structure. So although she enjoys certain privileges of belonging to the aristocratic class, she is in many respects limited by gender roles. Therefore, it seems that her negative feelings towards the city may stem from her own inner contradictions rather than from the city itself.

In conclusion, through the voice of its narrator, *Las batallas en el desierto* exemplifies how mid-Twentieth-Century Mexican elite society began to adopt US cultural artifacts from popular music to fashion, especially in Mexico City. Pacheco illustrates how an impoverished aristocratic family such as Carlito's could benefit from US businesses regardless of his mother's resistance. At a symbolic level, Pacheco suggests that the power invested in the father figure is in alignment with modernity as represented by US capitalist ventures. In any case, the novel indicates that the aristocratic spirit is renewed and empowered by the expansion of consumerism and Western values.

Chapter Three Conclusions

As discussed in this chapter, and as life writing theorists have observed, it is possible to explore the history of social mobility in the context of the writer's memory. The novels studied here provide clues of how aristocratic distinction is articulated in childhood and help explain how families define class by establishing controlled relationships to what they consider subaltern populations. The reproduction of aristocracy depends primarily on its biological continuity, but the constant reproduction of their rituals and practices from an early age is essential in the construction of the aristocratic identity because it preserves the principle of exclusivity under which nobilities and aristocracies are established. Although major historical events such as the

Mexican Revolution triggered structural shifts, the peace and economic development of the 1950s brought about more changes in the economy and the power relationships that were preserved in the memories of Mexican writers. All these novels, published between 1981 and 2003 suggest that twenty years after the Mexican Revolution, a new generation of *criollo* aristocrats looked at how their parents turn to different strategies to preserve their distinction in the midst of a fierce social mobility

If the adoption of exogamic practices, in which cultural elements such as the perception of ethnicity and the display of distinction played an essential role in the 1920s and 1930s, the mid-century presents new challenges to the descendants of the old aristocracy. With the introduction of new technological developments and the triumph of mass manufacture over artisanal production, land ownership is no longer a primary source of wealth. Nonetheless, as we have discussed here, the cultural capital of the aristocratic class is still a rather profitable asset which in the end works to their benefit. Likewise, these texts inspired by the social mobility of the 1950s confirm our premise that aristocratic capital will continue to be a mechanism of differentiation and distinction in the context of more recent events in Mexican history like the boom of globalization in the mid 1990's and the economic and cultural changes that resulted from Mexico's insertion into the era of world trade and global communication.

The novels studied in this chapter also show that by the 1950s, marrying outside the aristocratic circles or mingling with the new bourgeoisie, although not the first choice, is no longer unthinkable. For the mothers of the children protagonists, endogamy was *de rigueur*, but for the children in the 1950s, money and access to luxury seem a viable and unashamed option. The *criollo* aristocracy, which saw itself as a strong and solid unity, now reveals that it is in fact porous and vulnerable to power shifts. As the reading of these novels suggests, although all

authors evidently portray characters who are carriers of aristocratic heritage and class memory, they also reveal how they privately learn to be distinguished. In other words, by narrating the different ways in which their families promote and inculcate the reproduction of rituals, the authors deconstruct the myth of distinction. So, although there is an important biological hereditary component in the elite group, the children born inside this group must learn to decipher and reproduce a series of codes that will differentiate them from the rest of society. Learning the languages of the imperial powers, studying abroad, and distancing themselves from the uneducated masses are essential tools in the construction of the *gente bien*.

In the public sphere, some fundamental aspects of these families remain undisclosed. For instance, the narrative voices in *Las yeguas finas* and *Las batallas en el desierto*, innocently share with the reader several key secrets about their private affairs, which are in sharp contrast with their class pride. Guadalupe Loaeza, for example, depicts families too proud to go to public schools, but so deeply indebted to the point where they cannot afford toilet paper; or a contradictory mother who believes private school fees are of higher priority than serving breakfast to her children. José Emilio Pacheco also portrays a family whose mother considers Jewish and Arab immigrants inferior, when in fact her own husband was the son of a tailor. What becomes relevant in this chapter is that those secrets of poverty or unknown origins are a repeated theme in the families portrayed. However, and if these texts throw any light into the actual lives of the social group that they represent, then we could conclude that the label of *gente bien* is undeniably questionable.

As for the reasons why these authors write about the internal contradictions in these families, two possible explanations come to mind. The first approach would be that the novelists have little sympathy with the families they represent and thus choose to reveal such obscure and

shameful aspects of their lives; this hypothesis would also resonate with the mother-child conflicts that we touched upon in this chapter. Writing becomes then, an instrument of personal liberation. A second and perhaps more practical explanation would imply that these authors are aware of their ties to elite, but at the same time know that such affiliations might question their positions as intellectuals. For instance, Poniatowska's public leftist affiliation might be questioned after seeing the privileged background in which she lived. Poniatowska, an actual European royal, is more noticeable in the intellectual milieu for her works on the subaltern rather than her memories as an aristocrat. Finally, it could also be assumed that elite members like Poniatowska and Loaeza use fiction as a way to bust myths about aristocratic upbringing. By bringing the reader into the reconstructed intimacy of *gente bien* families, these authors' works confirm that aristocratic memory is selective. In doing so, the texts provide readers with tools to deconstruct the myths of these families' past.

The strong mother characters in these works also demonstrate that aristocracy is gendered and that the female self is the mechanism of its biological and cultural reproduction. However, women still find themselves subjected to the patriarchal discourse and heterosexual normativity. With the exception of Mariana in Pacheco's *Las batallas en el desierto*, all the mother characters that we analyzed in this chapter have agency and participate actively in procuring a wealthy future, but none of them at no time indicate or even contemplate the desire to pursue wealth or happiness as independent, single, working women. They all depend on the income of their husbands (or lovers in the case of Mariana), and project the same future for their own daughters. However, the young girl narrators in *Las yeguas finas* and *La "Flor de Lis"* seem to be deviating from this model, or at least begin to question their mother's roles in the family. In this respect, sending their young daughters to study abroad presents the aristocratic mothers with a paradox,

for after being exposed to 1950s proto-liberation; their young daughters now question their own roles as women.

Chapter Four

Gente bien in Twenty-first-Century Mexican Mass Media

Almost a hundred years after the Mexican Revolution erupted to put an end to the social inequalities that favored the powerful landowning aristocracy; it is still difficult to understand how this social class has continued to exert its influence in cultural production. It would seem that advances in public education and social programs would contribute to eliminate class walls in Mexican society. At the turn of the Twentieth Century, it was highly unlikely for *mestizos* and immigrants to enter the world of finance, business, or government; Indian figures such as Benito Juárez or Porfirio Díaz were rather exceptional. Thus, contemporary Mexican multi-millionaires such as Carlos Slim or Alfredo Harp Helú, would have encountered social obstacles to entering the elite simply because of their Lebanese heritage. And although the conditions under which millions of Mexicans live nowadays are far better than those a century ago, a *criollo* ancestry and connections to the colonial nobility are aspects that still confer privilege and status. This chapter will discuss contemporary representations of high social status and the constructions of *gente bien* in a variety of Mexican media. Particularly, the textual analyses presented here center on the contradictions that emerge from representing *gente bien* through parody and comedy. In order to explore these *gente bien* portrayals, the selections for this chapter are contemporary humoristic texts that emphasize the interplay between money, race, and elite distinction. *Las chicas VIP*, a television comedy sketch, and Ricardo Cucamonga's comic *Cindy la Regia* are meaningful to this study because they actually center exclusively on the representation of contemporary *gente bien*, while they make special emphasis on the difference between aristocrats, the nouveaux-riches, the lower and middle classes.

During the past two decades (1995-2015), the focus of Latin American literary analysis has slowly shifted from the decidedly canonical novels of the Boom and post-Boom periods to include more and more frequently cultural texts such as television shows and comics so as to include them in academic debates dealing with notions of representation, identity, and power relationships. The technological development of mass media in the first half of the Twentieth Century made it possible for film and radio to reach wider audiences, many of which were unable to read or write. As Edmundo Paz-Soldán and Debra Castillo point out in their introduction to *Latin American Literature and Mass Media*, during the first quarter of the Twentieth Century, "the growing centrality of the image" (5), that is, the images and language produced by the mass media, began to define identities and styles; but most importantly, these images produce knowledge, because much of what is known about the world depends on how the human eye perceives it. Although Castillo and Paz-Soldán are particularly interested in narrative fictions inflicted by mass media images, their focus on the novel as a primarily object of study, immediately reveals their predilection for the traditional printed text, still inside the perimeters of what Angel Rama legendarily coined as the Lettered City.

According to the National Survey on Reading (Encuesta Nacional de Lectura), the number of Mexican readers of traditional books was 46%, slightly less than half of the population. In line with the results of this survey, Mexicans read an average of 2.94 books per year. (*sic.gob.mx*). It is not surprising that this decrease in reading traditional texts may be related to the success of television in the second half of the Twentieth Century, and more recently, the boom of social media. In a 2014 study conducted by the Mexican Internet Association (AMIPCI), social media interaction was the main use of internet among Mexicans: "The main online activity is the access to social networks even more than sending/receiving

emails, even though it is mainly for leisure followed by email management and music downloading" *(amipci.org.mx*). What this means is that, mainly, the articulation of meanings among Mexicans is taking shape through mass media. Critics such as García Canclini and Martín Barbero agree that at the turn of the Twenty-first Century internet and mass media communication are the principal means of interpellation among the great masses of people, thus forming what Benedict Anderson called the national imagined community. Thus, new meanings, identities, and representations of what conforms Mexican society, can be extracted from the thousands of messages that circulate the World Wide Web every day. The social re-articulation of post-revolutionary Mexican society was not only a response to the authoritarian regimes that appropriated national discourse, but also the result of relationships between ethnic identities and power. Literature, film production, or a national culture are some of the representational machines that serve to consolidate discursive practices, which enable new conceptions of national identity and social affiliations.

In Mexico, the notion of realism in film and media has often been tied to the examination of social problems stemming from centuries of colonial rule, racism, and economic inequality. The development of the film industry and later the dominance of television paralleled the growth of nationalism during the period stretching from the mid-1930s and the early 1960s. For instance, Jean Franco affirms that in both literature and film, Latin America has been "deeply implicated in the process of national formation and its attendant problems of national and cultural identity" (*Dangerous Liaisons* 204). Particularly in literature, Franco asserts that canonical works of the 1950s and 1960s: "offer a space in which different historical developments and different cultures overlap. What they enact is the unfinished and impossible project of the modernizing state" (205).

Aristocratic identity relies on representations, since it is a semiotic practice. Being "*gente bien*" is to signify something for the elite and for others. As Pierre Bourdieu argues, aristocratic distinction cannot be reduced to a purely abstract operation. He emphasizes that the behaviors and knowledge of cultural capital must be displayed, pointing to the fact that aristocratic recognition processes take place in the public sphere (*Distinction* 435); thus, the category of *gente bien* is inconceivable without an identifying public image and language codes. In *Subultures and the Meanings of Style*, Dick Hebdige argues that class image is not an inherent trait of a particular social group because behaviors and linguistic referents that seem innate to a specific class are in fact not only arbitrary, but also correspondent to the interests of that particular social group (102). Yet he also points to the general fact that construction and communication of these images/signs cannot be enclosed, on the contrary, it must be performed in public (102). All class identifiers, as acts of meaning making, occur in the material world where discourse and image cannot exist without a medium of expression; these matrices of meanings and signifiers are expressed by cultural objects such as personal appearance, clothing, music, and manners of speech.

In his book *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord expands the traditional semiotic model in order to approach the interaction between the public and the web of images produced by mass media. Interested in the ways that people are visually represented on modern media where human interaction has been reduced to representations, he questions the traditional understanding of the spectacle in which social relationships between people are mediated by images (18). Following Debord, one can observe that in today's consumer society, social class is no longer about being, but about looking. By importing the models from the United States, Mexican mass media now use the image of the traditional aristocrat, and most recently the media

celebrity, to create stereotypes and the desire for consumption. Consequently, social life moves further, leaving a state of having and proceeding into a state of appearing. The theory of the spectacle allows us to view the current set of aristocratic identifiers exposed in cultural texts as a process of representations. In a world dominated by mass media and a ubiquitous presence of social networks, identity becomes a process of branding and projecting a series of images to be consumed publicly.

4.1 A comedic image of *gente bien*: *Las chicas VIP*

Television actresses Claudia Silva and Paula Sanchez appeared as Montserrat and Ximena in a sketch called *Las Chicas VIP* as part of the television show *Desde Gayola*. Both actresses became involved in this sketch after working in Mexican giant communications emporium Televisa for several years. According to Horacio Villalobos, creator and co-producer, the show was conceived as a space to criticize Mexican society through humor by following the live sketch blueprint he borrowed from popular US comedy shows: "*Desde Gayola* surgió por la fascinación que siempre he tenido por el programa gringo *Saturday Night Live* que critica y satirizada con gran valentía a la sociedad estadounidense. *Desde Gayola* siguiendo esa misma fórmula, pero con mucho menos presupuesto, con gran entusiasmo y talento ha buscado hacer lo mismo. [The show *Desde Gayola* emerged from the fascination that I have always had for the program *Saturday Night Live*, which with great courage criticizes and satirizes American society. *Desde Gayola* follows a similar formula with a significantly smaller budget, but with great enthusiasm and talent have sought to do the same] (*desdegayola.com*). The late 1990s saw a decrease of self-censorship due in part to the competition between Televisa and the recently formed TV Azteca, which then launched a series of provocative shows and unconventional telenovelas. In order to counter the increasing popularity of Azteca, the more traditional Televisa

began broadcasting less-conventional programs geared towards a middle class urban audience on its cable affiliate Telehit.

Villalobos had participated as actor in several television productions, but he admits that his creative talent had been limited by censorship. Many of the characters that later appeared in *Desde Gayola* came directly from short comedic performance shows which he produced for gay and lesbian bars and clubs such as el Cabaretito and the now defunct El Taller in the early 1990s. Villalobos was by then a music video presenter and started featuring drag performers during his in-between-video commentaries. He was later given the opportunity to develop his show on TeleHit. The main objective of his show was to denounce inequalities of the LGBT community through humor. Indeed, the show is comedic, but in the words of Villalobos: "[…] pretendemos hacer reír al espectador, […], llevar al público a reflexionar por medio de la comedia acerca del mundo en el que vivimos" [we intend to make the audience laugh, lead the public to think, through comedy, about the world in which we live] (*desdegayola.com*). Villalobos makes clear that writers and cast are completely responsible for the production of the show so that no censorship may edit its contents or its social critique; in other words, to be credible, and thus successful, the themes of the show had to be anchored to current social issues such as marriage, drug use, sexuality, racism, anorexia, and abortion, among others. During its first run on cable channel Telehit (1999-2004), most episodes of *Las Chicas VIP* followed a similar narrative structure. The scene always occurs at what appears to be a small coffee shop, a table with two or three chairs where the protagonists sit, and two other tables with anonymous costumers in the back chatting. The *mise-en-scène* usually begins with a long shot showing two girls in their mid-twenties and clad in the latest fashion (see figure 4.1). These women at the center and in focus identify themselves as Montserrat and Ximena, they are having coffee at a posh restaurant and

gossip about a specifically absent person, most commonly, a common acquaintance whose class, education, physical appearance, or fashion style are in question.

A premise of this performance is that during their conversations, Montse and Ximena self-identify as "*gente bien*" which in consequence confers them the perceived right to criticize others, that is "*los nacos*" and the *nouveaux-riches* in the political elite. After commenting, most often in derogatory terms, the object of their criticism appears on the scene. Suddenly, the tone of the conversation follows a diametrical reversal, which exposes the girl's ignorance and hypocritical double standard to the viewer. In a season-one episode "La boda de la Gorda Sansores," Monste and Ximena refer to their friend Mafer as "la Gorda" while they speak negatively about her upcoming wedding. Both characters indicate that they will not attend the event because they consider la Gorda's lavish, ostentatious style to be of very poor taste. They also emphasize that her husband-to-be is nothing but a poor Cuban immigrant –a *balsero*- who pursues la Gorda only for her money. In the middle of this conversation, la Gorda arrives at their table and consequently, the attitude changes. Montse and Ximena ask questions and make comments alluding to la Gorda's social status; however, the latter responds to all these remarks by cleverly referring to her family's power and wealth. She does so by mentioning a long list of luxuries including table decorations which will be flown from Tiffany's, and the presence of Elton John and Luis Miguel as entertainers at the reception. Mafer leaves and then Montse expresses the following complains about Mexican society:

Te juro que vivimos en una sociedad de lo más hipócrita y de lo más falsa, güey, súper decepcionante; ésta pinche soy totalmente gorda fue de lo más golfo hasta abortos tuvo; pero ahora el padre le compra un marido y se casa por todo lo alto. [I swear that we live in the most hypocritical, false and disappointing society; this damn girl who is totally lousy and fat, who was

a complete slut and even had abortions; but now her father buys her a husband and she marries all out]. ("La boda de la Gorda")

In these final remarks, a comical double standard surfaces; Montse who acts hypocritically in front of Mafer, now denounces the same ills in Mexican society. But more importantly, this double-stance allows the viewer to infer that the reason behind Montse and Ximena's fake acceptance of Mafer is the wealth and political power of her father.

Although this sketch mainly criticizes the nouveaux-riches and the anxieties that they instill in the old-established *gente bien*, the reverse process, that is downward social mobility, is also present in the show. The episode "La nueva pobre" starts with Monste, Ximena, and their friend Ana María at the usual coffee joint, all three of them alluding to their *gente bien* status while referring to the poor masses in demeaning terms. At one point, however, Montse and Ximena discover that their friend is no longer wealthy and has been driven to work as a catalog sales girl. What is more important in this episode is the fact that their friend's past or ties with other *gente bien* isn't relevant at this point. On the contrary, Montse and Ximena look to distance themselves from the lower classes in order to assert and implement their higher status.

The sketch returned to Villalobo's new show *Nocturninos* on cable network MVS between 2008 and 2012. During this second airing, many of the older shows were re-made, but as new episodes were produced, they evolved into a new narrative strategy in which these privileged girls comment on the difficulties and obstacles that afflict the *gente bien* and see themselves as victims rather than perpetrators of important social ills. In both cases, humor is achieved by an unanticipated reversal of situations, but frequently in the context of class identity and aristocratic exclusion. The sketch also portrays other visual and narrative oppositions, which immediately denote the conflicting world of the characters' social class.

Perhaps the most prevalent visual and textual opposite is that of the protagonists, because although both women belong to the same social circle, they represent decidedly divergent trends. On the one hand, Montserrat is a skinny, pale brunette who exemplifies a more liberal type of "*niña bien*;" her body posture is usually relaxed and she speaks in a firm, authoritative tone of voice. Also, she admits her drug use and brags about her active sex life. This character boasts about her intelligence, even though she completed only one semester of college education, and always finds a twisted and cynical explanation for her perceived inferiority of the working classes. Sánchez explains that: "Yo les pido que no odien a Montse, porque todos quizás en la parte más obscura de nuestro ser, tenemos a una Montse en potencia o ya de perdis a alguien muy cercano en nuestra vida que se parece a ella." [I ask you not to hate Montse, because perhaps in our heart-of-hearts, everyone has a potential Montse, or have at least met someone very similar to her] (*desdegayola.com*). On the other side of the spectrum, Ximena, a voluptuous, spray-tanned blonde, depicts the ultra-conservative sphere of the elite. Although proud and self-assured, Ximena believes she is a devout Catholic, and is thus disgusted by issues such as premarital sex, inter-faith marriages, non-traditional sexualities, and abortion. However, as the show progressed into its 2008 season, the points of view of both characters evolved as they went through life experiences adding to more comical effects; for instance, Ximena, who represents a *niña bien* who stands for traditional decency, loses her virginity, and subsequently entails into a series of non-traditional sexual affairs which she previously considered sinful.

Despite its humoristic and fictional portrayal of the *gente bien*, at the core of this show, one can read the traces of the class affiliation norms by which the Mexican elite operates. It has already been mentioned that Ximena and Montserrat are visual and moral opposites; however, they both share common traits that directly relate them to the Mexican aristocracy system. It has

been argued in this dissertation so far, that *gente bien* identity markers are a series of behaviors, linguistic symbols, and commodities that are assigned specific, yet arbitrary meanings of distinction. A major component of *Las chicas VIP* is precisely the display of such markers in an exaggerated, often comical way. The comic effect originates precisely in a contradiction of terms, because markers of aristocratic distinction must be presented as natural and inherent. Any obvious ostentation of wealth is associated to the new rich wannabes. Clothes and appearance are the first and predominant categories of class markers. But for Montse, Ximena and their friends it is not sufficient to own imported luxury garments, but rather, the exclusive experience of shopping in New York or Paris just like their elite counterparts in the Western Hemisphere. Moreover, their shopping is not characterized as a pleasant past time, but often a tedious activity that is no longer entertaining due to the ever growing presence of ethnic-minority costumers in designer boutiques.

Parallel to their appearance, the language used by Monsterrat and Ximena is intended to mock the upper middle-class Mexico City manner of speech. This sociolect is characterized by the constant use of the appellative "*güey*", the overuse of the interjection "*o sea*", and the exaggerated pronunciation of English nouns and phrases. On top of the characteristic intonation, both characters enact a series of non-verbal signs that are also associated with the stereotype they represent; for instance they touch and flip their hair persistently when they speak; they sit in an uptight position by curving their lower back, exposing their chest, crossing their legs, and tilting their heads. Through these body positions, it is possible to read a high level of tension, which is yet another condition that seems persistent in women of this social circle.

The notion that these characters belong to a selected group is enforced by the fact that both women attended the same elite school and maintain strong ties with the powerful. It is

repeated in several episodes that the great education that Montserrat and Ximena possess was acquired during their studies at a fictional Catholic private school called Instituto Regina. At this institution, they were seemingly indoctrinated into the language and behavioral patterns of the *gente bien*. In fact, many of Ximena's phobias as well as her sexual repression are explained by what she learned from the nuns during childhood; for example, she rationalizes her intolerance of gays and lesbians by reminding herself that nuns taught them that homosexuality is sinful and immoral. Ironically, Ximena's longtime boyfriend turns out to be a gay man who uses her as a cover up. To contrast Ximena's ultra-conservative discourse, Montserrat's attitudes show an honest disregard for the nuns' teachings greatly because she believes people in her social class have a natural and inherited intelligence. Although she frequently boasts about having studied for one semester at ITAM (Autonomous Technological Mexican Institute), her alleged intellect is mocked repeatedly when she is unable to make simple mathematical calculations. The fact remains that their knowledge of 'who's who' within the Mexican elite confers them with power; not only can they unmask the schemes of the nouveau-riches, but they can also break rules: When asked to put out a cigarette in a café, Montserrat threatens to call a powerful relative and have the business closed unless the waiter stops reminding her about the recently passed anti-tobacco law.

Despite the fact that the audience knows that the intelligence of these characters is comedic, the manners in which they express their perceived superior intellect also hint at the lack of national and global awareness that is characteristic of their class. Again, the orchestration of contradictions at play produces humor, because what these characters believe is genius is in fact implausible; and what they consider humane and generous is actually selfish and cruel. For instance, in the episode "La reforma de PEMEX," Montserrat and Ximena are against a

constitutional amendment, which would privatize PEMEX. From her privileged point of enunciation, Montserrat concludes that *los nacos* would not have qualifications to control the resources PEMEX has. In her explanation, she also reveals her uncle was once a director of the Mexican oil giant. Ironically, she believes that her uncle's involvement in embezzlements and corruption were a charitable action:

> MONTSERRAT: Como qué buenos tiempos aquellos los del PRI. Como cuando mi tío Jorge dirigía Pemex, ¿te acuerdas? Que hizo lo que quiso sin darle cuentas a nadie. [...] Y el hombre hizo muchísimas cosas buenas, o sea, hizo Punta Diamante en Acapulco, hizo la Riviera Maya en Cancún, hizo varios centros comerciales en Estados Unidos, o sea le dio trabajo a la gente, a carpinteros, albañiles…
>
> XIMENA: Yo pensé que todo eso era de tu tío, no de Pemex.
>
> MONTSERRAT: ¡Es que es de mi tío! Pero lo hizo con el dinero de Pemex, lo que te estoy diciendo es que ayudó a mucha gente en el proceso. Si eso no es ayudar a tu país yo no sé de qué estamos hablando.
>
> [MONTSERRAT: Like those good times when PRI was in power! Like when my uncle Jorge directed Pemex, do you remember? He did what he wanted without anyone asking. […] And the man did many good things, that is, he did Punta Diamante in Acapulco, he did the Riviera Maya in Cancun, he made various shopping centers in the United States, and it gave people jobs; like carpenters and stonemasons…
>
> XIMENA: I thought that all of this belonged to your uncle, not to Pemex.
>
> MONTSERRAT: It is my uncle's! But he did it with the money from Pemex, what I'm saying to you is that he helped many people in the process. If this is not help to your country, I don't know what we are talking about!] ("La Reforma de PEMEX")

Montserrat's uncle Jorge, most likely refers to Jorge Serrano, now a billionaire who amassed a fortune during his tenure as CEO of Pemex during the 1970s. According to Montserrat, her Uncle Jorge's embezzlement helped to create thousands of jobs, thus benefiting the poor. At the closing of their conversation, both characters reaffirm flawed notion that their class is not only superior, but also necessary for the economic development of the country and the welfare of society.

Similarly, this logics of helping serves as a mask to disguise an inherent violence against those whom they perceive as hierarchically inferior. But for this show, a farce that ridicules the elite, the outcomes of class struggle are caricatured. The writers of the show are evidently making fun of events to entertain the mass audience through laughter. Nonetheless, behind the jokes the conversations between these girls, allow the audience to follow a verbally structured strategy of rejection and humiliation of the other. For example, when discussing the 2008 Mexico City floods that disrupted traffic and caused the death to dozens in far-flung poor neighborhoods, Ximena believes it would be good idea to provide swimming lessons to the house staff, so that they will not drown on their way to work. What is evidently cruel about these lessons is that she does not have the intention to hire a swimming instructor; but in what she considers a more effective method (i.e. the survival of the fittest), she will drop the housekeepers into the swimming pool and only keep those staff members who swim for their lives. This arrangement denotes a careless violence against the staff because it dehumanizes them and assumes that their lives have no value. Congruously to the dynamics of the show, and in a huge critique of the powerful, Montserrat agrees with her friend and emphasizes that they are both smart and committed to social welfare.

A scheme of attack and verbal violence is also created in situations where Montserrat and Ximena open up their physical space to another participant, often an 'other' who becomes the target of their verbal attack and ends up being expelled from the circle. This scenario can be interpreted as an allegory of the aristocratic enclosure, for Montserrat and Ximena are at the epicenter of the scene/space and they dictate who may enter and under which circumstances. A secondary yet constant character in this scene is a waiter (interpreted by Horacio Villalobos, creator of the sketch), who enters and exits the scene without ever speaking. His silence and almost insubstantial appearance correspond directly to his function as servant of the aristocrats. Finally, the third component of the allegorical space is a guest that represents a minority and/or an antagonistic social class. Remarkably, when this third character is more powerful than the aristocrats, for instance in "La boda de la Gorda Sansores," they exit the scene at their own will and pace; on the other hand, the less powerful, leave their table after the aristocrats charge them with intentionally ambiguous yet implicit insults. As mentioned earlier, in the episode "la nueva pobre", Montserrat and Ximena physically show their repulsion towards Ana Maria, a friend whose family has recently lost their fortune due to a political scandal. The episode starts off with Ana Maria sitting between Montserrat and Ximena while they all sit comfortably and facing one another. Ana Maria, a self-proclaimed member of the elite: "yo soy gente bien de toda la vida, a pesar de la desgracia, el estilo y el estatus nunca se deben perder" [I've been *gente bien* all my life, despite misfortune, my style and status should never be lost] ("la nueva pobre"). However, Montserrat and Ximena know the truth and force her to admit that she no longer has any fortune and that she makes a living by selling cosmetics through catalogues. Ana Maria immediately goes from a comfortable position to one of despair, she even admits her embarrassment for selling cosmetics: "Hello amiga, nos conocemos desde que íbamos en el Regina. Muchachas

perdóneme, sé que no soy digna de su amistad, pero lo educada aún no se me quita." [Hello girlfriend, we have known each other since we studied at Regina Institute. Forgive me; I know that I am unworthy of your friendship, but my good manners cannot be taken away from me] ("la nueva pobre"). It is quite humorous that while Ana Maria "confesses" her recent status of poverty, her former friends begin to move their bodies away from hers, as though her poverty were repulsive; they also refuse to kiss her goodbye once they forcibly ask her to leave them:

> XIMENA: Para que veas que somos gente decente y que te queremos un poquito ahora que termine la temporada te vamos a regalar todo lo que ya no vamos a usar.
>
> MONTSERRAT: Rosa María, cóbrate y vete de aquí por favor porque aquí nos conocen y que pena que nos vean con una vendedora ambulante.
>
> [XIMENA: So that you see we are decent people and that we care for you, now that the fashion season is over, we are going to give you all everything that we will no longer wear]
>
> MONTSERRAT: Rosa María, please collect your stuff and leave, because people here can recognize us, and it would be embarrassing if people see us next to a street vendor]. ("la nueva pobre")

This episode concludes with the social and physical ejection of Rosa María from the circle, and also with the affirmation that it is not her poverty, but her poor lifestyle which results abhorrent .

However, as the series continued, the physical positions as well as the power relationships also shift, particularly at moments in which Montserrat and Ximena compete directly. For instance, Montserrat exits the restaurant in the episode "el pretendiente naco" (the low-class boyfriend), after Ximena discovers her with Rubén, a low class boyfriend. Ximena makes fun of both until Montserrat and Rubén stand up ready to leave the restaurant. Most

interestingly, as Montserrat exits, she warns Ximena not to mention this incident or in retaliation, she will reveal Ximena has a brother with Down Syndrome: "Todo el mundo se va a enterar de tu hermanito el tarado que tienen en un psiquiátrico, el mongol ese, ¿no?¨ [Everyone will find out about your little brother, the idiot you have in a psychiatric facility, the retard, right?] ("El pretendiente naco"). Upon hearing this threat, Ximena leans downwards, shrinks her overall body. Next, she smiles at Rubén and warmly extends her hand to say farewell.

Much has been said about what traits and behavior define *gente bien*; a sizeable fortune, access to luxury services and items, a way of moving and speaking, and a mostly-European ethnic background. However, in this show, it is also important to examine the ways by which this elite group characterizes itself by the absence rather than the presence of distinguishing features. At a superficial level, Monsterrat and Ximena, as representatives of *gente bien*, describe themselves as decent, educated, and good-looking women; but in a parallel portrayal of who they are, they constantly state that they are far unlike the nouveau-riches, the working class, the wannabes, the middle class, and so on. In fact, they are so insistent in what they are not, that they see themselves disappearing. To this respect, Montserrat contends: "La poca gente digna, decente, blanquita como nosotras que trata de sobrevivir en esta selva, pues somos una especie en extinción," [The few deserving, decent people like us trying to survive in this jungle, I mean, we are a species in extinction] ("La reforma de PEMEX"). Immediately, both girls look into the camera and exhort the audience to keep them safe in unison: "¡Cuídenos!" [Protect us!].

Due to low ratings, *Nocturninos* and consequently *Las chicas VIP*, was cancelled in 2013. Villalobos said during the last emission: "MVS fue una empresa generosa. Nos duele por supuesto que nos corran, a todo el mundo le duele porque el programa iba muy bien. Las razones que nos dan son espeluznantes, porque no lo vendieron." [MVS was very generous. Of course it

hurts they are cancelling our show, because it was doing very well. The reasons they gave us were appalling, they say we didn't sell the show] ("Nocturninos último programa"). Moreover, it is difficult to assess the impact this show had on audiences, because at the time of this research, many of the internet pages that informed this investigation have been discontinued (i.e. *desdegayola.com*). In any case, many of these sketches have been uploaded to YouTube.com and its servers. The episode with the highest number of views is "La boda de la gorda sansores" with 611,456 hits (*YouTube.com*), while other episodes have an average of 200,000 views. Actress Paula Sánchez, who interpreted Monsterrat, has a Twitter account with 225,000 followers (@paulasanchezf *Twitter*). Meanwhile, Claudia Silva has a Twitter following of 278,000 and is scheduled to publish a book titled *El diario de una niña bien* in 2016 under the nom-de-plume Ximena de la Macorra, her character from *Las chicas VIP* (@ximenadelam *Twitter*).

4.2 The image of a *niña bien* in the era of social media: Cindy la Regia

Mexican caricaturist Ricardo Cucamonga rose to fame during the boom of electronic social media in 2009. He became a Twitter and Facebook sensation through his account @cindylaregia, a fictitious and self-proclaimed *niña bien* whose opinions, trials, and tribulations have attracted 332,000 followers as well as 354,000 likes on her Facebook page. According to her internet page cindylaregia.com, Cindy la Regia is a young elite woman from northern Mexico whose life revolves around two purposes; first, the desire to marry well, and second, the education of the masses by her sharing of knowledge in fashion and style. Although this comic strip is intended to be a caricature of contemporary *gente bien*, what it says about Cindy's class, not only reveals that there is an assumption of superiority, but it also plays with the idea that the middle and lower classes desire to emulate them. The popularity and publishing success of

Cucamonga's comic strip also informs of the desire to see how rich Mexicans live, how they speak, and what they think.

The very active Cucamonga began his career in the world of advertising and magazine publishing in Monterrey, Mexico where he graduated with a degree in marketing from the exclusive Tecnológico de Monterrey. He started creating comics since 2001 and worked mainly with many Latin American branches of transnational television networks and publishers. His portfolio also includes a series of advertising campaign illustrations for a myriad of global corporations doing business in Mexico. Starting as a marketer, he has transitioned into the art of comic strip to produce the virtual world of Cindy la Regia.[42] Currently, *Cindy la Regia* is published weekly in *Milenio Monterrey* y *Chic Magazine*. Penguin Random House published *Cómo casarte tipo bien por Cindy la Regia* (2012), *Cómo ser una niña tipo bien* (2013), and *Cómo superar a tu ex* (2015). (*cindylaregia.com*). Cucamongas's production is particularly concerned with the Mexican urban elite class taking up the issues of gender, class, and ethnicity in contemporary Mexico. Cindy represents present-day, urban, high-status young women whose ideas on class affiliation majorly respond to wealth and physical appearance. Through her behavior and beliefs, Cindy reveals how the standards of the pre-revolutionary aristocracy pervade in current Mexican society under the label of *gente bien de toda la vida* (lifelong *gente bien*).

Following a tradition established in the United States by popular stand-up comedians such as Sara Silverman and Lisa Campanelli, Cucamonga began his comic strip as a type of comedy that originates in the act of being politically incorrect and provocative. He began publishing this humor on social media and it quickly developed a steady following. According

[42] Cucamonga says jokingly that Cindy employs him as her ghost writer.

to several television interviews, his works revolve around what he calls social status anxiety, the lack of personal authenticity, and the belief that possession of luxury items confers identity to the individual. Through Cindy, Cucamonga evidently criticizes the culture of consumerism that currently prevails in Mexican society. In a 2012 TV interview, the author admits that his awareness of this anxiety was born of his observation of low-income women saving up money to buy luxury brands in an effort to be perceived as wealthy. In his own words: "Las cosas no te hacen mejor persona y seguir las reglas nada más por seguirlas no necesariamente es quien tú eres. Entonces es un ejercicio de: aquí tienes la caricatura de la niña a tope, que siempre está pensando en la pupila ajena antes que en la propia. ¿Tú qué piensas de esto?" [Material things don't make you a better person and following rules just for the sake of it, doesn't necessarily reflect who you are. Then it's an exercise: Here's the caricature of a girl at the top, who is always looking at other people's faults before looking at her own. What do you think about that?] ("Entrevista a R. Cucamonga En Galería VIP").

Although his books and tweets do not especially reflect on the negative side of consumerism, these texts describe the desire to acquire distinction by purchasing imported goods favoring US and European brand names. For doing so, these texts construct traditional opposition binaries such as wealthy/poor, stylish/vulgar, global/local, as well as fair-skin/dark-skin. It is clear that the binaries presented in these texts are produced, in part, by the identity crisis created by globalization.

Cucamonga's generic choice allows him to play with the delicate subjects of wealth disparity and discrimination in Mexico. In fact, a great deal of the situations that Cindy narrates deal with her undesired interactions with the lower classes, namely *los nacos* a demeaning term that characterizes an uneducated individual, usually although not necessarily, of lower social

status. His argument for using this term is that the category of *naco* is in fact elusive: "creo que no está definido del todo, entonces mi invitación a través de la risa, de la broma de estos cómics es decir ¿tú qué piensas de esto? Y si esto nos causa tanta ansiedad porque es parte de la idiosincrasia mexicana decididamente, vamos a reírnos de ella, vamos a agarrarla, vamos a dejarla atrás y vamos a ver qué hacemos para mejorar a México" [I believe that's not entirely defined, then through the laughter and jokes in these comics, I open the question: What do you think about this? And if this causes so much anxiety in us, because it is part of Mexican idiosyncrasy, let's laugh at it, let's leave it behind, and let's see what we can do to improve Mexico] ("Entrevista R. Cucamonga en Galería VIP"). According to him, for the creation of *Cindy la Regia*, he sought to develop a character that combines negative and positive elements: "La onda es que yo también estoy haciendo una serie de preguntas sobre la realidad nacional, sobre personas. Cindy es encantadora porque tiene ese balance, tiene las ondas políticamente incorrectas que son de humor negro y tiene también esta cosa que nos gusta a todos, las niñas encantadoras" [The thing is I'm also making a series of questions about national reality, about people. Cindy is lovely because she has that balance. She has things that are politically incorrect and in dark humor, and she also has something everyone likes, all lovely girls] ("Entrevista Con Ricardo Cucamonga En Galería VIP"). As with other texts discussed earlier in this chapter, humor becomes the preferred medium to critique economic disparity and social inequality.

In a parallel manner, the content of these texts often originates from conversations the author has heard and situations he lived in his youth; for instance, the conversations which Cindy narrates, are reminiscent of those in Loaeza's *Las niñas bien* (1985), as well as the conversations in *Las chicas VIP*. All these texts present elite female protagonists who struggle to maintain their distinction while dealing with personal issues such as love, marriage, and identity. In another

evident parallelism, the protagonists of this comic strip believes that her negative comments and actions are justified by an apparent will to help the less fortunate. One could argue, however, that one of the innovations of *Cindy la Regia*, and for which it deserves critical attention, is the fact that it does not represent a joyful Mexican elite; but on the contrary, in the midst of a racist, unequal society, the young aristocratic protagonist struggles to construct a world that conforms to her idealized version of reality. While Montserrat and Ximena –from television *show Las chicas VIP* mostly complain about the ugliness of the other and justify their meanness, Cindy actually wants the masses to improve their way of life by following her advice and imitating her style. Despite her means and methods, at the core of this comic, there is a subjacent, yet clear critique of social inequality.

At the epicenter of this comic strip and the books that followed, Cindy stands out as a self-indulgent, self-proclaimed *niña bien* from Monterrey, Mexico. The protagonist, Cindy Garza de la Garza Asada, is a twenty-three year old, natural blonde girl who believes to be extraordinarily beautiful, as she describes in the back cover of *Cómo casarte tipo bien*: "Seguramente estás pensando "¡Gooey! ¿Quién es esa niña taaan linda de la portada? ¿Una súper modelo? ¿Una ganadora de la lotería genética? ¿Una hermosa socialité?" Hello! Respuesta: ¡todas las anteriores! ¡Soy Cindy la Regia, la niña más fresa de México y éste es mi ultra mega súper chic libro!" [For sure, you're thinking "OMG! Who is that gooorgeous girl on the cover? A supermodel? A winner in the genetics raffle? A beautiful socialite? Hello! Answer: All of the above! I'm Cindy la Regia, the classiest girl in Mexico and this is my ultra mega super chic book!] (backcover). The comic drawings are minimalistic in detail and painted in contrastive bright colors, and as Cucamonga admits, they resemble simple drawings made by children; Cindy's hair is bright yellow, and her clothes are usually pink and green (see figure 4.3). The

visual simplicity of the drawing is perhaps necessary to counterbalance the complexity of Cindy's personality and language. As we shall see later, this technique of opposites and counterweights is manifest at other discursive levels of the text.

Cucamonga presents a character whose physical appearance is of utmost importance, thus body figure and clothes stand out as the two main topics that preoccupy her. Consequently, there is a constant mention of dieting, exercising, fashion, and luxury brands in this comic. As Cindy advices her readers: "Piensa que tu cuerpo es un templo… o no, mejor, ¡que es una boutique de lujo! ¿A poco te gustaría que un multimillonario llegara y viera los bolsos, la joyería y las mascadas de Hermés o Fendi por doquier y, tipo… la tienda toda gorda y fodonga y así? Eew! ¡Obvio NO!" [Picture your body as a temple… better yet, as a luxury boutique! Would you really like it if a multimillionaire came in and saw all the handbags, the jewels, and all Hermes and Fendi scarfs everywhere, and like, the store all fat and poorly dressed, and all that? Ewe! Obviously NOT!]. (*Cómo casarte tipo bien* 25) This piece of advice reveals that, in the protagonist's mind, the female body is a shopping space targeted to potential male costumers, once again reaffirming the notion that the value of the female is subjected to the male gaze and the male judgment. It also implies that a *niña bien* physical figure must conform to the idealized and often unrealistic female beauty standards which emanate from the fashion industries of the United States and Western Europe, opposed to Native American cultures.

Through the contemporary elite character that Cucamonga presents, it is possible to establish parallel personality traits to other *niñas bien* analyzed earlier in this chapter. Similarly to *Las chicas VIP*'s Montserrat and Ximena, Cindy manifests a Manichean view of society in which the binomial oppositions *gente bien/nacos*, slender/fat, beautiful/ugly drive many of her actions and even dictate her appreciation of her own body and personality. To this respect,

Twitter and Facebook are the biggest outlet for Cindy la Regia's comments, a series of one-liners in which she authoritatively places herself in the dominant position of a binary opposite. For instance, her Twitter feed usually informs the reader not only that she considers her beauty outstanding, but also that the rests of women are perpetually at a disadvantage, so it is a good deed not to outshine them, like in this tweet: "Les iba a compartir una selfie e irradiarlos con mi belleza… pero me dio pena por las feas. #buenaobradeldía" [I was gonna post a selfie and irradiate my beauty upon you… but I felt bad for the ugly ones #goodeedoftheday]. (@cindylaregia Aug 2, 2015) By referring to others in terms of pity, Cucamonga suggests that the contemporary *niña bien* conserves some of the old values of the old aristocrats, while at the same time implies that the behaviors of the current *gente bien* are still being constructed in oppositional categories.

Similarly, physical appearance is another central theme in Cindy's Tweeter feed, not only by complimenting her own looks, but also by accentuating what she considers negative in others. She is anxious about body image as this tweet explains: "Haters: Yo no quiero ser mejor persona, yo quiero ser delgada [I don't want to be a better person, I want to be skinny] (@cindylaregia 8 Jun, 2015). Her discourse is often modeled by contrasts also; for instance, this next tweet posted in the context of summer vacation is an illustrative example of how Cucamonga uses damning by faint praise to achieve comical effect: "No te preocupes, amiga, te va a ir súper en la playa!!! Greenpeace te protege!!!" [Don't worry, girlfriend, you'll be great at the beach!!! Greenpeace protects you!!!] (*@cindylaregia* June 11, 2015). The tweet appears to be part of a casual conversation with a friend whom we assume has expressed concern or perhaps insecurity about her physique. The first half of Cindy's message is an optimistic encouragement that her friend will have a good time at the beach; however, the second part reverses this spirit of reassurance by

implying that her friend resembles one of the many animal species protected by Greenpeace, most likely a whale, thus creating a sophisticated insult. Nonetheless, this is not the only rhetorical device by which Cucamonga composes Cindy's discourse, many of her tweets simply distinguishes the "I" versus the "you" in a clear cut contrast, for example: "Yo tan Gucci. Tú tan fuchi" [I'm so Gucci, you're so ugly] (@cindylaregia May 30, 2013), in which Cindy as the first person speaker puts herself in the higher position, while the "you" to whom she refers is down below, even the punctuation which divides the tweet into two simple sentences, accentuates the perception of separation between both elements, as though they are not even in contact. This category of tweets, also plays with language by juxtaposing phrases that sound alike, but invoke contrasting meanings; for example in "Yo tan Chanel. Tú tan Channel de las Estrellas" [I'm so Chanel, you're so Channel 2] (@cindylaregia Aug 7, 2012), the words Chanel and channel are similar, but the first refers to the luxury goods French designer, while the latter mentions the very popular Televisa's Canal 2, marketed as "el canal de las estrellas" where popular telenovelas and poorly produced comedy shows are commonly broadcast. As can be expected in this world articulated by imposed antagonisms, the voice of Cindy's subaltern is quite simply absent. Similarly to the *criollo* elites which constructed *gente bien* distinction, Cindy's discourse makes it clear that she is convinced of possessing an inherent developed intelligence, so most of her remarks, whether accurate of fallacious, originate from a perceived position of authority attributed to origin and economic superiority.

In addition to two-phrase tweets, Cucamonga has also used his Cindy la Regia Twitter feed to mock current social topics and offer humorous, yet provocative opinions. For instance, in the summer of 2012, a politically non-affiliated organization called "El México que queremos" [The Mexico we want] ran a media campaign to raise awareness on Mexico's most urgent social

problems such as poverty and inequality. In order to do it, the organization gathered a number of intellectuals and public figures who completed the phrase "yo quiero un México…" expressing their concerns and hopes. In the midst of this campaign, Cucamonga released a series of Cindy la regia tweets in which he rends mockery of this campaign, for example this tweet: "Yo quiero un México donde no haya discriminación, pero ¿qué hacemos con tanta gente feíta" [I want a Mexico without discrimination, but what do we do with so many ugly people?] (@cindylaregia Apr 17, 2012) or "Quiero un México diferente!... no se podrá mudar acá Suecia?" [I want a different Mexico, could Sweden move in here?] (@cindylaregia Apr 5, 2012). However, what calls our attention to this messages is that they might actually reflect the silenced racist opinions of many. As Cucamonga commented on a radio interview on Mexico's WRadio in 2012: "Yo sé que por los medios convencionales jamás se hubiera dado mi humor" (*marthadebayle.com*); inferring that the mainstream culture as well as the two major national television broadcasters, Televisa and TV Azteca, would most likely censor the language and controversial spirit of a class-divisive character like Cindy.

Despite the fact that Cindy self-identifies as the type of *gente bien* who descend from the colonial Mexican aristocracy, Cucamonga problematizes the character's notion of inherited distinction and education in his book *Como casarte tipo bien* by revealing hints of Cindy's parents and her anxiety to marry into the *gente bien*. In her appearance, and in her self-description, Cindy presents herself as undoubtedly Caucasian, she also constantly mentions her family's fortune, as well as class markers that confer distinction. However, in one strip Cucamonga introduces Cindy's father as a simple, albeit wealthy tradesman, with prototypical *norteño* speech and costume which are the opposite of her *gente bien* identification. In yet another sharp contrast, Cucamonga invites his readers to look at the cracks in the walls upon

which Cindy has built her world of distinction. Even though her father lacks sophistication and fashion sense, for Cindy, his most terrible flaw seems to be the origin of his father's fortune; when he states that he works hard at Monterrey's central de abastos, she immediately blushes and corrects him by saying: "en tu *office*, en tu *office*" (39). In a dialogue between Cindy and a friend named Francesca, the latter emphasizes that her family is of Italian origin: "somos italianos puros de siglos y siglos atrás" [We're pure Italian from centuries and centuries ago] (*Cómo ser una nina tipo bien* 103). However, in the strip's final panel, Francesca's mother calls her by her pet name Panchita and tells her that they will have chilaquiles for dinner, which informs the reader that despite Francesca's claim, she probably has Indigenous roots like most Mexicans. By playing with this, Cucamonga challenges the "questionable origin" of Cindy, but if one reads further into this character's family, which is a fictional representation of an actual *gente bien*, then it becomes clear that the current system of class distinction is no longer solely based on aristocratic affiliation, simply put, Cindy apparently is a nouveau-riche. However, this text is also showing that after a century of social mobility and economic upheavals, the new money still seeks out to simulate the old aristocracies as well as the imported American and West European models.

Indeed, physical appearance and masking her family origin are not the only sources of Cindy's anxiety, for money and the power it conveys in a developing economy is a constant theme in this comic. The *niña bien* model presented by Cucamonga is largely constructed on the premise of luxury and exclusivity, and the only way for acquiring this is by purchase power. Standardized beauty and high class are indispensable, but for Cindy, the most essential element is the possession of a large fortune. And it couldn't be any other way, since it has been established that her family is not affiliated to the old Mexican aristocracy. In the current

economic order, and as pictured in the text, luxury items are mass-produced, marketed, and sold to whomever has the desire and the money to purchase them. As it has been discussed in previous chapters, Mexican *gente bien* at the turn of the Twentieth Century had a different concept of luxury and the acquisition thereof[43]. In today's middle and upper classes, the display of brand-names and logos is essential in assigning value, and consequently, social status to the person carrying such products.

In the world of *Cindy la Regia,* language distinction is fundamental in establishing class identity. Earlier in this chapter, it was argued that prototypical *gente bien* have a particular intonation and lexicon that tells them apart. It was also contended that the dramatization of this sociolect on the media is perhaps exaggerated in order to cause a higher comedic effect. The use of this sociolect is also central in *Cindy la regia*; what is more, Cindy's Monterrey-*gente bien* jargon is so repetitive and ubiquitous that many of its phrases and interjections seem to have diluted their meaning inside the text. One of the most repeated is the Mexican expression "güey" which Cucamonga transcribes as "goeey" in an attempt to capture the manner in which it is pronounced by the *nina bien* character. This appellative is a derivation of the Spanish word for bull, "buey", which was considered a mild vulgarity two generations ago. However, for Mexican Gen-Xers as well as for millennials, the word "guey" is no longer an insult, but rather, an informal appellative of camaraderie comparable to the American "dude" or the British "mate". As one reads this "goeey" so many times either in the comic strip or the *Cindy la regia* books, one begins to feel that the meaning has been washed out to the point in which it sounds more like

[43] For the old aristocrats, there was a language code for assigning and recognizing the value of items, but this language was exclusive of the elite and the value usually diminished as the item became copied or more available to the lower classes. The development of transportation made it possible to travel to the centers of luxury production in the US and Western Europe, thus the emerging Latin American middle classes were able to purchase luxury brands directly form the vendors.

noise. In this same line, Cindy's language is characterized by the pervasive use of superlatives and hyperboles. Page one of *Cómo ser una nina tipo bien* actually mimics an *ex libris* book plate which presents the reader with this hyperbolic chain of superlative adverbs: ¡Goeey! Este ultra mega súper cool book es propiedad de…" [This ultra mega super cool book is the property of…] (1). The polarization that results from the contrast between Cindy's superlative surroundings and the ordinary world, again produces an effect of discontinuity, as though the reality that she constructs around herself is out of the reach of her readers, thus making her persona larger than life.

In a parallel maneuver, Cucamonga's character presents a hybridity of languages in which Spanish linguistic structures are constantly mixed with US slang. Although the narrative of this comic strip is set in Northern Mexico, this lexical multiplicity is not a form of regional bilingualism; the frequent use of English expressions seems to be cemented on the public display of status, in this case, the privilege of a bilingual education. A careful examination of how English is displayed reveals that while the texts admit English is privileged over Spanish, the ways in which the author presents this situation also produces humor (see figure 4.4). The section on fashion advice in *Cómo casarse tipo bien* exemplifies the universal, although unnecessary, use of English style terminology. Here, not only is English the language of use, but the structure in which this pieces of advice are rendered, parallels the dismembering of the female body on its surface by following this series: Hairstyle, Make-up, Accessories, Fragrance, Designers, The bag, Nails, OMG: Shoes, and Recap (33-37). What this reveals about Cindy is that her face and body, namely her public image, are subjected to the language of the hegemonic power of US culture.

Yet again, in suggesting that the very essence of Cindy's personality is her superficial appearance, Cucamonga seems to affirm that the contemporary *niña bien* is not that dissimilar from the aristocratic female characters that were studied in previous chapters of this dissertation (Carlos Fuentes' Aura, Pimpinela de Ovando, and Catalina Bernal to name a few). Perceived beauty and the display of physical health reinforces the notion that appearance is an essential element for distinction. However, as this analysis has showed, power as manifested in the possession of wealth, decidedly plays a central role in the market of distinction.

Chapter Four Conclusions

The cultural texts commented in the this chapter, show yet again that social status can only be determined and analyzed by establishing its contrasts and intersections with the working classes, often marked by their perceived ethnic difference. What is more, this analysis has also proved crucial in understanding social distinction as a seemingly gendered phenomenon. On the surface, these texts evidently make fun of the *gente bien* values and behaviors; but their popularity in social media, as is the case of *Cindy la regia*, indicates that the echoes of the old colonial ethnic segregation in contemporary Mexican life.

The *mestizo* national image that prevailed since the 1940s promoted a set of un-aristocratic values, especially through the iconic images of mariachis and the rural Mexico of Golden Age films. In that context, the new nation that arose from the Mexican Revolution reconciles the famous *Tres Culturas*: The Pre-Hispanic, Spanish, and Modern Mexican cultures. Article 1 of the Mexican Constitution clearly establishes that:

> Queda prohibida toda discriminación motivada por origen étnico o nacional, el género, la edad, las discapacidades, la condición social, las condiciones de salud, la religión, las

opiniones, las preferencias sexuales, el estado civil o cualquier otra que atente contra la dignidad humana y tenga por objeto anular o menoscabar los derechos y libertades de las personas. *(www.diputados.gob.mx*)

[All types of discrimination whether it be for ethnic origin, national origin, gender, age, different capacities, social condition, health condition, religion, opinions, sexual preferences, or civil state or any other which attacks human dignity and has as an objective to destroy the rights and liberties of the people are forbidden].

In spite of these constitutional guarantees. There is an identifiable trend in current narratives in which the wealthy *mestizo*, though able to have access to the same luxuries and other status markers, is not entirely welcome in the *gente bien* circles. Despite being able to acquire and develop many of the same aristocratic distinguishing traits, ethnic markers are still determinant in social upward mobility. As all the female characters studied in this chapter point out, to be like them at least three conditions must be met, that is being 'classy', 'white', and most of all 'rich.'

However, the cultural reading offered here, indicates that those qualifications are unstable and perceived. First, education and manners are culturally determined; quite simply, what was considered 'decent and educated' at the turn of the Twentieth Century, is no longer the standard in the present. For instance, manners and etiquette in the times of globalization have shifted towards the more relaxed model, which is driven by US and Western Europe middle class consumers. Secondly, although biologically determined, race and ethnic features are perceived and categorized culturally. In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I discussed the case of Golden Age movie stars who convincingly acted out the parts of Indigenous, *criollo*, or *mestizo* characters, thus showing the degree of ethnic instability in the eyes of the Mexican audience. Thirdly,

possession of wealth is highly unstable, nowadays even the value of permanent assets like land and buildings is driven by macro-economic forces. National deficits as well as global financial crises like the US housing bubble of 2008 or the falling prices of crude oil in the Middle East continue to have an indirect yet deep impact in the fortunes of the Mexican *gente bien*.

Finally, the characters studies in this chapter allow us to better understand the Mexican experience, some of its conflicts, contradictions, and the similarly difficult issue of neoliberalism in a society deeply divided by wealth inequality. The ways in which Mexican culture sees and represents *gente bien* is present in the cultural production. Although perceived as fixed, inherent characteristics, our cultural reading of these texts show that physical appearance, family connections, and other intangible markers are discursive, and thus, arbitrary. Through comedy and laughter, the authors and actors here studied show that *gente bien* pretentions and attitudes are similar to a theatrical characterization.

Concluding Reflexions

The label *gente bien* is at once an enormous social partition and prime intersection for the crossing of identities with respect to class, gender, national history, and responses to global narratives. At present, the global era is questioning long-established visions of national literatures and cultures, a position that has driven scholars into developing interdisciplinary concepts that better relate to current social realities. This dissertation treats works of literature and film as vital sources of knowledge that can help us understand the complexities of Mexican society, particularly, its conflicted elite. This approach, thus, established a dialogue with scholarly disciplines such as sociology and historiography. The analysis of the cultural texts considered in this dissertation examined how the aristocracy is a socially-dynamic, nuanced, and conflicted group with a remarkable capacity to renew, to re-create, and to re-invent itself over time. More specifically, by incorporating relevant theories of distinction, post-coloniality, gender, and performativity the present dissertation revised the question of the aristocracy as it considered how these portrayals reveal the performative rather than ontological nature of aristocratic identity in Mexican *gente bien*. The analyses in this dissertation also shed light into the nature of aristocratic distinction in Mexican *gente bien*. As argued here, and in agreement with Bourdieu and Mension-Rigau, the elements that constitute social distinction, behaviors, gestures, language, and beliefs that make social belonging immediately identifiable, are not biologically inherited, but rather, they are the result of a long process of indoctrination during childhood. Simply put, *gente bien* develop their distinction through learning and continued rehearsal with the hopes that these behaviors are perceived as natural and inherited in the public sphere. Moreover, the examination of behaviors and other class markers of Mexican aristocrats

revealed their fears and anxiety to be overpowered by the *mestizo* ruling class that arose after the Mexican Revolution.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the study of *gente bien* representations at the center of this dissertation. For instance chapter one, on Carlos Fuentes's early novels, explored the literary representations of the Mexican aristocrats and the process of imitation and social intermingling that took place in the late 1950s. By looking at the biological and social modes of reproduction of aristocrats, this dissertation revised the question of exclusion and inclusion in the families who descend from the colonial nobility, but most importantly, the desire of the upwardly mobile *to acquire* distinction and be recognized as *gente bien* in the public sphere. As for the works published novels in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the analysis confirmed that aristocratic distinction is constructed inside the family and at its core lies a series of beliefs implanted by education and rather than biological inheritance. Moreover, the literature and films in chapter two allude at the negotiations that the old aristocrats sustained with the political and economic power nodes of the PRI administrations for most of the Twentieth Century.

Despite the popularity of the *mestizo* national image that became institutionalized at the height of the PRI administrations (1940s and 1950s), the distinction of the old aristocracy became integrated in the symbolic foundation of the post-revolutionary nation. In public spaces and especially in the plastic art movements like *muralismo,* The PRI governments famously sponsored many artists such as Diego Rivera and Clemente Orozco to also represent a mestizo version of Mexican history through their works. As pointed out in this study, the stereotypes of what is Mexican contrast to those portrayed in Golden Age Cinema, which sought to find biological and family links between the feuding classes of the Revolution War. Moreover, some *criollo*-descendant performers whose faces and bodies became the iconographic referents of

Mexican-ness successfully portrayed Indians, *mestizos*, and *criollos*. Promoted by the PRI populist administrations from 1936 to 1958, a mestizo national image was established as dominant and referential to all other images of Mexican society. In this case, the specific stereotype of the young *criollo* protagonists, heirs and heiresses to their ancestors' haciendas, was shown to have pervasively affected the public image of the aristocracy, a class that was inevitably bound to become part of the mestizo nation that arose after the Revolution. The examination of those stereotyped images of the Mexican hacendados and aristocrats revealed the ambivalence of those categories, but also a desire of Mexican audiences to identify with the glamour and distinction of *gente bien* movie superstars like Dolores del Río, María Félix, Pedro Infante, or Pedro Armendáriz.

As for the models of reproduction associated with *gente bien*, this dissertation showed that, in a climate of economic boom and upward social mobility, the aristocracy adopted exogamic practices in order to secure wealth and political power. As discussed in the analysis of the social mobility, upon the introduction of imported technologies and mass manufacture from US culture, the *gente bien* in the 1940s and 1950s no longer relied on land ownership a primary source of wealth. As we have discussed here, the literary representations of mid-century *gente bien* also confirm the idea that their aristocratic distinction became a rather profitable asset, a sort of commodity that could be sold to upstarts, nouveaux-riches, and even PRI politicians. Likewise, the chapter that dealt with current representations of *niñas bien* in television and social media confirmed our premise that aristocratic capital is and will continue to be a mechanism of differentiation and distinction in the context of more recent events in Mexican history like the boom of globalization in the mid-1990s and the economic and cultural changes that resulted from Mexico's insertion into the era of world trade and global communication.

On a different note, since the figure of the mother, appears ubiquitously in all the texts analyzed in this dissertation, we could assert that this study has contributed to identify the cultural meanings embodied by the Mexican woman in her reproduction role; especially when social mobility distresses their position. Whereas the "degree of aristocracy" varies in these texts, from *mestiza* Esperanza in *Flor silvestre* to royal blood Mariana in *La "Flor de Lis"*, we observe an ever present preoccupation with motherhood and reproduction of social class. Even though Mexican society follows a patriarchal model of inheritance, women are characterized as the party responsible for a clean family lineage and the education of children. For instance, the mestizo national foundation films of the Golden Age require that the *mestiza* women prove their virtue by displaying traditional abnegation as is the case of *Flor silvestre*'s Esperanza, or atonement and repentance of a sinful past as is the case of Cucaracha in the homonymous film. In agreement with this system of approval and inclusion, the opposite is true with the representations of mestiza and social-climbing women who do not show submission, purity, or virtue. This system excludes a wealthy but seemingly immoral and proud *parvenue* such as *La región más transparente*'s Norma Larragoiti, who is never recognized as *gente bien* and dies. Not surprisingly however, the representations of women born into the *gente bien* encirclement are portrayed as worthy by default. Regardless of their flaws and insincere motives, *criollo*-descent women are automatically perceived as prime specimens for marriage and motherhood. Such are the cases of Pimpinela de Ovando, and Catalina Bernal in Carlos Fuentes' novels, overbearing mothers as in the novles by Poniatowska, Loaeza, and Pacheco, and even snobs like Montse and Ximena in *Las chicas VIP*.

Aditionally, this dissertation offered a critical reading of life-writing and novels of formation, such as the *Bildungsromane* by Loaeza, Poniatowska, and Pacheco in chapter three.

As we have seen, this *gente bien Bildungsroman* proliferated in the 1980s and 1990s, precisely when globalization trends resembled the social mobility that occurred in the 1950s. These novels not only reveal the process of indoctrination within aristocratic families, but they also confirm Bourdieu's concept of social capital and its central position in the articulation of class distinction. The novels by Loaeza and Poniatowska also echo the slow but significant social changes that Mexican women have undergone. The trajectory of these authors has demonstrated that the *gente bien* representation in the consecrated medium of the novel has not exhausted all its possibilities.

Current cultural representations of *gente bien* in Mexico

The past decade has been marked by the publication of a number of telenovelas, movies, and shows that deal with the controversial theme of social distinction. On the one hand, some productions opt for the comedic approach when representing social stereotypes. In 2014, Guadalupe Loaeza launched *www.ninasbien.mx,* a website dedicated to reveal the secrets of *niñas bien* in a blog format; however, this site was discontinued after only a few months. Also, Daniel Espinosa, a renowned jewelry designer, launched a collection of fashion jewelry in partnership with Guadalupe Loaeza and her *niñas bien* emblematic theme (see figure. Furthermore, in February 2016, actress Claudia Silva will publish *Diario de una niña bien* inspired by her character Ximena de la Macorra from *Las chicas VIP*.[44] In a similar pattern as the punks and mods that Hebdige studied in *Subcultures*, the Mexican *gente bien* stereotype has followed a parallel conversion of its signs into mass-produced objects and commodities (see figure 5.1).

[44] At the time this dissertation is published, this book is not yet available in the US, but from its publicity slogan, it seems to be a comedic portrayal of Ximena: "una niña bien que lo tiene todo y no sabe nada" [A *niña bien* who has everything, but knows nothing].

On the other hand, a handful of shows present a melodramatic representation of the wealthy, including *gente bien* and their clashes with the socially upward bourgeoisie. Since the 1950s, telenovelas have presented the problem of class and distinction. A common telenovela plot is the so-called Cinderella story, in which a poor young woman and a wealthy male form a romantic couple. Although most of these productions usually portray the upward social movement of the female protagonist, they do not allude to aristocratic distinctions among different subgroups within the social elite. Emblematic telenovelas produced by Valetín Pimstein such as *Rina* (1978), *Los ricos también lloran* (1979), *La gata* (1970), and their remakes show a society divided into two clearly-defined opposing classes: the rich and the poor. However, the Twenty-First Century has seen two globally-successful telenovelas, which specifically mention the distinction between the new money and the lifelong aristocratic *gente bien*. The most recent version of *Teresa* (2010) produced by José Alberto Castro for Televisa, narrates the desires of an intelligent and ambitious working-class girl to become part of the elite. Although Teresa successfully imitates the *gente bien* behavior and language, her ostentation of luxury and her obsession with money eventually differentiates her from the lifelong aristocrats. Another telenovela that shows the clash between aristocrats and new money is the teen-oriented *Rebelde* (2005), a Mexican adaptation of *Rebelde Way* (2003) created by Argentinian producer Cris Morena. This show depicts the trials and tribulations of a group of wealthy adolescents who attend the fictional Elite Way School. Among its several narrative threads, this telenovela emphasizes the conflicts that arise when the daughter of a newly-rich singer clashes with her *gente bien* classmates. Similarly to the texts studied in chapters one and two of this dissertation, this telenovela resolves the personal and social tensions among its characters by marriage. Again, the inevitability of love is the preferred solution for the denouement of *Rebelde*, even though it

always remains clear that the gente bien *accepts* the new money only after a series of conditions such as a good reputation and considerable fortune are met. The case of *Teresa* shows the exclusion of the female protagonist, precisely because she does not meet the wealth and decency expectations of the aristocrats. Although, these telenovelas incorporate class conventions of the traditional melodrama, their treatment of a nuanced and often competitive elite also enriches our understanding of the current aristocratic stereotype.

Another melodramatic text that revolves around the premise of social mobility, money, and distinction is the film *Nosotros los Nobles* directed by Gary Alazraki in 2013. This movie is a remake of Luis Buñuel's *El gran calavera* (1949), which was a written by Spanish playwright Adolfo Torrado. The actions of this film revolve around a self-made millionaire who decides to teach his children the value of merit and hard work. In order to accomplish this, Mr. Noble, the protagonist pretends to lose his fortune. Departing from the premise of downward social mobility, the film challenges the concept of social distinction by showing the nouveaux-riches' dependence on money. As opposed to the *gente bien* who, in moments of economic crisis, still rely on connections and profit from family genealogy and perceived distinction, *Nosotros los Nobles* portrays a fragile bourgeoisie. Although it is true that the aristocracy also depends on money, the texts analyzed in this dissertation allude to a very different approach and attitude towards capital; whereas the nouveau-rich must work to generate wealth, the aristocrat may profit from their social capital and employ it as a commodity.

Aristocracy and nobility nomenclature on Mexican media

The presence of the *gente bien* is patent in Mexican news and social media, which have appropriated the terminology of the nobility and the aristocracy and extended it to categorize criminals. For instance, in August 2011, three Mexico City policemen stopped a car for a routine

breathalyzer alcohol test in the exclusive Polanco neighborhood. The two women who stepped out of the car refused to be tested and began shouting a number of offenses at the police. These women threatened the policemen and made demeaning comments on perceived social status, they called one of the officers: "pinche asalariado de mierda" [fucking wage-earner of shit] (“Brozo contra las ladies”). What resulted scandalous about this situation is that it was captured in a video that became viral, which revealed that these women were Azalia Ojeda, a former participant of *Big Brother Mexico*, and Vanessa Polo, former Miss Mexico beauty pageant aspirant. Because of their perceived superiority, they quickly became known as the Polanco “Ladies."

An even bigger scandal broke in Mexico City when Andrea Benítez, the daughter of Federal Consumer Protection Agency (PROFECO) director, Humberto Benítez had three health inspectors close restaurant Maximo Bistro in colonia Roma. According to news reports and social media, she became angry at the restaurant staff because she did not get a table immediately, even when she had no previous reservation. The event became a trending topic on Social media and Miss Benitez was nicknamed “Lady Profeco” due to the arrogance and bullying that she showed. Mr Benítez offered a public apology on his Twitter account: "Mi sincera disculpa por la conducta inapropiada de mi hija y la sobrerreacción de verificadores de @Profeco. Privilegio sólo para la ley [my sincere apology for my daughter inappropriate conduct and the overreaction of @Profeco inspectors. Privilege to the law only] (Twitter, April 28 2013). However, this apology didn't save him from being dismissed of his charge. Since that incident in April 2013, many other similar scandals broke out and the terms "Lady" and “gentleman” have become synonymous with the presumptuous behavior of wealthy individuals.

Whereas the term "lady" is applied to characterize outrageous women whose system of beliefs indicate they are entitled to special treatment of the law, another term appeared in the last decade to describe wealthy young men with similar characteristics. The nominal phrase "mi rey," literally translated as 'my king,' had several popular uses in Mexican slang, mainly as a term of endearment, but also to characterize an attractive man. However, this phrase has been lexicalized as the noun "mirrey" and its plural "mirreyes," a term which describes a young man who publicly displays ostentation and disregard for other people's rights. Perhaps the best study on this social group is Ricardo Rafael de la Madrid's *Un Mirreynato* , which describes and criticizes this group of Mexican young men characterized by the excess of money and luxury. De la Madrid believes *mirreyes* are a post-globalized version of 'juniors' or 'hijos de papi' [daddy's boys] derogative terms used the 1950s to describe the sons of politicians who used to create public havoc with impunity (17). According to reporter Emiliano Ortiz for Cadena Tres Noticias, these men are inspired by public figures like singer Luis Miguel and have a strong presence on social media ("los mirreyes" *YouTube.com*). Although the *mirreyes* phenomenon is reminiscent of the excess of wealth within the elite; it is important to observe their bourgeois attitude towards money. Whereas *mirreyes* and ladies are directly related to the display of influence and wealth, *gente bien* are notable for their display of aristocratic values like genealogy links to the colonial nobility.

Contributions of this study

The primary objective of this study was to offer a unique approach to the question of the representation of the Mexican aristocracy in cultural texts. While there are several studies that center on aristocratic distinction in Europe, as well as the historical research by Víctor Macías that concentrates on the dominant position of the aristocracy during el Porfiriato years, my

analysis differed in its scope. This dissertation covers texts in formats as varied as canonical novels of the Latin American Boom, Golden Age films, novels of formation and life writing, a television show, comics, and tweets. The selection of primary texts was guided by two principles. First, it sought to explore a variety of cultural texts which reflected the presence of the aristocracy across genres; and second, and most importantly, the selection only included texts that put the aristocracy vis-à-vis the new money and the *mestizo* bourgeoisie. Therefore, my corpus excluded emblematic films from the Golden Age period such as Ismael Rodríguez's *Ustedes los ricos* (1948), or Luis Buñuel's *El ángel exterminador* (1961), because they depict the elite as a unified social class determined by wealth. These films omit many of the nuances, conflicts, and negotiations between sectors of the elite that compete for privilege. Also, in general terms, the topic of *gente bien* reflects the urban experience of Mexico City in the 1950s onwards. In response to the importance of the Mexican capital, this study excluded novels which narrate rural settings. However, the same principles that guided the analysis in this study can be used in the interpretation of the landed aristocracy, class struggle and social mobility in novels such as Rosario Castellanos *Balún Canán* (1957), or Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955), both antecedent to the texts in chapter one by Carlos Fuentes.

Continuing with the peculiarities of this study, it could be argued that by approaching the theme of aristocratic distinction using literary and cultural texts as primary sources and analyzing them through the lenses of cultural studies and historiography, this dissertation has made a contribution to these fields by proposing alternative perspectives to the study of culture. In doing so, this study sought to integrate the tools of literary analysis in the interpretation of the representations of social class construction. With respect to the ways in which this dissertation has contributed to Mexican studies, it can be claimed that by considering the concept of class as

a social construction as opposed to the inevitable results of historical and biological circumstances. In agreement with Butler and her thesis of gender, as well as Bourdieu's concept of distinction, the term *gente bien*, and its antecedents like *gente decente*, or *gente de bien* are culturally constructed labels. Also, the analyses presented here have helped to expose and clarify the differences between competing Mexican elite groups. In spite of their similarities, this dissertation has helped locate the *gente bien* as a discursive category distinct from others in the elite, like the wealthy bourgeoisie, and the powerful political elite formed by government officials and Congress people. In spite of this distinction, the polyvalence in the public images of the elite seems to be their most noticeable identity trait, which opens the door for further investigations and interpretations of these signs in the visual disciplines. I envision future cultural studies of other sectors of the elite, such as the aforementioned *mirreyes* and ladies. Such investigations may allow us to discuss the interrelations and dependencies between the aristocracy and its imitators in today's Mexico.

In addition, future research could see similar investigation on other Latin American aristocracies and their adaptations in the face of major historical events. Subsequent studies on the aristocracy and *gente bien* could focus on the gargantuan influence of drug trafficking money. A great deal of contemporary Colombian novels and telenovelas describe a different, yet parallel process of competition between the old *criollo* landowners and the new-money imitators of their distinction. Moreover, such a study could as well as look into the complicity between aristocrats and drug dealers such as the case of Midas McAllister in Laura Restrepo's *Delirio* (2004). Other future studies could investigate the international common genealogies between the *criollo* aristocracies in the Americas. Such studies might shed light into the migrations of

Spanish nobility into the Americas in colonial times, thus establishing thought-provoking studies of class mobility, race, and nation-formation across the Spanish Atlantic.

What is probably the main limitation of this dissertation is the decidedly fast rhythm of the Mexican social field. I first became interested in the *gente bien* label in 1998, well before the creation of social media like Twitter, or web-based video services like YouTube.com, etc. These technologies make it possible for anyone with a smartphone to create new internet personalities who create hundreds of new images of what it means to be socially distinguished in Mexico. Likewise, this dissertation aimed at covering several different media and portrayals of aristocrats / *gente bien,* and thus the number of texts analyzed was not limited to just one literary genre or medium. However, this allows for future expansions on the study of the aristocratic novel, the aristocratic television, or the aristocratic *Bildungsroman* for example. I hope that studies that arrive after this will see the opportunity to observe whether my readings and interpretations of *gente bien* apply in other media such as Mexican pop music or telenovelas.

For all the research of a handful of pioneering scholars, the cultural analysis of aristocratic distinction in Latin America is still in its infancy. Albeit the existence of primary texts that narrate and portray the social phenomenon of aristocracy / *gente bien*, the critical theory dedicated to the research of elite distinction generally focuses on Western European models which seldom acknowledge the Spanish system of nobility, its offspring in Hispanic America, and the magnitude of its cultural and historic influence. Also, a great deal of Latin American critics often see class in Marxist terminology, thus incorporating the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, and the ruling class under the same all-encompassing category. As has been emphasized throughout, even though money, power, and distinction are intertwined factors in the

construction of class, aristocrats, bourgeois, or quite simply, people with money correspond to distinct contexts, and therefore should be applied appropriately.

The principal contribution of this dissertation has been to confront major theoretical frameworks with Mexican cultural texts from the second half of the twentieth century. The conclusion seems evident: The label *gente bien* exists in the imaginations of millions of Mexicans, but as we have seen in the literature here studies, aristocrats have no convincing ontological status to which they can systematically cling. However, this does not mean that their presence in Mexican society is irrelevant when it comes to explaining observable social practices. It means that *gente bien*, at its very core, should be considered an unstable, discursive category similar to gender and race; all of which can be deconstructed and challenged with the aid of theoretical tools and critical readings. It is hoped that this dissertation will stimulate scholarly reflection and inspire forthcoming research on a topic which needs more comparative investigation.

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